



– *Presents* –

**YOUR
GUIDE TO
OPERA**

Overture

As CEO of Edmonton Opera I want to thank you for participating in this, our first opera education program.

I believe music especially opera can add a great richness to life.

My first exposure to music came as a little girl sitting under the piano listening to my grandmother play and sing operatic arias. I remember loving music and taking piano lessons. I guess I persisted with those scales long enough because I have from time to time throughout my life taught piano and of course that served as good grounding for what was to become a career.

As for opera, it was love at first sight and sound. As a young person in former Yugoslavia, a student could attend opera for the equivalent of 25 cents. For me it was all magic, as I was instantly taken by this rich art form that actually brings together several other wonderful art forms such as... music, voice, sets, costumes, drama, love stories, lavish productions.

Now you too will have a similar educational and experiential journey by being part of Edmonton Opera's education program and "Your Guide to Opera." We have created a thorough curriculum, practical and engaging teaching aids and yes, the opportunity for all to attend the dress rehearsal of an Edmonton Opera performance.

This leads me naturally enough to tell you a bit about your hometown opera company.

First, I want to say what a great opera city we have here. We are a professional opera company backed by some of the greatest volunteers and corporate and civic leaders I have ever seen. I can't tell you how fulfilling it is to be working with people, both staff and volunteers, who love opera and are willing to support it. Edmonton Opera is the oldest and largest professional, year-round opera company in the Prairie Provinces, one of 17 opera companies in Canada and the fourth largest in terms of budget and artistic output. It is also one of five flagship arts organizations in Edmonton.

Your Edmonton Opera will be celebrating a 50th birthday soon...and that is a real statement about the kind of long term support Edmonton and area has for us and as well for many of the other arts and cultural organizations in this great city.

So welcome to the wonderful world of opera. Enjoy and learn.



Sandra Gajic
CEO | Edmonton Opera

Opera Live!

Nothing beats the excitement of live opera!
For more information on how your class can attend a dress rehearsal at special student pricing, contact us by email at education@edmontonopera.com or visit us online at:

www.edmontonopera.com



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A Brief History of Opera

Late Renaissance

Florentine Camerata

1570s

This group of intellectuals meets to discuss and guide trends in the arts.

Dafne

1597

First opera composed by Jacopo Peri in Florence, Italy.

Baroque Period

Monteverdi

1567–1643

Claudio Monteverdi was the best known opera composer of his time.

Handel

1685–1759

Wrote 40 Italian Operas, including *Giulio Cesare* (Julius Caesar) in 1724.

Classical Period

The Marriage of Figaro

Mozart

1756–1791

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote a number of operas including *Don Giovanni*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, & *The Magic Flute*.



Beethoven

1770–1827

Ludwig van Beethoven wrote his only opera, *Fidelio*, in 1804. The overture underwent three further revisions, and the final version was performed in 1814. Beethoven started out following classical traditions, but ended up ushering in the Romantic period.

Bel Canto

Donizetti

1797–1848

Gaetano Donizetti's most well-known opera is *Lucia de Lammermoor*, first performed in 1835. Over his life, he wrote about 75 operas.

Rossini

1792–1868

Gioacchino Rossini is best known for his opera *The Barber of Seville*. He enjoyed great popularity in his lifetime, and surprised everyone when he gave up opera after the success of *William Tell* in 1829.

The Barber of Seville

Bellini

1801–1835

Vincenzo Bellini wrote ten operas over eleven years in the bel canto tradition, including *La Sonnambula* (The Sleepwalker.)



Romanticism

Verdi

1813–1901

Giuseppe Verdi is considered by many to be the greatest of Italian opera composers. He was a follower of bel canto principles, and his operas are known for their beautiful melodies and dramatic quality.

