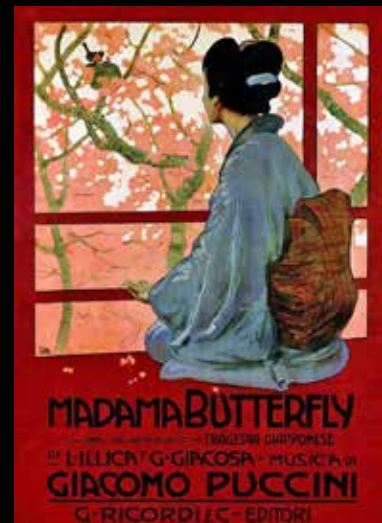
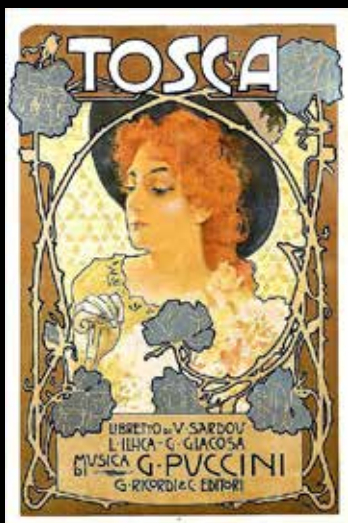
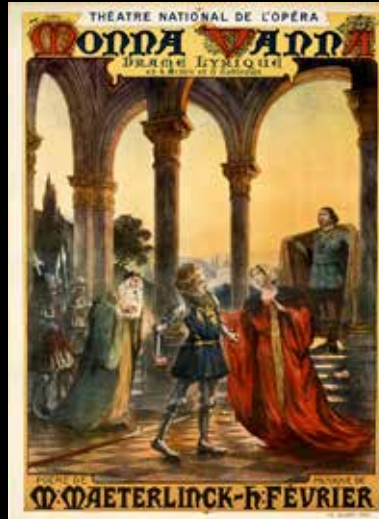




WHAT IS OPERA?



WHAT IS OPERA?

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WHAT IS OPERA?

At more than four hundred years old, **opera** is one of the oldest art forms in the world. Opera is a form of theater, a type of musical “play,” in which most of the words are sung. Music is a fundamental component of opera, and dramatic roles are performed by singers as opposed to actors, as in “ordinary” plays. Operas are typically a collaboration between a **composer** (who writes the music) and a **librettist** (who writes the words for the music.) Opera typically incorporates other performing arts, such as acting and dance, and usually includes scenery and costumes. Traditionally, opera singers did not use microphones during performances. (When opera was invented, there were no microphones). This meant that opera singers needed to have superior vocal abilities to project their voice, so that it could be heard by a large group of people.

Opera traces its history to Italy in the late sixteenth century, where the earliest known composition considered an opera, *Dafne*, was written by Italian composer Jacopo Peri in 1597. While this work is lost to history, Peri’s later work, *Euridice*, is the oldest opera score to have survived. It is based on the Greek mythology characters of Euridice, whose husband, Orpheus, tries to resurrect her from the dead using his enchanting music.

From its beginning, opera was an artform known primarily among the wealthy and the elite. It was performed for nobles, the aristocracy, and the gentry, in palaces and other exclusive locations. As such, opera was an experience that common people were unable to access.



Jacopo Peri, considered one of the greatest composers of all time



The Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy, Circa 1752, Domenico Olivero (1679-1755)

In the 1600s, or the **Baroque era**, opera widened its audience to include the growing merchant class, a group we might describe as the middle class today. The public developed a taste for opera and demand for the art form grew. The plots of operas also began to change. Composers created storylines to appeal to the merchant class as opposed to solely the elite.

In addition to **opera seria**, or tragic serious tales that were often inspired by Greek mythology, ancient history, and epic tales, composers began inserting comedy into somber subject matter and audiences were delighted. In France,



L'opéra Comique, Sapho, Massenet, 1897

a style of opera developed that became known as **opéra-comique**. While this term translates to “comic opera,” it often included satire and featured both spoken dialogue and sung portions.

Opera continued to evolve in the nineteenth century. It embraced new styles, including **bel canto** (Italian for “beautiful singing”). *Bel canto* is very melodic, characterized by polyphonic (or multipart) singing and highly controlled intensity of vocal tone. This was also the time of legendary composers and works such as Gioachino Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*, Vincenzo Bellini’s *Norma*, and Gaetano Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*.



Promotional poster for *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti



Cavalleria Rusticana by Pietro Mascagni

But styles come and go—even in the 1800s—and by the middle of the nineteenth century, another type of opera grew in popularity. This style of opera, known as **verismo** (Italian for “realism”), mirrored what was taking place in the visual art world. Artists and composers attempted to depict subject matter more truthfully with less artificiality. Their work was direct, forceful, gritty, and full of emotion. It depicted common people, peasants, and lower-class heroes as opposed to earlier works that centered around mythological and aristocratic representations of characters. The first opera composed in the verismo style is *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni, composed in 1890. Translating to “rustic chivalry,” *Cavalleria Rusticana* is set in a Sicilian village, and tells a tale of romance, jealousy, betrayal, and revenge.

