

## Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

**Title:** Production Design Adaptation

**Grade Level:** 9-12<sup>th</sup>

**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:** How does production and visual design aid in storytelling?

**Lesson Focus:** Students will use critical thinking, creativity, social-emotional learning, and collaboration while exploring stage design and the visual world of storytelling in opera.

**Prior Knowledge:** Students have read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Love in the Time of Cholera*, analyzed characters and can name the Who, What, When, and Where, participated in the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson, and created an opera adaptation pitch.

**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, completed opera adaptation pitch worksheets (from Exploring Story Adaptation lesson), production design definitions handout, elements of design definitions handout, costume design worksheet, set design worksheet, production design questionnaire, student laptops/tablets, interactive board, paper, pens/pencils, and colored pencils.

**Key Vocabulary:** Production Design (set design, props, costume design, lighting design, projection design, and hair/makeup design), Elements of Design (color, line, texture, shape, texture, form, space, value, and pattern), and Interlude.

### Definitions

- **Production Design:** The process of creating the visual aesthetic and environment for a film, television show, commercial, or other forms of media. It involves creating sets, props, as well as costumes, projections, and other visual elements that help bring the story to life and immerse the audience in the narrative. The Production Designer is responsible for overseeing the creation of these elements, working closely with the director, producers, and other key creatives to ensure that the visual style of the production aligns with the overall vision and tone of the project.

- Set Design: The art and practice of creating the physical environment in a theatrical production, film, television show, or other visual medium. This includes scenic elements and design layout for sets, lighting, props, and furniture to bring the story or concept to life. It involves arranging these elements in a way that enhances the audience's visual and aesthetic experience. Set design may also involve creating technical elements such as sound systems, special effects, and rigging to support the production. Set designers work closely with other production team members to create a cohesive and visually appealing environment complementing the production's overall vision.
- Props: A term commonly used in live performance and film production to refer to objects or items used on stage or on set to enhance the performance or scene. Props can include anything from furniture, decorations, weapons, hand-held objects, and more. Props are used to add realism and detail to a production and help bring the world of the play or film to life for the audience.
- Costume Design: The process of creating costumes and outfits for characters in theatre, film, television, or other visual media. It involves researching the time period, setting, and character traits to develop pieces that help bring the character to life. Costume designers work closely with directors, actors, and other production team members to ensure that the costumes accurately reflect the vision of the production. This can involve sourcing or creating garments, accessories, and props, as well as coordinating fittings and alterations. Costume design plays a crucial role in storytelling and character development, helping to enhance the overall visual and emotional impact of a production.
- Lighting Design: Refers to the art and practice of creating and controlling the lighting for a performance. This includes designing the placement and intensity of the lights and using different colors and effects to enhance the performance's mood and atmosphere. Lighting designers play a crucial role in enhancing the storytelling and emotional impact of the production, helping to set the stage, highlight performers, create a sense of place and time, and evoke different emotions in the audience. It is an integral part of the overall visual and artistic design of the production.
- Projection Design: The art of creating and manipulating projected images and videos to enhance the visual elements of a live event, such as a concert, theater production, dance performance, or installation. It involves using specialized software and hardware to project images, videos, or other visual content onto a surface, such as a screen, wall, or even the audience itself.
- Hair and Makeup Design: Refers to the planning and execution of hairstyles and makeup looks for performers and actors. This creative process involves analyzing the characters or themes in the performance, researching historical or cultural references, and designing hair and

makeup that enhances the overall aesthetic and storytelling of the production. Hair and makeup designers work closely with directors, costume designers, and performers to create a cohesive and visually impactful presentation on stage or screen.

- **Elements of Design:** The basic components or building blocks that make up a visual composition. These elements include color, line, shape, texture, form, space, value, and pattern. Each element plays a critical role in creating a successful design and influencing how the viewer perceives and interacts with the artwork. By manipulating and combining these elements, designers can create visually appealing and cohesive compositions that effectively communicate their intended message or evoke a specific emotional response.
  - **Color:** The visual sensation produced by the reflection or absorption of light. Colors can be categorized as primary (red, blue, yellow), secondary (orange, green, purple), or tertiary (colors created by mixing primary and secondary colors).
  - **Line:** The path of a moving point, created by a pencil or brush. Lines can be straight, curved, thick, thin, or dotted, and can be used to create shapes, patterns, and textures.
  - **Shape:** A two-dimensional object with a defined boundary. Shapes can be geometric (such as squares, circles, and triangles) or organic (such as leaves, flowers, and animals).
  - **Texture:** The surface quality of an object, which can be visual or tactile. Textures can be smooth, rough, shiny, matte, or any combination thereof.
  - **Form:** A three-dimensional object that is geometric or free form. Like shape, form has length and width, but also has depth.
  - **Space:** The area around, within, or between objects. Space can be positive (the actual objects in a composition) or negative (the empty or empty areas).
  - **Value:** Refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. It is a critical aspect of visual communication, as it can greatly affect the mood, contrast, and overall aesthetic.
  - **Pattern:** A repeated decorative design or motif. Patterns can be created through the repetition of lines, shapes, colors, or textures.
- **Interlude:** A musical composition that is typically played in the middle of a performance, such as a concert, opera, or ballet. It is usually a short, instrumental piece that is a moment in time where something occurs between two events, in the case of this example, it is between two distinct scenes.

