

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Script for Lesson: Exploring Story Adaptation

Grade Level: 9-12th

Length: 45 minutes

Literary Work: *The Marriage of Figaro (La Folle Journée, Ou Le Mariage de Figaro)*
(Pierre Beaumarchais)

Opera: *Le nozze di Figaro* (W.A. Mozart, composer; Lorenzo Da Ponte, librettist)

Slide 1:

Today, we're going to explore the concept of story adaptation.

Slide 2:

Our inquiry question is: "What is story adaptation and how is it relevant to opera?" By the end of the lesson, we will be able to: (List off objectives from slide.)

Slide 3:

We are going to begin with a word association exercise. Write down the first word that comes to mind for these words... (opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, adaptation).

(Reveal each word independently to give students a chance to write down/come up with their answers.)

****Instead of having students write down their answers, Instructor could create a live word cloud such as with *Mentimeter*. Students can add their responses via their phones/computers/tablets (repeated words will increase in size.**

What comes to mind when you hear the word "opera"?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Those are some great responses! It seems like many of you think of (examples: music, singing, and performance, etc. ... that's all part of opera!) Opera is 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. Has anyone seen an opera before?

What words did we associate with *The Marriage of Figaro*?

Provide students space to share their thoughts. (Possible responses: love, desire, deception, manipulation, fidelity, social class, power, forgiveness, comedy, etc.)

Finally, what about "adaptation"? What does that mean to you?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

That's a great start! Adaptation is when a creative work, such as a film, television show, play, opera, musical, or even book, is based on an existing story, like a novel or short story. It's when we take an idea and make changes to fit it into a new medium or vision.

Slide 4:

Let's review the story arc of our literary work. Can anyone remind us of the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution of this story?

Review the story arc as a class.

Exposition: *Figaro and Susanna prepare for their wedding, but Susanna reveals that Count Almaviva is plotting to seduce her, despite his vow to abolish the droit du seigneur (a symbolic remnant of feudal privilege).*

Rising Action: *Figaro schemes to thwart the Count's plans. Meanwhile, subplots emerge, including Marcellina's legal claim that Figaro must marry her and Cherubino's romantic escapades.*

Climax: *In a chaotic series of events in the garden, disguises and mistaken identities expose the Count's infidelity. The Countess, disguised as Susanna, tricks the Count into confessing his intentions.*

Falling Action: *The Count realizes his folly and is publicly humiliated. Figaro and Susanna reconcile their misunderstandings amidst the chaos.*

Resolution: *The Count humbly asks for the Countess's forgiveness, which she graciously grants. Figaro and Susanna's wedding proceeds, symbolizing reconciliation and social harmony.*

Slide 5:

Great! Now we are going to read through the synopsis of the Italian opera *Le nozze di Figaro* (Leh NOHT-tseh dee FEE-gah-roh), based on Beaumarchais's play.

(Pass out opera synopsis handout.)

Read through the synopsis as a class.

Slide 6:

I would like for us to compare the story structure of the opera with the original literary work. Turn and talk with your neighbor and discuss what are some differences and similarities you noticed?

Questions on slide:

- Is the setting/time period the same for both the opera and literary work?
- Is there a difference in point of view? In historical context? In narrative structure?

- What else did you notice?

Give students a couple of minutes to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups.

Would anyone like to share what they discussed?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

We are now going to delve deeper into *Le nozze di Figaro* (Leh NOHT-tseh dee FEE-gah-roh).

Slides 7-12: Key Scenes: choose which key scene to introduce to the class.

Slide 7: Key Scene #1

Let's look at this key scene. The Countess pines for the love of her husband, Count Almaviva, who has grown cold and unfaithful. This scene introduces the emotional depth of the Countess, and adds a layer of poignancy and vulnerability to the comedy, showing that beneath the schemes, real emotions are at stake.

Discuss any prominent and notable features in the image, including the identification of characters as well as any significant details that highlight their interactions or setting.

Slide 8: Key Scene #1

Here is an excerpt from that scene. As we watch, notice how any differences in the scene compared with the original literary work.

*Met Opera on Demand: Track #16. ACT II: Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro
01:04 – 04:01*

OR

*Act II, Scene 1: Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro
48:08 – 51:26*

(Watch excerpt.)

What did you notice?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 9: Key Scene #2

Let's analyze this key scene. Figaro faces court for breaking a marriage contract with Marcellina. However, the discovery of a birthmark reveals that he is Marcellina's long-

lost son, and Bartolo is his father, turning the conflict into a joyful family reunion. Susanna enters, mistakenly assumes betrayal when she sees Figaro embracing Marcellina, but quickly learns the truth and rejoices. This scene masterfully combines humor, surprise, and heartfelt reconciliation, showcasing the opera's blend of comedy and emotion.

