

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Title: Exploring Story Adaptation

Grade Level: 9-12th

Length: 45 minutes

Literary Works: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; *Love in the Time of Cholera* (Gabriel García Márquez)

Opera: *Florencia en el Amazonas (Florence in the Amazon)* (Daniel Catán, composer; Marcela Fuentes-Berain, librettist)

Inquiry Question: What is story adaptation? How is it relevant to opera?

Lesson Focus: Students will use critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration while exploring the concept of story adaptation and how it relates to opera stories.

Prior Knowledge: Students have read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Love in the Time of Cholera*, have analyzed characters and can name the Who, What, When, Where, Story arc (Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Resolution Ripple effects).

Materials: Copies of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Love in the Time of Cholera*, presentation slides (includes *Florencia en el Amazonas* short opera synopsis with photography and video examples), libretto excerpts of key scenes, opera synopsis handout, opera adaptation pitch worksheet, student laptops/tablets, interactive board, paper, and pens/pencils.

Key Vocabulary: Opera, composer, librettist, libretto, adaptation, key scene, and pitch.

Definitions

- **Opera:** A dramatic work set to music, with singers performing entire roles accompanied by an orchestra. It typically includes arias, duets, and ensembles, and is known for its elaborate costumes, sets, and vocal prowess.
- **Composer:** The person who writes the music for an opera, symphony, movie score, etc.
- **Librettist:** The person who writes the text of an opera.
- **Libretto:** The words or text of an opera.
- **Adaptation:** A creative work, such as a film, television show, play, or book, that is based on an existing story, such as a novel, short story, or historical event, and has been modified or reimagined to fit a different medium or audience. Adaptations often involve changes to the characters, setting, or other elements of the original story to make it more suitable for the new format.
- **Key Scene:** A pivotal moment in a story, play, or film that significantly impacts the narrative and characters. It is often a turning point that advances the plot, reveals important information, or changes the direction of the story.

- **Pitch:** A compelling summary of a proposed story idea that typically includes an overview of the plot, characters, setting, and themes of the story, as well as any unique or marketable aspects that make it stand out. The goal of a story pitch is to persuade the recipient to greenlight the project or take further action.

Objective(s): At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Analyze an opera synopsis based on a literary work.
- Compare a literary work with the opera adaptation synopsis.
- Identify elements of adaptation across multiple versions of the same key scene present in the literary source and opera.
- Collaboratively brainstorm a pitch for an opera adaptation of the literary work.

Assessment: Groups present their opera pitches following the guidelines for adaptation.

Adaptation Guidelines:

- Who: character/character identity
Note: character identity can be adapted, but students may not eliminate or add characters.
- What: key scene, action in the story - what is happening?
- When: time period, time of day, year, etc.
- Where: location and setting

Assessment Rubric

4: Presentation is thorough and comprehensive, providing detailed and specific information on the Who, What, When, and Where. Pitch is highly detailed, insightful, and well-supported, demonstrating a deep understanding of the literary work and creative approach to the adaptation guidelines.

3: Presentation includes detailed information on the Who, What, When, and Where. Pitch is clear and well-developed, showing a strong understanding of the adaptation guidelines.

2: Presentation provides some detail on the Who, What, When, and Where. Pitch is somewhat clear but lacks depth and specificity. Basic knowledge of the literary work is present.

1: Presentation lacks specific and clear information on the Who, What, When, and Where. Pitch provided is vague, lacking depth, and knowledge of the literary work.

Learning Standards:

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each

treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

National Core Arts Standards

TH:Cr2.I.a. Explore the function of history and culture in the development of a dramatic concept through a critical analysis of original ideas in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr2-II.b. Cooperate as a creative team to make interpretive choices for a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr1.1.I.c. Use script analysis to generate ideas about a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr2-I.a. Explore the function of history and culture in the development of a dramatic concept through a critical analysis of original ideas in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr2-II.b. Cooperate as a creative team to make interpretive choices for a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re7.1.I.a. Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.

TH:Re7.1.II.a. Demonstrate an understanding of multiple interpretations of artistic criteria and how each might be used to influence future artistic choices of a drama/theatre work.

Procedure:

Introduction/Hook (5 minutes):

- Begin with a word association exercise to spark students' interest and creativity.
 - Words: “opera,” “*One Hundred Years of Solitude/Love in the Time of Cholera*,” and “adaptation.”
 - Ask students to write down the first word that comes to mind.
 - Students share their answers while the instructor writes down their responses on the board. Keep in mind any repeated words.
 - OR
 - Create a live Word Cloud with [Mentimeter](#).