La Traviata

Wagner

1813–1883

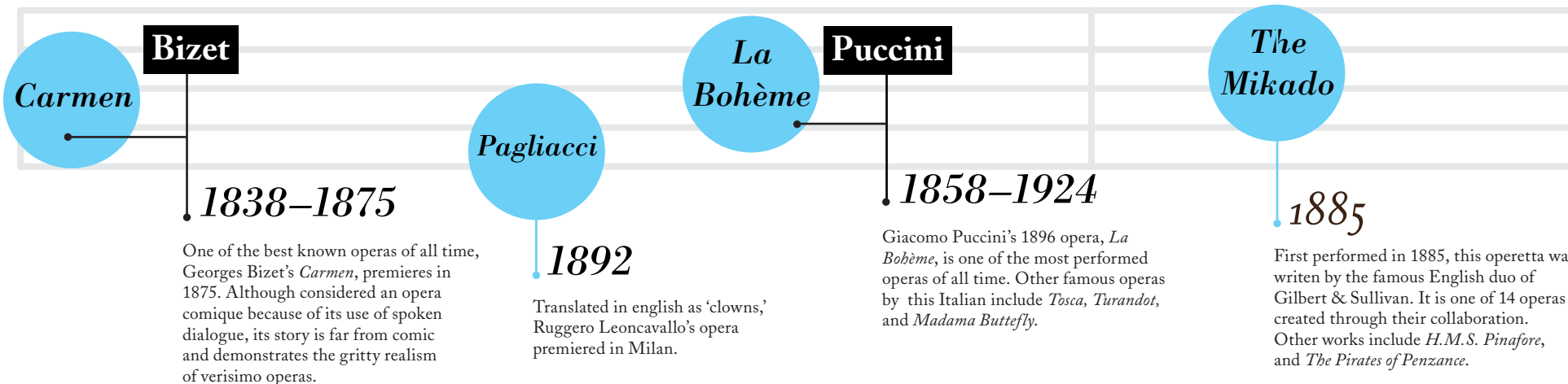
Richard Wagner is known for his innovative music dramas and use of leitmotifs. His most famous works include *Tristan und Isolde*, and the massive *Ring Cycle* which includes four epic operas.

Der Ring des Nibelungen



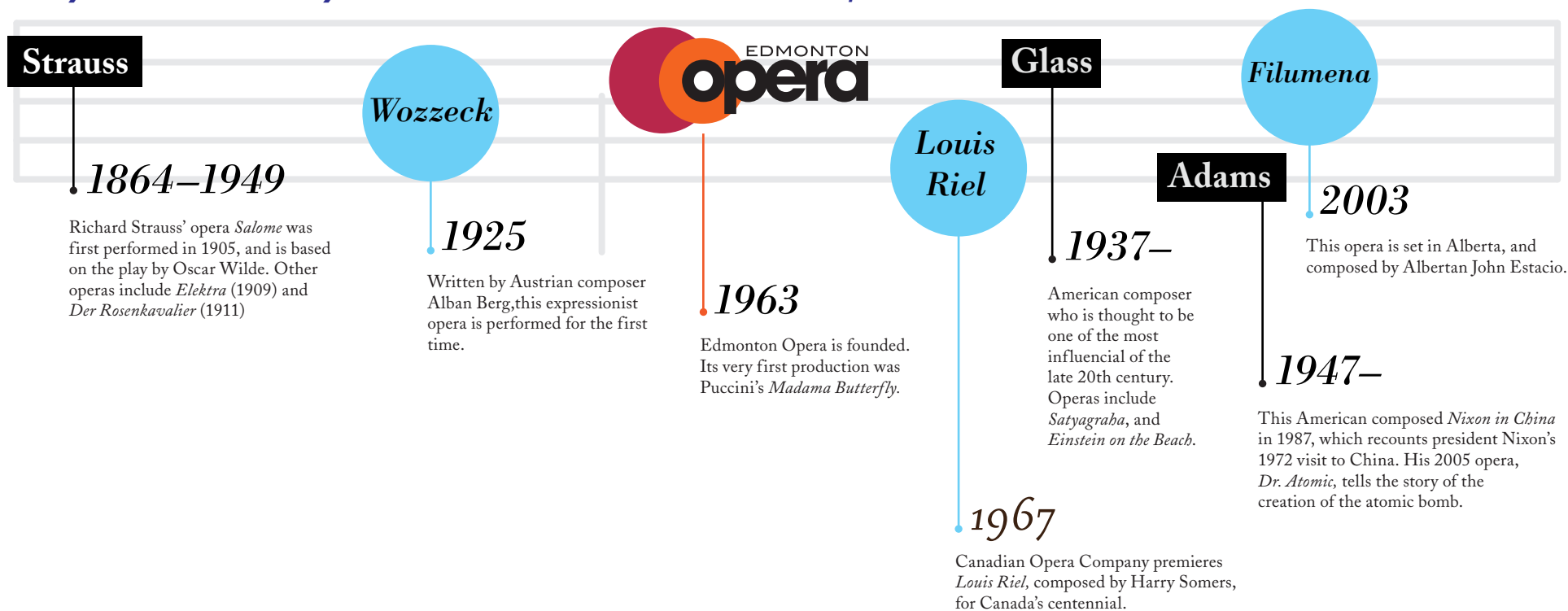
Verisimo (Realism)

