

Curriculum Connections

So you think opera is just a musical thing? Take a look at some of the ways that the study of opera can meet National Curriculum Standards.

- **Music:** Because opera has been an integral part of musical development for 400 years, the study of opera can become a window into the various style periods from late Renaissance to contemporary. Students will develop critical listening skills as they identify and process the elements of a live performance. Check out our *Touring Production, Workshops, Youth Opera Productions* and *Student Dress Rehearsals*.
- **Language Arts:** Opera is a story told with music and, as such, contains all the elements of story-telling and drama. By following the plot of the libretto and learning the context of specific songs within a particular opera, students learn about story structure, sequencing, character development and other dramatic elements. Many operas are based on plays, books or stories that were popular in a given time (including many of Shakespeare's plays) and can give a new insight into a work's meaning with the added element of music. After seeing a live performance, students can compare and contrast their reactions and will begin to form opinions and make judgments about what they experienced. Check out our *Student Dress Rehearsal/ Teaching Humanities through Opera Blog*.
- **Social Studies:** Western opera is an art form that was born in late 16th-century Italy. However, the practice of telling stories with music has been present in every major culture of the world for as long as we have historical records. Many operas are set in times and places far removed from our own. The costumes are unlike our clothes of today, the settings are different, as is the manner of speech. However, often the problems and concerns of the characters reflect many similarities to today's world. Opera can give students a looking glass into a world of the past while connecting the past to the present. Check out our *Student Dress Rehearsal and Opera on the Move* programs.
- **Art:** Music has often paralleled the stylistic development of the graphic arts. An OperaDelaware performance can offer art students a look at the performing arts of a particular style period and provide opportunities for discussion to compare and contrast the arts scene of that time. Check out our *Student Dress Rehearsal/Teaching Humanities through Opera* program.
- **Career Education:** While the opera singer gets most of the limelight, there are many other ways in which to have a career in the world of opera. Classes in such areas as set/prop design and construction, costume design and construction, and stage direction are addressed as well as in musical performance during the all-day Summer Youth Opera Program (July/August 2009). Check out our *Youth Opera Program*.

Classroom Activities

Below are suggested classroom activities to integrate the study of opera with other educational subjects, including foreign language, dance, visual arts, social studies and language arts.

Foreign Language

1. Attend the Student Dress Rehearsal performance of *The Barber of Seville* or *Tosca*, sung in Italian. Using the study guide, translate the synopsis into Italian (or the language you are studying).
2. Have students write a letter to a friend in the language they are studying describing the performance they saw.

Dance

3. Using [opera glossary terms](#), provided by OperaDelaware, have students act out the meaning of each word through movement, gesture and expression. Let other students guess the concepts being conveyed through movement.

Visual Arts

4. Discuss the costumes of the HMS Pinafore/*Tosca* characters (or the characters in another opera they saw). What is the significance of color and image for each? What does each character's costume tell about him or her? Have students design (draw) costumes for themselves, using color and image to reflect their own personalities.

Social Studies

5. Use encyclopedias, history books or Web sites to research what was happening in Italy in the late 16th century during opera's early development, or research what was happening during Rossini's (1792-1868) or Puccini's (1858-1924) lifetime or perhaps research what was happening during the year in which the operas took place, e.g. *Tosca* is set in Rome (1800) the year Napoleon invaded Italy. Assign different events or countries to each student group.

Language Arts

6. Have students imagine that the opera they are studying is set in a different period or country. How might the sets, costumes and even characters change to suit this new setting? Write character sketches for the newly formed characters. Write a descriptive paragraph about the new sets and costumes. Rewrite the libretto for one scene of the opera or the ending based on this new setting.
 7. Use dialogue or monologue excerpts from the text of an opera to help students develop reading comprehension skills. Based on what they read, have students determine the setting, purpose and tone of the scene. Have them develop character sketches for each character. Have them describe the events that may have taken place before the excerpt, and predict what might happen next.
 8. Ask a student to read out loud from a storybook or textbook. Ask him to change the tempo of his reading using the tempo words found on the "Opera Terms" list on this website.
 9. Before attending a performance, make a class opera chart with three columns: "What We Know," "What We Want to Know," and "What We Learned." As a class, fill the first column with information (or ideas!) the students already have about opera. Fill the second column with questions the students have and things they want to discover about opera. Following the performance, complete the last column with knowledge the students gained during their opera experience.
 10. Ask students to write a review of an opera performance they attended. Their review should include unbiased information about the overall experience. (Was the hall clean? Did the performance start on time?) as well as their personal opinion of the performance (What did they like or dislike about OperaDelaware's production of *The Barber of Seville* or *Tosca*? Were the costumes appropriate? Were the lead roles well cast?) As a class, you may want to brainstorm aspects of the performance to review or read a review in the paper before beginning this exercise.
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