During the *verismo*, or post-Romantic era, Italian composers such as Giacomo Puccini (*La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*) and Ruggero Leoncavallo (*Pagliacci*) created some of opera’s most famous works. Giuseppe Verdi, another giant of the era, wrote masterpieces such as *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La Traviata*, works that forever changed opera and inspired generations of artists to come.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

While it is important to note that Italy produced some of opera's most iconic compositions, it did not have a monopoly on the art form. Opera was widely popular across Europe, and France, England, Germany, and Russia were also home to great composers. In Germany, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart initially favored opera seria but became famous for his Italian comedic operas, especially *The Marriage of Figaro* (*Le nozze di Figaro*) and *Don Giovanni*. Mozart's **librettist** (the person who writes the text of a musical work) was Lorenzo Da Ponte, a Venetian who later moved to the United States.

Also in Germany, Richard Wagner revolutionized opera through his concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which means ("total work of art"). While poetic, visual, musical, and dramatic arts are typically separated and considered to exist in separate spheres, Wagner sought to unite and synthesize them. Wagner was one of the best-known composers of **Romantic Opera**. In his most famous work, the four-opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung), which was usually performed over the course of four days, Wagner achieved this concept.

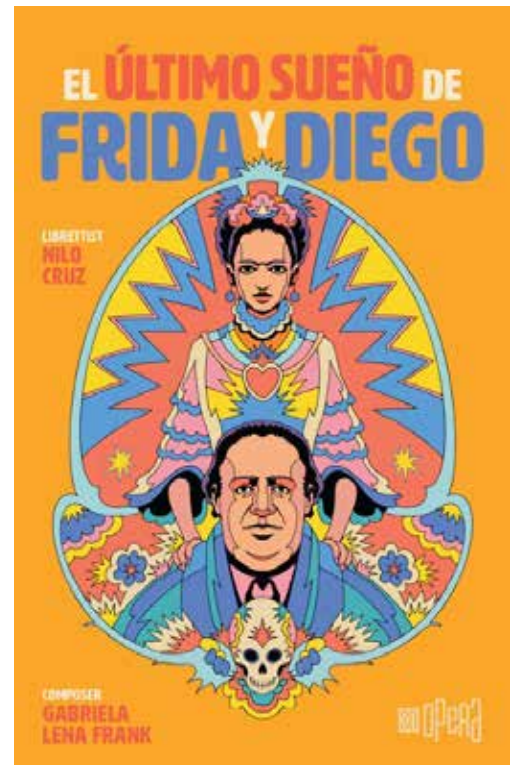


Richard Wagner



Legendary tenor Enrico Caruso

With the rise of recording technology in the early 1900s, opera singers such as Enrico Caruso and Maria Callas became among the world's first "recording stars," selling millions of albums and becoming international superstars. Opera became known to much wider audiences, including those who would be unable to afford tickets to a live opera performance. The subsequent invention of radio and television brought opera to even wider audiences and composers began shaping their works for these media. As opera reached the **modern age** (1900 to the present), it shifted away from harmony and melody and used more **atonality** (music that lacks a tonal center or key) and **dissonance** (a clashing combination of notes or disharmony). Some of the key composers associated with this era include Richard Strauss.




El Último Sueño de Frida y Diego by Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz


The contemporary age of opera is history in the making. Recent years have witnessed the production of operas such as *El Último Sueño de Frida y Diego* (The Last Dream of Frida and Diego), which tells the story of Mexican artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. There has also been greater emphasis on highlighting diverse composers and voices. History and literature continue to inspire operatic works; John Adams' *Nixon in China* was inspired by U.S. President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to the People's Republic of China. Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* is based on Sister Helen Prejean's memoir about her fight for the soul of a condemned murderer and Mark Adamo's *Little Women* is based on Louisa May Alcott's 1868–69 tale of growing up in New England after the Civil War. Time-honored favorites, such as key works from opera's golden age, also remain popular.


Let's Learn About Opera!


Warm up activity: KWL

Before beginning the lesson, students create an opera K-W-L. Some questions to help guide and scaffold include “What is opera?” and “What do you think of when you hear the term ‘opera’?” Activate prior knowledge with other questions such as “Do you think opera is something for kids or adults? Have you ever seen or heard opera before?” After, students will complete the first two columns (*know and want to know*), refer to the reading “*What is Opera?*” and other resources of the teacher’s choosing. Students will finalize the last column of the K-W-L when the lesson is complete.

 TOPIC		Name: _____ Date: _____
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 KNOW

 WANT TO KNOW

 LEARNED

Let's Learn About Opera!

