



Lyric Unlimited Teacher Guide for Opera in the Neighborhoods

Lyric Unlimited is Lyric Opera of Chicago's department dedicated to education, community engagement, and new artistic initiatives. Lyric Unlimited was launched with major catalyst funding from **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** and receives major support from the **Caerus Foundation, Inc.**

Welcome to the Lyric Unlimited Teacher Guide.

This is your ticket to the world of opera and how to prepare your students for the performance.

The information in this guide supplements our online classroom resources as well as the Opera in the Neighborhood’s *Backstage Pass!* These resources are designed to enhance your curriculum and easily integrate into your existing learning objectives.

Please review this guide and consider how the information and activities within can be used in your classroom. We recommend setting aside small blocks of time to share this content with your students over several days or weeks before and after the performance. The more students know about the opera, the more rewarding the experience.

Thank you for joining us and for sharing the opera-going experience with your students!

Guide Contents

What Is Opera?	2
People Who Make Opera Happen.....	3
Preparing Students for the Performance	4
Opera Plot Analysis Worksheet.....	5
Opera Terminology	6
Audience Etiquette	7
Reflecting on the Performance	8
Learning Standards	9

What Is Opera?

noun. op•er•a. a play in which most or all of the words are sung, and the music helps tell the story

Like a movie or a play, an opera combines acting, sets, and costumes. What makes an opera different is that the story is told with music and singing instead of just talking. The first operas were written over 400 years ago—but new operas are composed and performed every year!

Understanding opera is not as difficult as you may think. There are people singing loudly without microphones, sometimes in a different language, but the stories of most operas are universal. They are usually about familiar themes such as love and envy. Opera in the Neighborhoods performances are sung in English and are usually about teamwork and problem solving.

Operas can be any length, too. Some of the longest operas are over 5 hours long (such as Richard Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*). One of the shortest operas is only 8 minutes (*L'Enlèvement d'Europe* by Darius Milhaud)! Opera in the Neighborhoods performances are usually 45 minutes in length.

Voice Types

There are many different types of singers in opera. Every opera singer has gone through years of training to enable their voices to soar over an entire orchestra without microphones!

Here are the most common voice types in opera:

soprano - (soh-PRAH-no) - the highest voice in opera, usually female. They often sing roles like daughters, girlfriends, wives, or princesses.

mezzo-soprano - (MET-soh soh-PRAH-no) - the middle high voice, usually female. Mezzos can be almost any type of character—sisters, mothers, or teenage boys to evil queens and emperors.

tenor - (TEH-ner) - usually the highest male voice. The leading male character is usually a tenor, so they often play heroes or princes.

baritone - (BEAR-ih-tone) - the middle low voice, usually male. Baritones often play good guys, like brothers or fathers, but sometimes they are bad guys, too.

bass - (BASE) - the lowest, deepest voice, usually male. Basses often play old and wise characters, but they can also be villains.

People Who Make Opera Happen

An opera starts with a story that someone, usually the librettist or composer, thinks has operatic potential. The story can be from:

- Literature (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Carmen*, *Porgy and Bess*)
- Mythology (*Orfeo*, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Elektra*)
- Fairy tales (*Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel*)
- Historical or current events (*Nixon in China*, *Doctor Atomic*)
- Completely original ideas! (*The Magic Flute*, *The Elixir of Love*, *Così fan tutte*)

Librettist

The librettist is a writer who turns the story into a libretto. A libretto is the script and lyrics for an opera.

Composer

The composer writes the music for the opera in a way that helps tell the story. The composer creates the *score* which is a book that contains the music along with the words of the libretto.

Stage Director

The director decides how the opera will be performed. The director tells the cast where to stand and how their characters should act.

Production Designer

The production designer works with the director on how the opera's story will be told visually. They create the scenery (or set) as well as a plan for how each scene will appear on stage.

Costume Designer

The costume designer works with the production designer and director to determine how the cast will dress. This is a large responsibility, since every person on stage requires a costume.

Conductor

The conductor leads music rehearsals and conducts the orchestra and singers during performances. Often the conductor is a skilled pianist.

Orchestra

The orchestra consists of instrumentalists who play the composer's music written. Some operas use only one pianist, while grand operas might require as many as 100 musicians!

Stage Manager

Through commands and signals backstage, the stage manager controls everything that happens during a performance. They tell the cast when and where they should be before they go on stage.

Preparing Students for the Performance

The activities below are designed to help you quickly and easily develop performance-related lesson plans. The objectives are written in “I Can” statements using student-friendly language, and all activities can be used to address state and national learning standards.

Objective 1: I can tell the story of the performance I am about to see.