- Students can add their responses via their phones/computers/tablets (repeated words will increase in size.)
- Discuss findings.
- Define opera.
- Introduce the concept of adaptation and discuss its relevance in literature.

Main Narrative/Sequence (20 minutes):

- Review story arc of either *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Love in the Time of Cholera* (Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Resolution).
 - *One Hundred Years of Solitude*
 - **Exposition:** The Buendía family’s founding of the town of Macondo, led by José Arcadio Buendía, and introduction of José Arcadio, Úrsula, and their children.
 - **Rising Action:** The family’s complex relationships, including the romance between José Arcadio Buendía and Rebeca, and the arrival of Melquíades and revolutionary leader, Aureliano Buendía.
 - **Climax:** Aureliano Segundo's reign of prosperity ends, and Aureliano Buendía (the second) faces his inevitable fate. The family’s cycle of repetition intensifies.
 - **Falling Action:** The final generations of the Buendía family begin to deteriorate and the town of Macondo faces destruction due to the family’s cyclical misfortune.
 - **Resolution:** The last member of the Buendía family, Aureliano, deciphers the prophecy and realizes that the family’s fate was always sealed, leading to the town's ultimate collapse.
 - *Love in the Time of Cholera*
 - **Exposition:** Love story between Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza begins when they are young. Fermina rejects Florentino after realizing the disparity between her romanticized feelings and reality. She later marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino.
 - **Rising Action:** Florentino silently vows to win Fermina back, enduring years of unrequited love and numerous affairs.
 - **Climax:** After Dr. Urbino's death, Florentino declares his love for Fermina again, reigniting their connection.
 - **Falling Action:** Fermina slowly warms to Florentino, and they rekindle their relationship in their old age.
 - **Resolution:** The couple sets off on a riverboat, embracing love despite their advanced years, symbolizing love’s timeless nature.
- Read through the full synopsis (see below) of the opera *Florencia en el Amazonas* as a class and discuss the fundamental elements of the story.
 - Conduct a “Turn and Talk” activity. (Students chat in pairs, or small groups)
 - Students compare the story structure of the opera with the original literary work.
 - Compare setting/time, historical context, point of view, narrative structure, etc.

- For a more detailed exploration, visit: [Plot and Creation: Florencia en el Amazonas](#)
- The instructor chooses one of three provided key scenes in the opera, sharing photo and video examples to enhance understanding.

Scene Selections (see below for summaries, libretto excerpts, and viewing options):

- Key Scene #1: Act I, Scene 4: Londres, Tahití, Sierra Nevada
 - Key Scene #2: Act II, Scene 11: Cristóbal, Cristóbal (“Eschúchame [Hear me]”)
 - Key Scene #3: Act II, Scene 16: ¡Ya! ¡Quite esa cara! (Now! Take that face off)
- Ask and discuss questions such as, “why do we adapt stories?” “How does storytelling add relevance for an audience?”
 - Discuss the adaptation process for the chosen scene/turning point, outlining guidelines for adaptation and pivotal considerations. Discuss the ripple effects of making these changes.
 - Guidelines for adaptation:
 - Consider the Who, What, When, and Where.
 - Who: character/character identity
 - *Note: character identity can be adapted, but students may not eliminate or add characters.*
 - What: key scene, action in the story - what is happening?
 - When: time period, time of day, year, etc.
 - Where: location and setting
 - Students may use their prior knowledge of literary work and opera synopsis/libretto excerpts as resources.
 - Together as a class, guide students through the adaptation process for the chosen key scene.

Activity/Practice (10 minutes):

- Students will work together to decide how they are going to adapt the opera, and brainstorm ideas for those changes based on the provided guidelines for adaptation: Who, What, When and Where. Each group will fill out an opera adaptation pitch worksheet.
 - Have students break out into groups and either adapt the same key scene viewed as a class or choose another key scene from the opera to brainstorm for an adaptation pitch.

Present/Share (8 minutes):

- Each group will present their pitch for an adaptation to the class, explaining their creative decisions and rationale.
- Encourage feedback and discussion from peers.

Reflection (2 minutes):

- Conclude the lesson with a recap of learnings about adaptation.
- Invite students to reflect on their collaborative work and share their thoughts on the adaptation process. Ask and discuss:
 - “How did your understanding of the story change as you adapted it?”

