



2019-20 Opera Study Guide for Schools and Families

October 11 & 13: Ricky Ian Gordon's *27*

February 7-9 and 14-16: Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate!*

April 24 & 26: Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*



What is Opera?

Opera is a play where the story is told through song, music and drama. Operatic voices are very special. Opera singers use their voices in an incredible way that allows them to be heard without microphones. For this reason, these voices sound different from most of the singing you've probably heard on the radio.

In addition to the singers and instrumentalists, the spectacle of opera includes sets, props, special lighting, costumes, make-up and choreography. Many operas are in Italian, French and German, but most American Opera productions, including Intermountain Opera Bozeman, use "supertitles." This is a translation of the text that is projected above the stage so you can follow along.

It does help to learn the story before you attend a performance. All operas have what is called a "synopsis," a condensed outline of the story.

Before people had televisions and movies, opera was one of the ways that they could see stories come to life. Going to the opera is very fun, because it usually takes place in a beautiful theatre with a big stage, fancy costumes, and a big orchestra!

Operas tell all sorts of stories. Some of these stories are tragedies, which are dramatic and sad, but many of them are comedies, which are funny! The music in an opera always reflects the type of story that is being told.



A painting of people at the opera in Russia in the 1800s.

Opera Guessing Game

Can you guess if these operas are comedies or tragedies? Write a one-sentence summary that explains what you think the story is about. When you are done, your teacher will reveal the titles of each one!