Discuss any prominent and notable features in the image, including the identification of characters as well as any significant details that highlight their interactions or setting.

Slide 10: Key Scene #2

Here is an excerpt from that scene. As we watch, notice how any differences in the scene compared with the original literary work.

*Met Opera on Demand: Track #36. ACT III: Riconosci in questo amplesso — Eccovi —
Io vi dico
00:48 – 06:27*

OR

*Act II, Scene 5: Riconosci in questo amplesso
2:01:22 – 2:06:57*

(Watch excerpt.)

What did you notice?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 11: Key Scene #3

Let's examine this key scene. The story descends into chaos as disguises and misunderstandings spiral out of control. The Count, fooled by the swapped identities of Susanna and the Countess, wrongly accuses the Countess of infidelity. The uproar draws others into the fray, escalating the confusion. This comedic turmoil sets the stage for the impending revelations and the opera's resolution.

Discuss any prominent and notable features in the image, including the identification of characters as well as any significant details that highlight their interactions or setting.

Slide 12: Key Scene #3

Here is an excerpt from that scene. As we watch, notice how any differences in the scene compared with the original literary work.

Met Opera on Demand: Track #47. ACT IV: Gente, gente, all'armi — Questo giorno di tormenti
00:00 – 05:24

OR

Act IV, Finale: Gente, gente, all'armi, all'armi!... Questo giorno di tormenti
2:59:50 – 3:05:28

(Watch excerpt.)

What did you notice?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 13:

Why do we adapt stories?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

How does storytelling and adaptation add relevance for an audience?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte's adaptation of *The Marriage of Figaro* was a collaborative effort to turn Pierre Beaumarchais's controversial play into a successful opera. Beaumarchais's original play, banned in some places for its critiques of aristocracy, was carefully modified by Da Ponte to tone down its political overtones and focus more on the interpersonal drama and comedic elements. Mozart composed music that masterfully complemented Da Ponte's libretto, enhancing the emotional depth of the characters and the humor in the story. Their adaptation emphasized human emotions and relationships, blending social commentary with lively, accessible entertainment. This partnership showcased a balance between Mozart's musical genius and Da Ponte's skillful storytelling, resulting in a timeless masterpiece.

Slide 14:

To further our understanding of the adaptation process, we will create an adaptation pitch for one of the three chosen key scenes from the opera. Before we do, let's look at the adaptation guidelines. We will focus on the Who, What, When, and Where in the scene. When we say, "who," we mean the characters in the scene, "what" means the action in the scene, "when" means the time period and time of day and/or year, and "where" is the location and setting. Please note that the character identity can be adapted, but characters may not be eliminated or added to the scene.

Our adaptation pitches are to be intentional, thoughtful and show our knowledge of the original literary work.

What questions do you have?

Take time to answer any questions students may have.

Slide 15:

Using the background knowledge of the story and our new understanding of the opera, let's do a quick adaptation pitch for the key scene we just looked at. How could we adapt the "who?"

(Add student suggestions to the slide.)

The action? The "what?"

(Add student suggestions to the slide.)

The "when?"

(Add student suggestions to the slide.)

The "why?"

(Add student suggestions to the slide.)

Please note that each decision you make will have a ripple-like effect on the overall story.

Are there any other questions?

Take time to answer any questions students may have.

****Students can either work in groups selected by the instructor or students choose their own groups – number of students per group depends on class size. Students can either adapt the same key scene or choose a different key scene provided using their laptops/tablets. Libretto excerpts of the key scenes can be accessed on the OPERA America website. Print outs of the libretto excerpts can be distributed as well.**

We are now going to break out into groups and choose one of the three key scenes from the opera and brainstorm an adaptation pitch. You may use your laptop/tablet to find the additional key scenes provided in the slides. You will have 10 minutes to create your opera adaptation pitches and answer the questions. Each group will be given a

worksheet with the same questions on the slide to complete and help guide the process. Please answer the last two questions using complete sentences.

(Return to Slide 14. Have students break out into groups by preferred method. Pass out the opera adaptation pitch worksheets, 1 per group, or have students answer the questions on a separate piece of paper [stay on Slide 15]. Students work in groups for 10 minutes.)

Begin!

(Walk around the classroom, offering assistance as students work. Provide a 5-minute, 2-minute, and 1-minute warning.)

Slide 16:

Now it's time to share our ideas! Each group will present their opera adaptation pitch to the class. Remember to explain your creative decisions and rationale.

Groups take turns presenting their opera adaptation pitches.

Slide 17:

Thank you for sharing! How did your understanding of the story change as you adapted it?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Have any new insights or perspectives emerged?

Allow a moment for reflection, then invite students to share their thoughts.

Slide 18:

Thank you all for your work today!

****If planning to continue with Responding to Key Scenes lesson, add an announcement about exploring the opera more next class.**