- “Were there any new insights or perspectives that emerged?”

Extension/Follow-up/Next steps:

- Ask and discuss:
 - “Can this literary work and storyline be set in the present? Is it still relevant today? Why or why not?”
 - “Can adaptation work for historical events and figures? Why or why not?”
- Critical analysis of film adaptations compared with literary work and opera.

***Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996)**

Daniel Catán, composer; Marcela Fuentes-Berain, librettist

Florencia en el Amazonas by composer Daniel Catán and librettist Marcela Fuentes-Berain, is inspired by Gabriel García Márquez's works, but it is not directly based on either *Love in the Time of Cholera* or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Instead, it draws on the magical realism and thematic elements characteristic of García Márquez's writing. It premiered in 1996 at Houston Grand Opera, and was co-commissioned by Los Angeles Opera and Seattle Opera; it holds the distinction of being the first opera in Spanish commissioned by major U.S. opera companies. The work is deeply rooted in the literary tradition of magical realism, which Gabriel García Márquez popularized.

The opera features themes such as love, longing, transformation, and the mystical power of nature, which resonate with both novels, but its story and characters are original. García Márquez served as a loose inspiration, and the librettist, Marcela Fuentes-Berain, who was one of his students, travelled, along with Catán, to the Colombian compound of García Márquez, who gave them ideas for an operatic story.

Short Synopsis

The story follows the legendary diva, Florencia Grimaldi, and her fellow passengers on a boat ride down the Amazon. As they travel through the enchanting rainforest toward their destination—the opera house in Manaus, Brazil—each passenger holds a secret hope for what the journey will bring.

FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS OPERA SYNOPSIS

Daniel Catán, composer; Marcela Fuentes-Berain, librettist

ACT I

The Amazon rainforest, the early 1900s. Passengers aboard the steamboat *El Dorado* are traveling to hear the legendary but intensely private opera singer Florencia Grimaldi sing at the reopening of the theater in Manaus. Riolobo, a mystical character who can assume many forms, introduces the embarking passengers: Paula and Alvaro, a middle-aged couple attempting to rekindle their marriage; Rosalba, a journalist researching a biography on Grimaldi; and Florencia herself, travelling alone and incognito, harboring a burning desire to find her long-lost lover Cristóbal, a butterfly hunter, whose love unlocked her staggering powers of musical expression.

Once en route, Rosalba accidentally drops her research notes overboard. The captain's nephew, Arcadio, manages to rescue them, and the pair becomes aware of a strong mutual attraction. The evening concludes as Paula and Alvaro's attempt at a romantic dinner dissolves into a bitter quarrel. Initially unaware of her identity, the captain tells Florencia of the fate of Cristóbal, who disappeared without trace in the jungle, thus dashing her dearest ambition. As a heated card game brings out the contrasting sexual and hostile tensions between Rosalba and Arcadio and Paula and Alvaro, a violent storm brews outside. Trying to save the ship from being crushed, Alvaro is swept overboard. The captain is knocked unconscious, and despite Arcadio's efforts at the helm, the ship runs aground.

ACT II

Paula mourns the loss of Alvaro, realizing that it was pride—not lack of love—that stood between them. Riolobo appears again mysteriously to return Alvaro to the ship, claiming that Paula's laments saved him from death. Rosalba, distraught that her notebook has been ruined in the storm, talks to the incognito Florencia about her research. During the ensuing discussion, Florencia declares passionately that Grimaldi's gift was a result of her love for Cristóbal. Rosalba realizes that she is talking to her heroine and, hearing her story, decides her own love for Arcadio shouldn't be suppressed. To Rosalba's joy and relief, Arcadio reciprocates her feelings. Paula and Alvaro have also rediscovered their joy and love for each other.

After a long voyage, *El Dorado* reaches Manaus at last; however, the passengers learn that cholera has struck the town. The passengers do not disembark. Florencia laments her loss of Cristóbal, but as she dreams of finding him, her spirit drifts towards his in a mystical transformation.

Synopsis courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.

Key Scenes in Catán's *Flores en las Amazonas*

Video excerpts and timestamps are pulled from the Metropolitan Opera on Demand.
Performance Date: Dec. 9, 2023

KEY SCENE #1: Act I, Scene 4: Londres, Tahití, Sierra Nevada

Met Opera on Demand: Track #7. ACT I: Londres, Tahití, Sierra Nevada
00:28 – 01:23

In this moment Rosalba's notebook falls into the Amazon. Arcadio warns her not to reach in to grab it due to the piranhas. Will she get it back or will all her work be lost?