1. _____



2. _____



3. _____

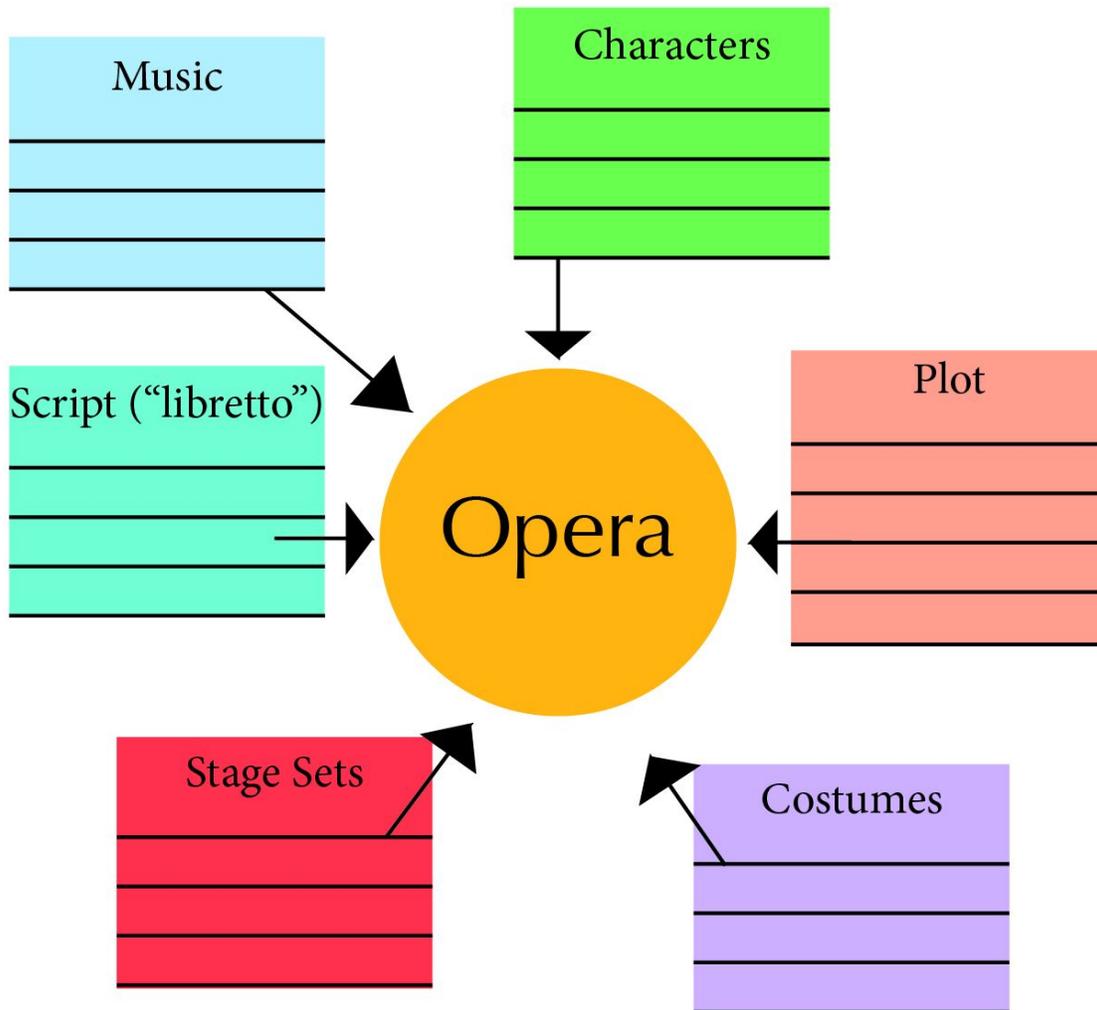


4. _____

Opera Vocabulary Game

Telling a Story with Opera

Match the vocabulary terms with their boxes!



Aside

Falsetto

Picasso

Vibrato

Fly

Gown

Chorus

Coloratura

Scenery

Practical

Corset

Dialogue

Orchestra

Wig

Rising action

Motivation

Conductor

Stockings

Composer

Figaro

Aria

Batten

Cyclorama

Flat

Duet

Cherubino

Paradox

Count
Almaviva

Overture

Satire

Focus on: *The Marriage of Figaro*

This opera takes things that happen in everyday life and makes them into a very dramatic (and funny) story. It was written in Europe in 1786 - just ten years after the American Revolution! The composer is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. This opera is called an *opera buffa*, or comic opera. The setting of this opera is a bit different than what we are used to in our daily lives. It takes place in a time when there were kings and queens and “aristocrats,” which were important noble people who had lots of money and servants. This opera is an *allegory* of the way that these people often lived. The plot makes fun of them in many ways! This is a funny opera with a happy ending.



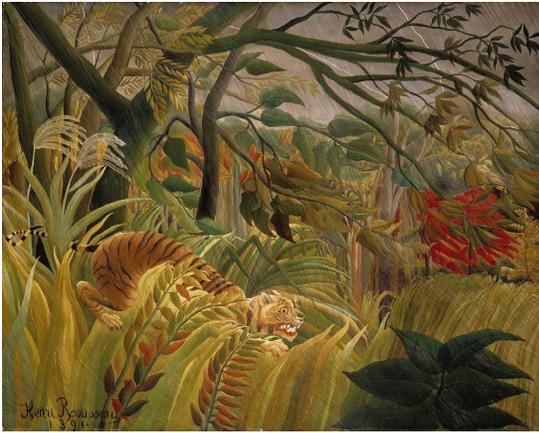
Characters:

Count Almaviva (baritone)
Countess Rosina Almaviva (soprano)
Susanna, the Countess' maid (soprano)
Figaro, personal valet to the Count (bass)
Cherubino, the Count's page (soprano - *breeches role*)
Marcellina, Dr. Bartolo's housekeeper (mezzo-soprano)
Bartolo, a doctor and lawyer (bass)
Basilio, a music teacher (tenor)
Don Curzio, a judge (tenor)
Barbarina, Antonio's daughter (soprano)
Antonio, the Count's gardener and Susanna's uncle

Focus on: 27

Not all operas were written a long time ago! Composers are still using opera as a way to tell stories. Ricky Ian Gordon and Royce Vavrek wrote this story to look at the lives of some very famous artists and writers. They lived in Paris during a time when art was changing and becoming more *individual*.

This meant that artists could be more creative and use styles that might have been considered “strange” by people from earlier times. This opera tells their story! Here are some artists that you might recognize. The main character of this opera, Gertrude Stein, was a writer who helped many of these artists become successful and start their careers!



