

INTRODUCTION TO OPERA

This lesson should be given by the teacher at the beginning of the school year.

Objectives: the students will be able to define opera and to understand the following vocabulary: *libretto, librettist, score, composer, recitative, chorus and aria*. They will be able to use these words in appropriate context in discussion. They will also understand the word “*minimal*” as it applies to opera as well as “*repetition*.”

The class will watch two 5-minute videos of professional and children’s opera.

Approximate lesson length: 40 minutes – can be divided into several days.

Materials needed: Video tape player, opera video; Children’s Opera Highlights Video; chalk and chalkboard.

Cross-curricular objectives: *Language Arts*

Needed:

UFOC Highlights Video

Children’s Opera Highlights Video

Sample scores: professional and children’s version

Process: Ask the students if any of them have ever been to an opera. Say “If I say the word *opera* what do you think of? Get several responses.

Explain that most of the people who say they don’t like opera really don’t understand it and have probably never been to an opera. Explain that your class is going to learn about opera so they will understand it better.



Explain that an opera is really a play that is mostly sung, with costumes, scenery, acting and music to go along with the singing. Explain that in most operas all of the words are sung. Ask the students a question by singing it instead of speaking and ask them to respond by singing the answer. Ask them to “sing” to you something funny or sad that happened to them. Have them notice the differences in the way they naturally sing with different emotions. Explain that music and songs bring appropriate moods and excitement to a play. Ask students if they have ever noticed how music plays a part in a movie. The music can tell you if the scene is spooky or exciting, sad or happy.

Explain that opera is a very old art form that started in Europe nearly 400 years ago. Explain that even though opera has changed a lot since then and new operas continue to be written, we still enjoy the old ones.

*Libretto
Librettist*

Write the word *libretto* on the chalkboard. Explain that *libretto* is the name given to mean the words the singers sing in an opera. Tell the children that a libretto looks just like a play, but instead of the words being read, they will be sung. Explain that a *librettist* is the person who writes the libretto. Write it on the board. Tell them that they will be librettists when they have finished the story because they are going to write it themselves.



Vocabulary

Musical
Score
Composer
Aria
Chorus
Recitative
Minimal

Write the word musical score on the board. Ask the students what a score is. Show them a completed piece of music from an opera. Write composer on the board. Ask the students what a composer is. Tell them that the composer is the person who makes up tunes to which to sing their words. Tell them that they will be composers before they are finished with their music. Tell them a professional musician will help them to write accompaniment to their own melodies, and that person will create a musical score of their own original opera for them to have.



W.A. Mozart

Write the word aria on the board. Explain that an aria is a song that is sung in an opera usually by one person. Write chorus on the board and explain that that is just like an aria only sung by more than one person. Explain to the children that choruses are extremely important in their opera. Choruses include all of the children – or at least large numbers. They can be heard by the audience. They can often be the funniest or scariest part of the entire opera. They should try to include many choruses. Arias and choruses do not have to rhyme, but should have a sense of rhythm.

Tell the children that they should try to think of these things while they are writing their story. They should watch for important places in the story – usually where the action needs to stop and explain a little more deeply what a character is thinking or feeling, or what is going on – and insert arias or choruses in those places.

Write the word recitative on the board. Explain to the children that recitative means “sung as if spoken.” That means that it represents the normal conversation between characters on the stage. They are speaking back and forth to each other. Recitative should never rhyme (unless quite by accident), does not need rhythm, and does need to be **very, very short sentences**.

Write the word minimal on the board and explain that that means as little as possible! In an opera, long sentences are hard to understand and hard to act out. This is especially true in the recitative sections of the opera. Arias and Choruses can be longer. They should plan to think of how they can say something in the least number of words.

Repetition Write the word “repetition” on the board and explain to the children that in all opera...adult or child composed... repetition is an important tool to use. Audiences like to hear things sung more than once. They understand the words better the second time and they like to hear the melodies over again. They should think of places where they can sing an aria or chorus again (or even again and again!)

Tell the children that they are going to watch two different opera videos. The first one, UFO’s Highlights from Die Fledermaus and Magic Flute, is of the operas being performed by professionals on the Ellen Eccles Stage in 2002. The second video, UFO's Opera for Children by Children Highlights from 2002, is of children performing on the same stage.



Show them the UFO 2002 Season Highlights video and the UFO Opera for Children by Children 2002 Highlights video, then ask the questions below:

Did you hear the libretto, the score, arias, choruses, and recitative? Did they both have all of those things? Were they both “minimal” in the recitative sections? Did you hear repetition?

Were the children’s operas really opera? Were they the same in all the important ways? (Answer: yes!)

Tell the children that they will be librettists, and composers as well as actors and singers before this is over.

At the end of the lesson, compliment the children on their attentiveness. Compliment them on any contributions that they have made during the lesson. Tell them that they have within them the ability to write stories, to make up music and to have a wonderful time and that you are all going to do this together! This is going to be **their** opera.

Opera Journal



Assign each student to begin his/her own Opera Journal. Ask them to copy the words that you have written on the board, and to define them; then have them draw a picture illustrating what each term means to them.

Tell the students these books will be for them to keep forever...Tell them that you will not be giving them a grade. There is no right or wrong answer.

Encourage them to write their own definitions and to draw their own pictures. You may collect these later to determine who did not understand what you were discussing. In a later lesson, go over those items and prepare a way to teach them again without singling out a child. This book should not be graded. It is part of their creative exercise.

Evaluation: After the lesson, list the things that were more difficult for the children to understand and to respond to. Make a list of terms that they may not have understood and prepare to use them again the next time you are working on the opera. Notice which children were not paying attention and not involved. Plan to give those children special assignments for the next opera class, such as passing out the books, turning on the overhead projector; something to make them feel important.

Teachers: Be aware of the objectives that you can accomplish by integrating the opera into another core subject.

USOE Language Arts Core Objectives - Reading

Standard 1, Objective 1

The students will assimilate new ideas introduced through pictures and print.

Standard 4, Objective 2

The students will build a reading vocabulary