Featured Opera: Gioachino Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (1816)

Opera Vocabulary

Bel canto, which refers to both a style of singing and a genre of opera, emerged in the early 1800s. *Bel canto* means “beautiful singing” in Italian, and as you might have guessed, in *bel canto* the focus is on beauty and evenness of tone in the voice.



Gioachino Rossini

An **aria** is a piece sung by only one voice. Arias are an important part of opera, especially *bel canto* opera. Arias provide an opportunity to highlight one singer and learn about what is going on in the mind of the character. Some people compare arias to **soliloquies** (speaking one's thoughts aloud when alone, especially by a character in a play). They enable us to get into the hearts and minds of the characters.

A **baritone** is the middle singing range of the male voice.

About Gioachino Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*

The Barber of Seville is a **bel canto** opera. It follows the adventures of Figaro, a barber, who is trying to help his former employer, Count Almaviva, in winning the love of a beautiful young woman, Rosina. Rosina's guardian, a lecherous man named Dr. Bartolo, wants to marry her for her money. Figaro does everything in his power to ensure that true love prevails.

Activity and Discussion Questions:

Listen to **baritone** Vito Priante sing “Largo al Factotum,” a famous **aria** from Gioachino Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. It is sung as the main character, Figaro, makes his first appearance on stage. He sings about why he's the most famous barber in Seville, Spain. Have students watch the video clip below and read the subtitles.

[The Barber of Seville](#) - 'Largo al factotum' (Rossini; Vito Priante, The Royal Opera)

- How would students describe Figaro's mannerisms? Is he shy, angry, boastful?
- Have they ever heard this song before? Where?
- Students watch this video clip of Woody Woodpecker interpreting “Largo al Factotum”
[The Barber of Seville - Woody Woodpecker](#)
- How did “Largo al Factotum” help create a mood in the cartoon?
- Ask students to think about the music they listen to today. What is most important in today's music? Melody and beauty of the voice? Rhythm, tempo, words/lyrics?
- How does opera differ from an “ordinary” play?

Let's Learn About Opera!

Featured opera: Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1875)

Opera Vocabulary

Opéra-comique is a style of opera that originated in France that mixes spoken dialogue with self-contained musical numbers.

An **aria** is a piece sung by only one voice. Arias are an important part of opera, especially *bel canto* opera. Arias provide an opportunity to highlight one singer and learn about what is going on in the mind of the character. Some people compare arias to **soliloquies** (speaking one's thoughts aloud when alone, especially by a character in a play). They enable us to get into the mind and hearts of the characters.



Scene from the opera *Carmen* by Georges Bizet

A **chorus** is a group of singers of all vocal ranges who sing together to support the vocal leads. Chorus has an important role in opera; it usually represents the voice of the people. The chorus helps provide structure to the story; it interacts with the other performers and guides the audience.

A **soprano** is the highest singing range of the female voice. We Love Opera! Who is the soprano at the opera?

About Georges Bizet's *Carmen*

Carmen is an **opéra-comique** set in southern Spain and tells the story of the downfall of Don José, a naïve soldier who is seduced by a woman named Carmen. Have students watch and listen to **soprano** Anna Caterina Antonacci of The Royal Opera in London play the role of Carmen and sing the **aria** *Habanera*.

[Carmen - Habanera \(Bizet; Anna Caterina Antonacci, The Royal Opera\)](#)

Activity and Discussion Questions:

- Ask students to identify the aria and the chorus in the video clip. (Carmen sings the aria; the singers who surround her are the chorus.)
- Ask students to read the subtitles while they listen to the music. Whose emotions does the aria *Habanera* reveal? (*Habanera* reveals the thoughts and emotions of Carmen.)
- What emotions is Carmen expressing? (While many men would like to marry Carmen, she would rather be alone and free.)
- Ask students to identify instruments they hear and rhythmic patterns from the music. Where have they heard this song before? Then have students watch clips from:
[Sesame Street - Elmo's bedtime lullaby](#)
[Habanera | Muppet Music Video | The Muppets](#)

Activity and Discussion Questions:

Another famous aria from *Carmen* is the “Toreador Song”. It is performed by a bullfighter who describes the drama of his job, including the experience of being in the bullring, the cheering crowds, and the fame he achieves through victory.

Watch bass-baritone Laurent Naouri play the role of Escamillo in the London Philharmonic Orchestra’s performance of *Carmen*. In this clip, Naouri sings the “Toreador Song”. Note: Students are likely to be familiar with the portions of the aria at 1:25, 2:52, and 3:20.

[Bizet - Carmen - Toreador Song](#)

- Ask students to identify the aria and the chorus. (Escamillo sings the aria; the singers who surround him are the chorus.)
- Ask students to share some of their observations of the piece. What is Escamillo doing in the scene? (He is raising a glass to give a toast and then acts out some of the dramatic parts of bullfighting.)
- This video does not have subtitles. What can students infer is taking place in the plot? How can we follow the story without understanding the words?
- Where have students heard this aria before? Here are two sources; what others can they think of?