Henri Rousseau



Henri Matisse



Pablo Picasso

Activities

1. Pick a favorite story and draw what you think the sets might look like on an opera stage for that story.
2. As a class or in partners, have students do the vocabulary activity.
3. Have students listen to excerpts of the music (found on intermountainopera.org), and see if they can identify which opera the song belongs to, and which character might be singing.
4. Ask students to draw or paint their own sets and costumes for *The Marriage of Figaro*.
5. Ask students to create a work of art inspired by Picasso or Matisse that reflects the story or setting from 27.
6. Ask students to pick a story that they are learning about in Social Studies and describe how this story could make a good opera. Would people learn different things about this story if it was an opera?
7. Have students do a short writing activity answering the following question: why use opera to tell a story?

Going to the Opera: What to Know

SOPRANO: the highest female voice

MEZZO-SOPRANO: (also called ALTO) the lower female voice

CONTRALTO: lowest female voice

COUNTERTENOR: highest male voice

TENOR: high male voice

BARITONE: the middle male voice

BASS: the lowest male voice

BREECHES ROLE: a role sung by a woman who is dressed in men's clothing

The opera has a special set of rules and customs that help make the experience more enjoyable for everybody. The following list will help you practice those traditions correctly.

- ◆ Do dress comfortably but nicely.
- ◆ Do find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher.
- ◆ Do remove your hat in respect to the artists and to the person sitting behind you.
- ◆ Do turn off phones, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- ◆ Do not take photos.
- ◆ Do not chew gum, eat, or talk
- ◆ Do get settled and comfortable prior to the performance beginning.
- ◆ Do CLAP as the lights are dimmed.
- ◆ Do sit still and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- ◆ Do applaud at the end of an aria or chorus piece to signify your enjoyment.
- ◆ Do laugh when something is funny.
- ◆ Do read the English supertitles projected above the stage so you understand the story.
- ◆ MOST IMPORTANT: Do have fun and enjoy the show!!!!

For Educators

Vocabulary Definitions:

Aside: A comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

Chorus: A group of singers, singing together, who sometimes portray servants, party guests or other unnamed characters

Orchestra: The group of instrumentalists or musicians who, led by the conductor, accompany the singers.

Coloratura: Elaborate ornamentation of vocal music written using many fast notes and trills.

Aria: A solo piece written for a main character, which focuses on the character's emotion.

Conductor: The leader of the orchestra, sometimes called Maestro. This person leads all the musicians (instrumentalists and vocalists) in the performance of an opera

Composer: A person who writes music.

Duet: An extended musical passage performed by two singers. They may or may not sing simultaneously or on the same musical line.

Falsetto: A method of singing above the natural range of the male voice. Often used in opera for comic effects such as a man imitating a woman.

Wig: a covering for the head made of real or artificial hair

Corset: a tightly fitting laced or stiffened outer bodice or dress.

Overture: An orchestral introduction to an opera

Paradox: a situation that seems self-contradictory and illogical, but is true.

Satire: the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices

Vibrato: A natural wavering of frequency (pitch) while singing a note

Batten: piece of wood or pipe from which lights, scenery and curtains are hung.

Motivation: the reason behind a character's behavior

Cyclorama: Curtain or drop across back of stage; can serve as background for some scenes.

Flat: canvas covered wooden frame used for scenery

Practical: set piece or prop that is usable, actually works

Scenery: hangings, structures, etc. that represent a location or decorate the stage

Rising Action: conflict in a scene gets worse and/or more complicated

Fly: scenery which is raised into the roof (flown out) or lowered on the stage

Tricorne hat: a style of [hat](#) that was popular during the 18th century. This hat had a rather broad [brim](#), pinned up on either side of the head and at the back, producing a triangular shape

Opera Guessing Game answers:

1. *Falstaff* (Verdi) - comedy
2. *La Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*) (Rossini) - comedy
3. *Romeo and Juliet* (Gounod) - tragedy
4. *Daughter of the Regiment* (Donizetti) - comedy