Operetta



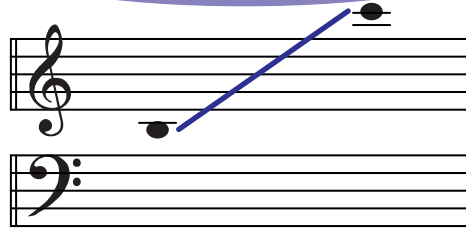
Early Twentieth Century

Late Twentieth Century



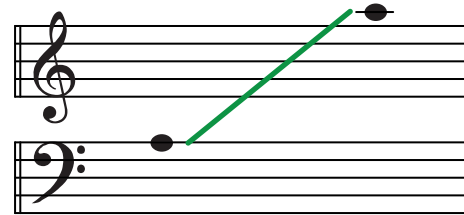
Vocal Spotlight

Soprano



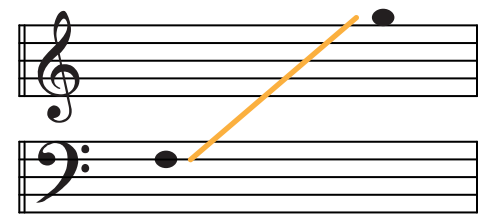
Sopranos are the highest pitched of the female voices. Composers generally write the lead role for this type of voice. Coloratura sopranos shine when singing very high notes and rapid passages. Dramatic sopranos have great intensity and power. Lyric sopranos have exceptionally beautiful voices, and can sustain long passages.

Mezzo-Soprano



A type of female voice that is lower than the soprano and higher than the contralto. Often played by the character of the young boy, a complex or evil character.

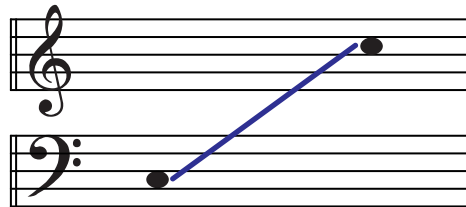
Contralto



A type of female voice that is the lowest pitched. Their voice is deep and well-rounded. Usually played by the maid, mother or grandmother.

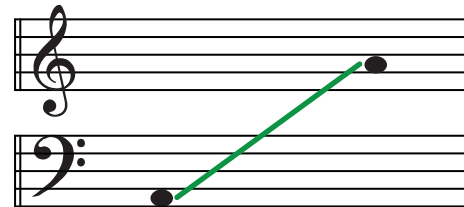
Vocal Spotlight

Tenor



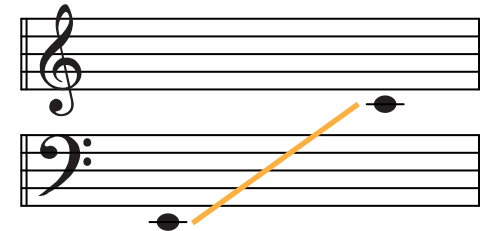
The highest sounding male voice, often the leading role. Much like sopranos, tenors can have lyric or dramatic sound quality. Tenors typically play characters that fall in love with sopranos.

Baritone



These voices are more mellow and slightly lower than tenors. The roles sung by baritones are usually father figures or middle-aged children, but they often have central roles.

Bass



Basses are the lowest sounding human voices and they often play roles of wise and older characters in opera, like kings, emperors, or gods. The basso profundo is the lowest of these, and is commonly heard in Russian opera.

Glossary

Arias: Meaning “air” in Italian. Arias are solos that accompany the orchestra, which allow a character to express their feelings and demonstrate their vocal talents.

Arioso: Meaning “airy” in Italian. A style of singing between aria and recitative. It is similar to recitative in its closeness to speech, yet similar to aria in melodic structure.

Baritone: A type of male voice that is lower than the tenor, but higher than the bass. Usually played by father figures or middle-aged children.

Bass: A type of male voice that is the lowest pitched. It is often played by wise and older characters.

Chorus: A large group of singers, often 40 or more, who appear on stage in a crowd scene. Sometimes the chorus comments on action or contrasts solos.

Coloratura soprano: A type of soprano that can sing very high notes quickly.

Contralto: A type of female voice that is the lowest pitched. Their voice is deep and well-rounded. Usually played by the maid, mother or grandmother.

Dramatic soprano: A type of soprano that sings with intensity and power.