[MLB Commercial](#)

[Disney Pixar’s Up soundtrack Carl alone](#)

Let's Learn About Opera!

Featured operas:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (in Italian *Le Nozze di Figaro*, 1786) and Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1889)



Scene from *The Marriage of Figaro*, by Mozart, 1786

Opera Vocabulary

Opera buffa is a type of opera that is usually comic and follows the lives of ordinary people. It was first developed in the eighteenth century.

Verismo, which means “realism” in Italian, is a style of opera that emerged in Italy in the 1890s. Most *verismo* operas depict gritty plots and are set among ordinary characters and settings. Verismo was a departure from earlier works whose characters were often aristocratic or mythical.

Overture: An overture is a piece of music that the orchestra plays before the opera starts, usually while the curtain is still down. Overtures provide audiences an idea of what the opera will be like.

A **chorus** is a group of singers of all vocal ranges who sing together to support the vocal leads. Chorus has an important role in opera; it usually represents the voice of the people. The chorus helps provide structure to the story; it interacts with the other performers and guides the audience.



Libretto from *Aida*, Metropolitan Opera

An **intermezzo** (Italian for “interlude”) is performed between the acts of a play or opera.

Libretto is an Italian word meaning “little book,” and refers to the text or script of an opera.

A **sequel** is a work that continues the story or develops the theme of an earlier work, such as a book, film, etc.

About Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*

The Marriage of Figaro, which is also known by its Italian title *Le nozze di Figaro*, is considered one of the greatest operas ever written. *The Marriage of Figaro*, which premiered in Vienna in 1786, is a **sequel** to *The Barber of Seville*. It is an **opera buffa** in four acts composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, with an Italian

libretto written by Lorenzo Da Ponte. *The Marriage of Figaro* tells the stories of servants Figaro and Susanna, who succeed in getting married despite the fact that their employer, Count Almaviva, is trying to seduce Susanna and possess her for himself.

Activity and Discussion Questions:

Watch the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra play the overture to “*The Marriage of Figaro*.”

[MOZART - “Le Nozze di Figaro” Overture - BARENBOIM / East-West Divan](#)

Please note, students will be most familiar with the portion that begins at 2:44 but providing a sense of the entire piece is ideal.

- After listening to the overture, what do students think will be the mood of *The Marriage of Figaro*? Will it be dramatic and serious or light-hearted and comedic?
- Where have students heard the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* previously?
- If classical music and opera is considered “old fashioned,” why is it utilized so heavily in popular culture, in things like movies, television, etc.?

About Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*

Cavalleria Rusticana, which means “rustic chivalry” in Italian, is an opera in one act that premiered in 1890. *Cavalleria Rusticana* takes place at Easter in a Sicilian village. A young woman, Santuzza, is looking for her former boyfriend, Turridu, who betrayed her and returned to his former fiancée, Lola. But Lola had meanwhile married a wealthy man by the name of Alfio. Santuzza tries to win back her lover. The two men argue and, in the process, Alfio kills Turridu.



Cavalleria Rusticana by Pietro Mascagni

Activity and Discussion Questions:

Watch the Gimnazija Kranj Symphony Orchestra (a youth orchestra!) play the intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

[Cavalleria Rusticana \(Intermezzo\) with amazing Gimnazija Kranj Symphony Orche...](#)

Please note, students will be most familiar with the portion that begins at 1:26 but providing a sense of the entire piece is ideal.

- After listening to the intermezzo, what do students think is the mood of what is taking place (or about to take place) in *Cavalleria Rusticana*? Will it be dramatic and serious or light-hearted and comedic?
- *Cavalleria Rusticana* translates to “rustic chivalry” in Italian. Where have students heard the intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana* previously?
- Review the links to the intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana* and the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*. Approximately how many people are in each orchestra? How many different instruments can students identify?

Let's Learn About Opera!

Featured opera: Léo Delibes's *Lakmé* (1883)

Opera Vocabulary

A **duet** is music written for two people to perform together.

Consonance is when two or more tones complement each other to produce a sound that is pleasant to the ear.

Dissonance is when two or more tones clash and create a harsh, unpleasant sound.



Scene from Lakmé by Léo Delibes

About Léo Delibes's *Lakmé*

Lakmé is set in nineteenth-century India, when the country was ruled by Britain. The British forbade Indians from openly practicing their religion, so they prayed and performed rituals in secret. Lakmé, the daughter of a Brahmin priest, falls in love with Gerald, an English officer. Their love is forbidden; he represents the oppressor. When Gerald leaves Lakmé to return to his regiment, she eats a poisonous plant and dies.

In the clip below, Lakmé and her servant, Malika, are bathing and picking flowers together at the river. The women sing a song together, “Flower Duet,” which is about the beauty of the river, the flowers, and their friendship. It is there that Lakmé and Gerald meet for the first time.

Activity and Discussion Questions:

Listen to Julia Novikova (Lakmé) and Nerea Berraondo (Malika) of the Municipal de Santiago (Municipal Theater of Santiago, Chile) perform “Flower Duet” from *Lakmé*. The portion that students are most likely to recognize begins at :54.