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

- Respond to the musical and storytelling elements of opera to develop criteria for visual artistic choices.
- Refine an adaptation pitch to demonstrate critical understanding of the visual elements of stage design and opera to tell a story.

- Create visual representations of their set and costume designs based on their opera adaptation pitches.

**Assessment:** Evaluate the production design questionnaire, which explains the choices in set and costume design visual representations created by each group, looking for evidence of critical thinking, creativity, and their ability to successfully communicate their adaptation pitches.

#### Assessment Rubric

4: Displays exceptional critical thinking and creativity in set and costume design choices. Clearly and effectively communicates adaptation pitch. Uses at least three elements of design in a highly impactful way.

3: Demonstrates critical thinking and creativity in set and costume design choices. Effectively communicates adaptation pitch. Uses at least three elements of design.

2: Shows some evidence of critical thinking and creativity in set and costume design choices. Partially communicates adaptation pitch. Uses at least two elements of design.

1: Does not demonstrate critical thinking or creativity in set and costume design choices. Does not effectively communicate adaptation pitch. Uses less than three elements of design.

#### **Learning Standards:**

##### Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone)

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.

##### National Core Arts Standards

VA:Cr1.1.IIa. Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.

VA:Cn10.1.IIIa. Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.

MU:Cn11.o.T.Ia. Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

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

TH:Cr1.1.I.a. Apply basic research to construct ideas about the visual composition of a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr.2-II.a. Refine a dramatic concept to demonstrate a critical understanding of historical and cultural influences of original ideas applied to a drama/theatre work.

## Procedure:

### Introduction/Hook (5 minutes):

- Begin with a multi-sensory listening activity of the Act I “Interludio (Interlude)” from *Florencia en el Amazonas*.
- [Met Opera on Demand](#): Track #9. ACT I: Interludio  
00:00 – 02:22
- As they listen, ask students to use their senses and invite them to write down any colors, mood, spaces/places, textures, foods, etc. they can associate with the music.
- Have students share their findings as a class or with partners.
  - An example of a finding could be a student sees the color green which reminds them of the smell of fresh cut grass and the feel of grass under their feet.
  - Ask students to ponder how this all relates to storytelling.

### Main Narrative/Sequence (10 minutes):

- Discuss how artistic processes often begin this way and inspiration comes from many different sources, often our own experiences, perspectives, and prior knowledge and research.
- Define Production Design as the visual world of the opera - enhancing the storytelling, context, emotional experience, and communicates mood.
  - Display the elements of production design and definitions, including:
    - Set design, costume design, props, lighting design, projection design, and hair/makeup design.
    - Creative team: collaboration of designers
- Show examples of set designs from multiple productions of the opera. (Found in presentation slides.)
  - When highlighting the multiple ways the opera has been designed, discuss color, costume, props, sets, location, etc.
- Introduce/define Elements of Design and discuss their use in provided examples.
  - For a more detailed exploration, visit: [The Magical Costumes of “Florencia en el Amazonas”](#)
- Explain we will be curating design ideas for our opera adaptation pitches we created in the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson.
  - Reference this lesson’s introductory listening activity and ask students to consider all that was discussed when designing their adaptations: color, mood, textures, spaces/places, etc.
  - Students should use at least three elements of design in their work.
- Encourage students to find inspiration through *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Gabriel García Márquez) or *Love in the Time of Cholera* (Gabriel García Márquez) the literary work, *Florencia* libretto, and research on their computers and/or tablets, but to be mindful of intellectual property laws.

### Activity/Practice (20 minutes):

- Students collaborate to visually represent set designs and costume designs using their opera adaptation pitches. Instructor may choose one pitch for the whole class to adapt or have students work with their group's pitch from the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson.
  - Students break out into their Exploring Story Adaptation lesson groups or may choose to work independently.
  - Pass out groups' previously completed opera adaptation pitch worksheets.
  - Each group or independent student should receive a production design questionnaire to fill out and help guide the process.
  - Students can be assigned designer roles within their groups.
  - Students may use the set design and costume design worksheets to sketch out their designs or create collages using magazine cuts. Students may also choose to engage with the worksheets digitally by adding images.

OR

- Students may use a school district approved AI image creator to craft mood/concept boards.

Present/Share (8 minutes):

- Willing groups share their set and costume design sketches with the class using the questionnaire as a guideline for presentation.

Reflection (2 minutes):

- Ask students to reflect on the process of refining their opera adaptation pitches by developing set and costume designs in collaboration with their group or independently.

**Extension/ Follow-up/Next steps:**

- Discuss the connections to professions in the opera industry and to other artforms, such as fashion, architecture, etc., and other music genres. Delve deeper into how designers get inspiration – how do they research and find imagery that connects to the storyline.
- Students can take their set and costume designs to the next level and create set models, involving scale, and use recycled materials and fabrics to make costumes.
- Explore the work of Mexican Artists, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. How might they have envisioned an adaptation of *Florencia en el Amazonas*? Might their work influence how your students think about their own adaptations?

## ***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.*

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