Ensemble: A musical number sung by 2 or more people of different ranges. For example, duets, trios, quartets, quintets and sextets.

Florentine Camerata: a group of poets, musicians, and intellectuals in the late Renaissance Florence who gathered under the support of Count Giovanni de’ Bardi to discuss the arts, music and drama.

Leitmotif: German meaning "leading motif." Refers to a recurring theme that appears throughout the work and is tied to a particular idea or character.

Lyric sopranos: A type of soprano that has an extremely beautiful voice and can sustain long passages.

Mezzo Soprano: A type of female voice that is lower than the soprano and higher than the contralto. Often played by the character of the young boy, a complex or evil character.

Opera buffa: Italian comic opera.

Opera comique: A type of French opera that cannot be translated as "comic opera." It is not always light in nature and can have complex meaning. It contains spoken dialogue and arias.

Opera seria: Italian for "serious opera." A style of opera from the Baroque period in Italy.

Overture: Music usually played as an introduction to the themes that will be heard later in the opera.

Recitatives: when the singer sings words in a musical way, but with the free rhythms of speech. It is a type of singing unique to opera.

Singspiel: German meaning "sing play." It is a combination of spoken word with music.

Soprano: Highest pitched female voice. Usually the female lead singer is written as this type of voice. There are 3 types: coloratura, dramatic, and lyric.

Tenor: A type of male voice that is the highest pitched. It is often the leading role and they typically fall in love with Sopranos.

Tragedie lyrique: A French opera usually based on Classical mythology or Italian romantic epics. These operas usually have themes of love and noble knightly behaviour and do not necessarily end tragically as their name implies.

Who's Who?

Composer: Writes the music

Librettist: Chooses a story, writes or adapts the words

Conductor: Leads the musicians

Director: Blocks or stages the entire production

Principal Singers: Have the leading and supporting roles

Chorus: Sing as a group

Supernumeraries: Act but do not sing

Repetiteur: Accompanies singers during rehearsal, plays the whole orchestral score on piano

Costume Designer: Designs the costumes for each character

Wardrobe/Costume Staff: fit, clean and repair costumes; help singers put costumes on

Wig Staff: Make wigs and prepare make-up

Make-up Staff: Apply make-up for principal singers, assist chorus with make-up

Set Designer: Designs the scenery for each scene

Prop Builders: Build/buy all the set pieces that are not structural

Lighting Designer: Designs lighting effects

Stage Manager: “Calls the show”—cues scenery changes, lighting and actors so that everything happens at the right time.

Artistic Director: Chooses which shows to produce and which artists to hire

Stagehands: Move scenery, run lighting & sound cues

Front of House Staff: Work in the performance venue seating patrons, and operating coat check

Administrative Staff: Find funding; sell tickets; hire artists; take care of the business side of opera.

Audience: Enjoys and appreciates opera from a seat in the hall!

Critic: Writes a critique of performance for newspaper, radio, or TV

Fun Facts!

- The term opera comes from the latin word “opus” or “work.”
- Mozart wrote his first opera, *Bastien und Bastienne*, at the age of 12.
- *The Ring Cycle* by Wagner is the longest opera, taking 27 years to compose.
- Mozart’s full name was Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Amadeus Gottlieb Sigismundus Mozart. The last four (Theophilus, Amadeus, Gottlieb and Sigismundus) mean “beloved of God” in different languages.
- The performance by Placido Domingo in *Otello* on the evening of July 30, 1991 set a record for the world’s longest applause. Clapping lasted encore after encore for one hour and 20 minutes!
- Although Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* is one of opera’s best loved operas, its first performance was one of opera's biggest flops!
- After an opera you can cheer “bravo” for a man and “brava” for a woman. For multiple singers cheer “bravi” or “brave” for a group of women.

What to Expect

Dress Rehearsal Etiquette and Pointers

Arrive Early!

Your tickets will be available at the auditorium 45 minutes prior to show time. Please allow enough time to seat your group, we suggest 15 minutes. It is also best to allow students the opportunity to use the restroom, prior to locating your seats within the theatre.

Please Stay Seated.

Once in the theatre it is courteous to remain seated until intermission. Please do not leave the theatre unless there is an emergency.

Be Courteous.

Theatre is live performance, so any talking, cell-phone use (including texting) or other noise/light is a disruption and takes away from everyone's experience at the opera.

Applause is Welcome!