[Lakmé | Extractos: Dúo de las flores](#)

As students are listening to the piece, ask them to record their impressions on a piece of paper. Provide the following guiding questions before playing “Flower Duet”:

- Describe the mood of “Flower Duet.” What emotions come to mind? How does the piece make them feel? (Clue: this piece takes place in a natural setting; is there anything about the voices that reminds students of nature?)
- How many voices did they hear?
- How difficult do students think this piece would be to sing, and why? (Clue: the two singers are singing two different melodies at the same time in close proximity to one another).

- Is “Flower Duet” more consonant or dissonant?
- “Flower Duet” from *Lakmé* has been used in various movies and commercials. For example, British Airways has used this song as their “signature song” for a long time. [Pam Ann - British Airways Advert](#)
- Where else have students heard this song? If they have not encountered it in popular culture, where could the song be used? Describe a scene in a commercial or film.
- How does opera differ from an “ordinary” play?

Let's Learn About Opera!

Featured opera: Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin* (1850) and *Die Walküre* (1870)

Opera Vocabulary

A **chorus** is a group of singers of all vocal ranges who sing together to support the vocal leads. Chorus has an important role in opera; it usually represents the voice of the people. The chorus helps provide structure to the story; it interacts with the other performers and guides the audience.

Romantic opera is a style of opera that emerged in Germany in the early 1800s, where it was known as *Romantische Oper*. It was influenced by the opéra-comiques of France. Romantic operas often center around contemporary life or historical events and characters and are often dramatic.

Tempo is the speed of the music.

Mood refers to how a piece of music can make you feel, the emotion it conveys, the emotional responses it triggers.



Richard Wagner



Wagner's *Die Walküre*, 1899

About Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Die Walküre*

Lohengrin, a romantic opera in three acts composed and written by Richard Wagner, was first performed in 1850. The story is taken from a medieval German romance and centers around a mysterious knight, Lohengrin, who has superhuman charisma and fighting ability. He arrives to unite and strengthen the people of Brabant (modern-day Belgium) and to defend an innocent woman named Elsa, who has been falsely accused of murder. The most popular and recognizable part of the opera is the “Bridal Chorus,” which is most popularly known as “Here Comes the Bride,” and usually played at weddings.

Die Walküre is the second of the four epic music dramas that constitute Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (or in English: *The Ring of the Nibelung*). *Die Walküre*

tells the story of Sieglinde and Siegmund, twins who were separated in childhood and meet later in life and fall in love. Their relationship angers the gods, especially Wotan,

king of the gods, and his wife, Fricka, who demand that Siegmund must die. Wotan's daughter, the warrior-maiden Valkyrie Brünnhilde and the opera's title character, is compassionate towards the young lovers and disobeys her father by siding with Siegmund. Valkyrie Brünnhilde then faces punishment from the gods. *The Valkyrie: Ride of the Valkyries* has been used in countless commercials, films, and television programs.

Activity and Discussion Questions:

Listen to the "Bridal Chorus"; students will be most familiar with the part beginning at 3:20. [Richard Wagner: Lohengrin - Vorspiel 3. Akt und "Wedding March"](#)

- Ask students where they have heard this song before.
- Make the point that opera is everywhere, even at weddings.

Listen to "Ride of the Valkyries." [Richard Wagner: The Valkyrie - Ride of the Valkyries](#)

- Ask students where they have heard this song before.
- If they have heard it in film, television, etc., ask students what type of action was taking place when "Ride of the Valkyries" was played.
- What is the tempo, or speed of the music? Does it change?
- What repeated rhythms or melodies do you hear?
- Dynamics: How loud is the music? Does it change?



Ride of the Valkyries, painting by Cesare Viazzi

Let's Learn About Opera!

Exploring Opera

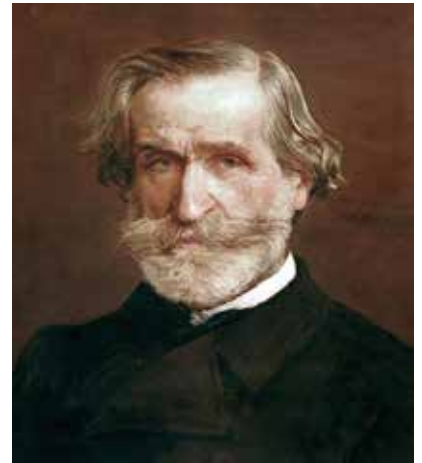
Activity and Discussion Questions:

Divide students into groups and assign, or allow students to select, an opera to study. (Teacher can also identify an appropriate number of operas for the class and then have the groups “draw straws” to select the opera they will be studying.) Each group will create an age-appropriate report on the opera that the group selected or that was assigned. The report, which can take a number of forms (video, Google Slides), should include the following:

- The name of the composer and librettist and a brief overview of their lives, accomplishments, and other works.
- A synopsis of the opera—its plot.
- Who are the major characters?
- What type of opera is it?
- What is the opera’s setting? When and where does it take place? Is the time period of the opera significant to its plot? (Does the opera, for instance, take place during a time of war?)
- What are the most famous parts of the opera? This would include the most well-known arias, overtures, etc. Students should find clips of these performances online and include a few in the report.
- What is the emotion or mood of the opera? Is it serious? Playful?
- An opera, like a play, includes scenery, props, and costumes. Ask students to imagine that they were asked to build sets and create scenery for the opera. What would it look like? What would the characters wear? Have them explain their choices and include as many details as possible.