Libretto Excerpt

ROSALBA
Dios mio!

ROSALBA
Oh my God!

ARCADIO
¿Qué pasa, señorita?
¡No! no haga eso!
¡Los pirañas!

ARCADIO
What's the matter?
No! Don't do that!
The piranhas!

ROSALBA
No temo morir más que por
desesperación

ROSALBA
I am not afraid of anything but despair

ARCADIO
Ya la veo

ARCADIO
I see it

ROSALBA
¡Mi trabajo de dos años

ROSALBA
Two years' work!

ARCADIO
¿Esa libreta?

ARCADIO
That notebook?

ROSALBA
¡Sí!

ROSALBA
Yes!

ARCADIO
¡Dios mio!

ARCADIO
My God!

ROSALBA
¿Ya la tiene?

ROSALBA
Do you have it?

ARCADIO
Se me cae

ARCADIO
It's slipping away

ROSALBA
¿Qué importa morir?

ROSALBA
I'd rather die!

ARCADIO
Ya casi...ino!

ARCADIO
Almost...No!

ROSALBA
¡No!

ROSALBA
No!

ARCADIO
Ya casi...ino!

ARCADIO
Almost...No!

ROSALBA
¡No!

ROSALBA
No!

ARCADIO
Ya casi

ARCADIO
Almost

ROSALBA
Casi

ROSALBA
Almost

ROSALBA Y ARCADIO
¡Ya!

ROSALBA AND ARCADIO
At last!

KEY SCENE #2: Act II, Scene 11: Cristóbal, Cristóbal (“Eschúchame [Hear me]”)

Met Opera on Demand: Track #15. ACT II: Cristóbal, Cristóbal
03:56 – 05:32

A storm has caused the El Dorado to crash. This scene features the aria, “Eschúchame.” Following the storm Florencia wonders if she is dead or alive, can Cristóbal hear her? Is he alive?

Libretto Excerpt

FLORENCIA
¿En qué momento era ya tarde?
Cristóbal, Cristóbal
Solo deseaba que escucharas de mis
labios
que tue amor fu eel impulse de mi vida
Sé que estás cerca
Pero no sé si en la vida o en la Muerte
¿Es este tu recuerdo o eres tú?
Por Piedad, Cristóbal
muerto o vivo
¡Eschúchame!

FLORENCIA
When did it become too late?
Cristóbal, Cristóbal?
I only wish that you could hear from my
lips
that your love was the force of my life
I know you are near
But I don't know whether in life or death
Is this a memory or is it you?
Have mercy, Cristóbal
dead or alive
Hear me!

KEY SCENE #3: Act II, Scene 16: ¡Ya! ¡Quite esa cara! (Now! Take that face off)

Met Opera on Demand: Track #21. ACT II: ¡Ya! ¡Quite esa cara!

03:01 – 04:54

Rosalba has given up on love and yet the incognito Florencia explains that it was love that gave La Grimaldi her musical gifts. Has Florencia revealed herself to Rosalba? Will Rosalba realize she is speaking with heroine? Will Rosalba embrace her love for Arcadio?

Libretto Excerpt

FLORENCIA

El amor no aprisiona
Es un inmenso mar
Nada lo contiene
Es como un fuego
Que derrite la rejas del corazón
Deja que entre ese fuego
Y serás la escritora
Que has soñado ser

ROSALBA

¿Lo cree?

FLORENCIA

Lo sé
Para cantar
Florencia Grimaldi tuvo que olvidar
la infelicidad del miedo

ROSALBA

¿Por qué lo afirma?
¿Por qué tan Segura?

FLORENCIA

Porque aún Florencia evoca con la voz su
amor por Cristóbal

ROSALBA

¡La diva! ¡Usted es ella!

FLORENCIA

¡No solo soy mi nombre!

FLORENCIA

Love is not a prison
It is as immense as the ocean
Nothing will stop it
It is like fire
that melts the iron bars of our hearts
Let that fire enter
and you will become the writer
you have dreamed of being.

ROSALBA

Do you think so?

FLORENCIA

I know so
To sing,
Florencia Grimaldi had to forget
the unhappiness of fear

ROSALBA

How can you say that?
How can you be so sure?

FLORENCIA

Because Florencia still evokes with her
voice her love for Cristóbal

ROSALBA

The diva! You are she!

FLORENCIA

I am not just my name!

Libretto excerpts courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.