Opera is spectacle. Your presence in the audience is essential to complete the whole experience. Enjoy the performance and respond to what you see. Unlike television or film, every live performance is unique: only you and the performers will share the experience you have in the theatre. Your warmth and good humour are important to them, so when you like something, tell them with your applause.

No food, gum, or drink of any kind.

This rule is strictly enforced while inside the theatre.

No cameras or recording devices.

The artists' images and performances belong to them and we ask you to respect that by refraining from recording their work in any way.

Activity One

Activity Overview

Pre show activity Grade 5-12

This activity will allow students to explore the relationship between Opera and Popular Culture. Students will be able to explain the effect that allusion to opera has on our understanding of a contemporary text.

Curricular Connections

ELA Grade 5-6

2.2 Respond to Texts

2.3 Understand Forms, Elements and Techniques

ELA Grades 7-9

2.2 Respond to texts

2.3 Understand forms, elements and techniques

ELA Grades 10-12

1.2 Extend awareness

Activity

Although opera is over 400 years old, it continues to influence popular culture today.

Using the following links or video sharing websites such as YouTube, listen to the following:

Guiding Questions for Discussion

As a group, engage students to consider/discuss any of the following:

How does the Pop Culture version compare to the Traditional version?

What purpose does the Pop Culture version serve?

Is it effective? If so, in what ways is it effective? If not, why?

Why would Pop Culture choose Opera, or at least the allusion to opera, to convey their message?

Can you think of other ways Opera has influenced modern culture?

Composer	Opera	Exerpt	Pop Culture Eample	YouTube Link
Bizet	<i>Carmen</i>	Habanera (sung in French)	Beyoncé Pepsi Ad Muppets	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UJ-tr8-Jl4 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHphaS4aPX0
Rossini	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>	Overture	The Rabbit of Seville	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55G7T8VdWEs
Leoncavallo	<i>Pagliacci</i>	"Vesti la giubba" (sung in Italian)	Rice Krispies Ad Coca-Cola Ad	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7joApY0dnw http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAUDHxDYMMo

Activity Two

Activity Overview

Pre show activity Grade 5-12

The stories, music, sets, costumes, characters, and drama that are brought together to create the magical spectacle of opera can be found all around us. From books and plays to music in popular culture students may be familiar with opera without knowing it. This activity allows students to discover the connection opera has to aspects of culture and develop their research skills.

Curricular Connections

ELA Grade 5-6

- 1.2 Clarify and Extend
- 3.2 Select and Process

ELA Grade 7-9

- 2.2 Respond to texts
- 4.3 Present and Share

ELA Grade 10-12

- 2.1 Construct meaning from text and context
- 2.3 Respond to a variety of print and nonprint texts

Activity

For students new to opera, discovering the places where they have heard music or stories from opera is a great place to start. Using the following list of some popular operas and operatic pieces, go exploring with your students to see where the themes, characters and music appear in our culture today. Musicals, cartoons, tv shows and movies are all great places to start.

Operas

Rusalka by Dvořák

The Ring Cycle by Wagner

La Bohème by Puccini

Madama Butterfly by Puccini

Operatic Pieces (music)

“Intermezzo” from *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Mascagni

“The Flower Duet” from *Lakmé* by Delibes

“Nessun Dorma” from *Turandot* by Puccini

“Die Walküre” from *The Ring Cycle* by Wagner

Guiding Questions for Discussion

As a group, encourage students to share the connections they find and discuss the following:

How is the music performed in and outside of its original context?

What changes when opera is introduced in new places? How does it stay the same? Is it still opera if it’s used in an advertisement or commercial? If not, what does it become?

Does your perception of opera change when it’s used in today’s popular culture? Why or why not?

How does the use of opera in popular culture affect society’s view of opera as an art form?

Activity Three

Activity Overview

Post show activity Grade 7-12

Write your own aria! This activity allows students to explore the emotions of one character at a specific point in time.

Curricular Connections

ELA Grades 7-9

2.4 Create Original Text

4.1 & 4.2 Enhance the clarity & artistry of communication

5.2 Work Within a Group

ELA Grades 10-12

2.2 Understand and appreciate textual forms, elements and techniques

2.1 Construct meaning from text and context

4.1 Develop and present a variety of print and non print texts

Activity

An aria, Italian for air, is a way for characters of an opera to express their emotions. They are solos performed to the accompaniment of the orchestra that reflect the events of the drama. First, as a class create a simple plotline. It can be any genre (mystery, comedy, sci-fi, etc.) and from any time in history. Next, within small groups decide specific details for a character and create an aria from the perspective of one character at one point in time. Remember to emphasize the emotions and feelings of this character. Students can recite the aria in writing, acting, or drawing the events in a comic strip.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

As a group, engage students to consider/discuss any of the following:

Compare characters created by the different groups. What emotions did the groups evoke through their aria?