Giacomo Puccini



Giuseppe Verdi



Storyboarding

- Many operatic productions begin with the creation of storyboards. Working in groups, have students create a synopsis of the opera. What are the key moments of the opera? Identify four to six critical scenes or moments. Then, depict these scenes, one per storyboard, with a brief caption underneath. The storyboards should tell a simple story based on action. (Boy meets girl. Girl rejects the boy. Girl marries another boy. Boy dies, etc.)

Let's Learn About Opera!

The language of music

Opera Vocabulary

Dynamics are the degrees of volume (loudness and softness) in music. They are also the words, abbreviations, and symbols used to indicate degrees of volume. *Piano* (soft) and *forte* (loud) are most common.

In music, **tempo** is the speed at which a composition is to be played, the number of beats per minute, etc. It can also refer to the mood and expression of the music. For instance, *presto* in music means fast. *Allegro*, which means “cheerful” in Italian, refers to a musical piece that is both fast and joyful.

Composers use these terms to indicate to the performer(s) the volume of a piece or part of a piece of music. Dynamics and tempo, like other musical directions, are usually written in Italian, which is the internationally used language for music. Most important early composers were Italian and therefore were writing the “language of music” (many musical terms) for the first time.

The terms to refer to dynamics are:

- *Piano*: soft
- *Pianissimo*: very soft
- *Pianississimo*: very, very soft
- *Mezzo piano*: medium soft
- *Mezzo forte*: medium loud
- *Forte*: loud
- *Fortissimo*: very loud
- *Fortississimo*: very, very loud

The terms to refer to tempo are:

- *Presto*: very fast
- *Vivace*: vivacious
- *Allegro*: joyfully, quick, lively
- *Moderato*: moderate, not fast or slow
- *Andante*: rather slow
- *Adagio*: slow and expressive
- *Lento*: very slow
- *Largo*: very slow and dignified
- *Grave*: very, very slow



Illustration of Tempo

Rather than writing the complete word each time on music scores, composers use abbreviations for dynamics. Dynamic markings are a kind of shorthand, abbreviation, or code to indicate degrees of volume: The two basic dynamic indications in music are:

- **p** or *piano*, meaning “soft or quiet”.
- **f** or *forte*, meaning “loud or strong”.
- Because music is complex, and there are a lot of subtleties between “fast” and “slow,” there are more specific terms for dynamics.
- **mp**, stands for *mezzo-piano* and means “moderately quiet”.
- **mf**, stands for *mezzo-forte* and means “moderately loud”.
- **più p**, stands for *più piano* and means “quieter”.
- **più f**, stands for *più forte* and means “louder”.
- **pp**, stands for *pianissimo* and means “very quiet”.
- **ff**, stands for *fortissimo* and means “very loud”.
- **ppp** (“triple piano”), stands for *pianississimo* or *piano pianissimo* and means “very, very quiet”.
- **fff** (“triple forte”), stands for *fortississimo* or *forte fortissimo* and means “very, very loud”.

Activity and Discussion Questions:

Have students examine the musical score below. Based on the notations, how can they describe the musical piece?

Tempo I

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of four staves. The top two staves are the right hand (treble clef) and the bottom two are the left hand (bass clef). The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked 'Tempo I'. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line. In the first measure, the right hand has a dynamic marking of *fff* (triple forte), followed by *pesante* (heavy) and *m.d.* (mezzo-dolce). The left hand has a dynamic marking of *fff* and *m.s.* (mezzo-sordato). In the second measure, both hands have a dynamic marking of *ffff* (quadruple forte). The notation includes various chords and melodic lines with slurs and accents.

Have students select one of their favorite songs. What notations would they use to indicate the song’s dynamics and tempo? Is it the same throughout the song, or do the dynamics and tempo change?

Let's Learn About Opera!

Careers in Opera

To produce an opera requires more than singers and musicians. Opera productions are the result of many talented people. Below is a list of some of the jobs that are involved in opera productions.



Backstage



Behind the Scenes

Activity and Discussion Questions:

Ask students to review the list and select one or two positions that interest them or that they would like to know more about. Then ask students to research what is involved in each career or position and prepare a brief description. Teachers can reach out to local opera companies and inquire whether a representative would be willing to speak with the class.

Accountant
Archivist
Artist
Box office manager
Camera operator
Casting director
Choreographer
Chief financial officer
Composer
Communications and marketing manager
Conductor
Costume designer
Director
Education coordinator
Electrician
Executive assistant
Event coordinator
Fundraiser
General counsel
Graphic designer
Librettist
Licensing manager
Lighting designer

Lighting technician
Makeup artist
Music Director
Pattern maker
Photographer
Prop maker
Publicist
Proofreader
Seamstress
Set builder/carpenter
Set designer
Special effects artist
Stage manager
Stage crew
Social media/digital content manager
Sound designer
Sound technician
Storyboard artist
Supertitle/closed caption writer
Usher
Wigs and hair artist
Vocal coach

Vocabulary

- Act: a section of an opera that is then divided into scenes.
- Aria: the Italian word for “air”; a piece of music written for one singer or soloist.
- Baritone: the middle singing range of the male voice.
- [We Love Opera! Who is the baritone at the opera?](#)
- Bass: the lowest singing range of the male voice
- [We Love Opera! Who is the bass at the opera?](#)
- Baton: the instrument which the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.
- Bel canto: the Italian term for “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique; also refers to the operas written in this style.
- Bravo: the Italian term for “well done.” Used by an audience to show appreciation at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, one should use bravo for a male performer, brava for a female performer, and bravi for more than one performer.
- Choreographer: the person who designs the steps of a dance.
- Chorus: a group of singers of all vocal ranges who sing together to support the vocal leads.
- Composer: the person who writes all of the music for both voice and orchestra.
- Consonance: when two or more tones complement each other to produce a sound that is pleasant to the ear.
- Contralto: the lowest singing range of the female voice (also known as alto).
- [We Love Opera! Who is the contralto at the opera?](#)
- Conductor: the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, dynamics, and balance between the singers and the orchestra.
- Crescendo: a build in the volume or dynamic of the music.
- Dissonance: when two or more tones clash and create a harsh, unpleasant sound.
- Diva: an Italian word meaning “goddess;” an important female opera star. Masculine form is divo.
- Duet: music that is written for two people to perform together.
- Dynamics: refers to how loud or soft the music is; the variation in loudness between notes or phrases.
- Encore: a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. Usually performed because the audience wants to hear more even though the concert is technically over.
- Ensemble: a part of an opera written for a group of two or more singers.
- Interlude: a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.
- Librettist: the writer of an opera’s text (or words/lyrics)
- Libretto: an Italian word meaning “little book”; the text or script of an opera.
- Maestro: an Italian word for “master”; used as a courtesy title for the conductor.
- Mezzo-soprano: the middle singing range of the female voice.
- [We Love Opera! Who is the mezzo soprano in the opera?](#)
- Mood: how a piece of music makes you feel, the emotion it conveys.
- Opera: a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner of the singers.

- Opera buffa: an opera (usually comic) about ordinary people; first developed in the 18th century.
- Opéra-comique: is a style of opera that originated in France that mixes spoken dialogue with self-contained musical numbers.
- Opera seria: a serious opera.
- Operetta: light-hearted opera with some spoken dialogue (similar to a musical).
- Orchestra: an ensemble comprised of string, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments. Often led by a conductor.
- Overture: a musical introduction to an opera played before the curtain rises or before the opera proper begins.
- Prima donna: an Italian term meaning “first lady;” the leading female character in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The masculine term is primo uomo (pronounced pree-moh woh-moh.)
- Romantic opera: a style of opera that emerged in Germany in the early 1800s, where it was known as Romantische Oper. It was influenced by the opéra-comiques of France. Romantic operas often center around contemporary life or historical events and characters and are often dramatic.
- Soprano: the highest singing range of the female voice.
- [We Love Opera! Who is the soprano at the opera?](#)
- Surtitles: the visual translations of the opera’s text that are projected onto a screen during a performance to help the audience follow the story, much like subtitles in a foreign film.
- Tempo: speed of the music.
- Tenor: the highest singing range of the male voice.
- [We Love Opera! Who is the tenor at the opera?](#)
- Trio: music that is written for three people to perform together.
- Vibrato: the fluctuation of pitch and intensity in the voice which characterizes a trained singer’s sound.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to:
- Define opera
- Identify major operatic works and composers
- Recognize that opera has evolved since its birth and continues to evolve
- Describe the various types of opera and the different periods of opera
- Recognize that operas tell stories
- Recognize that music conveys emotions
- Identify the various types of voices in opera
- Identify various instruments based on their sound/appearance
- Explain the language of music; namely, dynamics and tempo
- Describe careers in opera
- Recognize that opera is commonly used in popular culture (television, film, etc.)
- Make connections between opera and their daily lives
- Appreciate opera as an art form
- Translate from verbal to visual storytelling
- Use visual vocabulary to communicate an opera's narrative

California Education Content Standards

Grades: Prekindergarten–Grade 12

Content Area: Arts

Category: Music

Enduring Understanding: Musicians' creative choices are influenced by their expertise, context, and expressive intent.