What is the inspiration for the character's aria? What leads to their dramatic reveal to the audience?

Why is aria an effective way of expressing feeling?

How does your choice of medium (acting, writing, drawing, etc.) change the tone and meaning of the story?

Activity Four

Activity Overview

Post show activity Grade 7-12

Twitter allows people, in 140 characters or less, to share their immediate thoughts and feelings with anyone person interested in reading the tweets. Similarly, the use of arias within an opera allows characters to communicate an emotional state to the audience. Most operas were written long before computer technology. What might characters in an Opera tweet if Twitter was available to them?

Curricular Connections

ELA Grades 7-9

2.3 Understand Forms, Elements and Techniques

2.4 Create Original Text

ELA Grades 10-12

1.2 Extend Awareness

2.1 Construct meaning from text and context

Activity

Working individually or in groups, students will write 15-20 tweets from the perspective of one or more characters in the opera. The tweets should provide not only a synopsis of the entire plot but should also serve to reveal the motivations and feelings of the characters or convey some of the themes of the opera.

Tweets are restricted to a maximum of 140 characters, and could include the use of hashtags (#) and usernames (@), or any other shortened language forms.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

How do the tweets deepen our understanding of the characters, plot, or themes of the opera?

What are the limitations of the tweet form for personal expression? What are the benefits of such a form?

Identify and compare the uses of standard English and slang in the tweets. How does their use change the meaning of the text?

How does communicating via twitter differ from other forms of language? How does this affect how others view your experiences?

Activity Five

Activity Overview

Post show activity Grade 5-12

After viewing an opera with your class allow students to reflect on and describe what they experienced by creating a newspaper review. Encourage students to share their review with the rest of the class.

Curricular Connections

ELA Grade 5-6

2.2 Respond to texts

3.1 Plan and Focus

ELA Grade 7-9

2.4 Create Original Texts

4.1 Enhance and Improve

ELA Grade 10-12

2.2 Understand and Appreciate textual forms, elements and techniques

4.1 Develop and Present a variety of print and nonprint texts

Activity

You have been hired by the Edmonton Journal to write a review of the production you saw. Be sure to focus on choices that were made by the artistic team: the sets, lighting, costumes, casting, etc. You can also describe areas such as the mood, motifs and themes of the opera. And don't forget to include a captivating title!

Allow students to present their reviews to classmates in small groups or as a class.

Further Resources

Infant & Pre-K

- » Auch, Mary Jane. *The Bantam of the Opera*. Holiday House, Inc., 1997.
- » Clement, Gary. *The Great Poochini*. Groundwood Books, 1999.
- » Elliott, Donald and Clinton Arrowood. *Lambs' Tales From Great Operas*. Harvard Common Press, 1991.
- » Thee, Christian and Robert Levine. *Behind the Curtain: Hansel and Gretel: Your Own Backstage Tour in Look-Through and Pull-Up Panels*. Workman Publishing Company, 1994.
- » Weaver, Tess and Andrea Wesson. *Opera Cat*. Clarion Books, 2002.
- » Weaver, Tess and Andrea Wesson. *Encore, Opera Cat*. Clarion Books, 2009

Grades 4-8

- » Bennett, Roy. *Opera*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- » Ganeri, Anita and Nicola Barber. *The Young Person's Guide to the Opera: With Music from the Great Operas on CD*. Harcourt: London, England, 2001.
- » Husain, Shahrukh. *The Barefoot Book of Stories from the Opera*. Barefoot Books, 1999.
- » Neidorf, Mary and Daniel Stevens. *Operantics with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*. Sunstone Press, 1999.
- » Siberell, Anne. *Bravo! Brava! A Night at the Opera: Behind the Scenes With Composers, Cast and Crew*. Frederica von Stade (Introduction) Oxford University Press Children's Books, 2001.
- » *The Random House Book of Opera Stories* (Random House Story Collections). Random House, 1998.

Grades 9-12

- » Davis, Peter G., ed. *The American Opera Singer*. Anchor, 1999.
- » Dobkin, Matt. *Getting Opera: A Guide for the Cultured but Confused*. Pocket, 2000.
- » Plotkin, Fred. *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Opera*. Hyperion, 1994.
- » Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Opera*. Billboard Books, 2004.