Essential Question(s): How do musicians make creative decisions?

Process Component(s): Plan and Make.

Performance Standard(s): With limited guidance, demonstrate and discuss personal reasons for selecting musical ideas that represent expressive intent.

Grades: Prekindergarten–Grade 12

Content Area: Arts

Category: Music

Enduring Understanding: Performers' interest in and knowledge of musical works, understanding of their own technical skill, and the context for a performance influence the selection of repertoire.

Essential Question(s): How do performers select repertoire?

Process Component(s): Select.

Performance Standard(s): With limited guidance, demonstrate and discuss personal interest in, knowledge about, and purpose of varied musical selections.

Grades: Prekindergarten–Grade 12

Content Area: Arts

Category: Music

Enduring Understanding: Analyzing creators' context and how they manipulate elements of music provides insight into their intent and informs performance.

Essential Question(s): How do performers select repertoire?

Process Component(s): Select.

Performance Standard(s): With guidance, explore and demonstrate awareness of music contrasts such as high/low, loud/soft, and same/different in a variety of music selected for performance.

Grades: Prekindergarten–Grade 12

Content Area: Arts

Category: Music

Enduring Understanding: Performers make interpretive decisions based on their understanding of context and expressive intent.

Essential Question(s): How do performers interpret musical works?

Process Component(s): Interpret.

Performance Standard(s): With limited guidance, demonstrate and describe music's expressive qualities (such as voice quality, dynamics, and tempo) that support the creators' expressive intent.

Grades: Prekindergarten–Grade 12

Content Area: Arts

Category: Theatre

Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists rely on intuition, curiosity, culture, and critical inquiry.

Essential Question(s): What happens when theater artists use their culture, imagination, and/or learned theater skills while engaging in creative exploration and inquiry?

Process Component(s): Envision/Conceptualize.

Performance Standard(s): (A) Create roles, imagined worlds, and improvised stories in a drama/ theater work. (B) Imagine how a character's inner thoughts impact the story and given circumstances in a drama/theater work.

Grades: Prekindergarten–Grade 12

Content Area: Arts

Category: Theatre

Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists make strong choices to effectively convey meaning.

Essential Question(s): Why are strong choices essential to interpreting a drama or theater piece?

Process Component(s): Select.

Performance Standard(s): Identify the essential events in a story or script that make up the dramatic structure in a drama/theater work.

Grade: Kindergarten

Content Area: History–Social Science

Category: Learning and Working Now and Long Ago

Overarching Standard: K.6 Students understand that history relates to events, people, and places of other times.

Standard(s): Understand how people lived in earlier times and how their lives would be different today (e.g., getting water from a well, growing food, making clothing, having fun, forming organizations, living by rules and laws).

Grade: 1

Content Area: History–Social Science

Category: A Child’s Place in Time and Space

Overarching Standard: 1.5 Students describe the human characteristics of familiar places and the varied backgrounds of American citizens and residents in those places.

Standard(s): Compare the beliefs, customs, ceremonies, traditions, and social practices of the varied cultures, drawing from folklore.

Grade: 3

Content Area: History–Social Science

Category: Continuity and Change

Overarching Standard: 3.3 Students draw from historical and community resources to organize the sequence of local historical events and describe how each period of settlement left its mark on the land.

Standard(s): Trace why their community was established, how individuals and families contributed to its founding and development, and how the community has changed over time, drawing on maps, photographs, oral histories, letters, newspapers, and other primary sources.

Grade: 6

Content Area: History–Social Science

Category: World History and Geography: Ancient Civilizations

Overarching Standard: 6.7 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures during the development of Rome.

Standard(s): 1. Identify the location and describe the rise of the Roman Republic, including the importance of such mythical and historical figures as Aeneas, Romulus and Remus, Cincinnatus, Julius Caesar, and Cicero. 8. Discuss the legacies of Roman art and architecture, technology and science, literature, language, and law.

Grade: 7

Content Area: History–Social Science

Category: World History and Geography: Medieval and Early Modern Times

Overarching Standard: 7.8 Students analyze the origins, accomplishments, and geographic diffusion of the Renaissance.

Standard(s): 1. Describe the way in which the revival of classical learning and the arts fostered a new interest in humanism (i.e., a balance between intellect and religious faith). 5. Detail advances made in literature, the arts, science, mathematics,

cartography, engineering, and the understanding of human anatomy and astronomy (e.g., by Dante Alighieri, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo di Buonarroti Simoni, Johann Gutenberg, William Shakespeare).

Grades: Prekindergarten–Grade 12

Content Area: World Languages

Category: Interpretive Communication

Goal: Students demonstrate understanding, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics, from authentic texts. They use technology, when appropriate, to access information.

Level: Novice

Standard: WL.CM1.N Demonstrate understanding of the general meaning and some basic information on very familiar common daily topics. Recognize memorized words, phrases, and simple sentences in authentic texts that are spoken, written, or signed.