- Refer to the *Synopsis* in the online classroom resources or the *Backstage Pass!* (for Opera in the Neighborhoods).
- Ask students to read the synopsis. Discuss the time period, setting, characters, and story with the class.
- As a class, or individually, use the *Opera Plot Analysis Worksheet* on the next page to help students understand the setting, mood, and basic action of the work.
- Have students write narrative predictions, or create artwork, reflecting what they think the set and costumes will look like.
- Ask students to wear headbands with the names of the characters. Next, provide brief descriptions of each character and encourage students to determine how their character should stand, speak, and behave. Read the synopsis aloud while students act out the story.
- Working in small groups, have students cast celebrities in each role as if they were making a modern film version of the opera. Encourage groups to present their choices to the class and discuss why each celebrity would be a good fit for the role.

Objective 2: I can recognize major musical themes from the opera.

- Refer to the *Musical Highlights* of the online classroom resources.
- Play the musical examples in class and use the commentaries provided to familiarize your students with the music, its significance, and its context within the opera.
- Play these selections over multiple classes so students become familiar with the music.

Objective 3: I can use the essential vocabulary associated with the production of modern opera.

- Refer to the *Opera Terminology* on page 6 of this guide.
- Encourage students to research and define these terms, then compose sentences using them appropriately.
- Give each student a card with either a term or a definition. Have students find the partner who matches their card.

Opera Plot Analysis Worksheet

SETTING

Place(s)

Time (or time span)

Mood

CHARACTERS / MOTIVATIONS

Main

Secondary

Turning Point

What important events happen in the story?

What conflict begins the action?

Resolution

#Synopsis – describe the story in 140 characters or less

Opera Terminology

Opera shares many of the same words found in theatre and other musical forms. However, a few terms are unique to opera and operatic singing and may be helpful when trying to understand, interpret, and speak about the art form.

act - a group of scenes with a common theme, such as a specific time or place, forming a major section of the opera

aria - a musical piece sung by one person, usually about the emotions a character is feeling; arias are the songs in opera

baritone - the middle low voice, usually male

bass - the lowest, deepest voice, usually male

bravo - Italian for “nicely done”; audience members who really like a performance often shout “bravo!” while applauding

chorus - a musical piece sung by a group of people; also, a name for a large group of singers

coloratura - singing in long phrases of fast high notes with leaps and trills; usually a soprano technique

composer - a person who writes music

conductor - the person who leads the musical performance

duet - a musical piece sung by two people

finale - the final musical number in an opera (or an act), often involving multiple people

libretto - the words or script of an opera

mezzo-soprano - the middle high voice, usually female

opera - a play in which the story is told through music and singing

operetta - a “small opera,” usually comic, that features popular-style music (for its time) and uses spoken dialogue instead of recitative

overture - a musical introduction to an opera played by the orchestra

production - the scenery, staging, and costumes of an opera

quartet - a musical piece sung by four people

recitative - sung dialogue, usually more about telling the story than about emotions; recitatives are the conversations in opera

score - a book of all the vocal and instrumental music for an opera

soprano - the highest voice in opera, usually female

supernumerary - a performer with a non-singing role, like an “extra” in a movie

tenor - usually the highest male voice

titles - English translations of what’s being sung projected on a screen above the stage

trio - a musical piece sung by three people

trouser role - a male role, usually the part of a young boy, performed by a soprano or mezzo soprano

Audience Etiquette

A great audience is essential to a great performance.

Opera performances can be very powerful and moving, especially when the audience members are fully engaged in what they are seeing and hearing. Here are some tips to make sure you enjoy your time at the opera:

- **There is no dress code.** Dressing up can be fun, though, and lots of people do it when they go to the opera.
- **Be in your seat on time.** The opera waits for no one! Be sure you are in your seat before the show begins.
- **Turn off your phone and other devices.** Sounds and light from electronic devices are very distracting to other audience members and the performers.
- **Remain quiet during the performance.** Even very quiet sounds may be heard throughout the theater.
- **Photography and audio/video recording during the performance is strictly prohibited.** Before and after are OK.
- **If you enjoy what you're hearing, let the singers know!** Besides the usual applause, opera goers often shout "*bravo!*" at the end of a particularly good musical moment. They might say *brava* if the singer is a woman or *bravi* if more than one singer is involved.

Reflecting on the Performance

These activities are designed to help you quickly and easily develop effective lesson plans built around clear objectives. Objectives are written in “I Can” statements using student-friendly language, and all activities can be used to address state and national learning standards.

Objective 1: I can describe the experience of attending a Lyric performance.

- Ask students to write a paragraph reflecting on:
 - Their favorite part of the performance.
 - Something new they learned about opera from the experience.
 - Parts of the experience that differed from their expectations.

Objective 2: I can explain to others what aspect of the opera impacted me the most.

- Make a list with the class of parts of the experience that interested students, such as sets, costumes, dramatic themes, music, audience etiquette, building architecture, etc.
- Divide the class into groups according to the listed categories. Ask each group to come up with a creative way to reflect on their experience, *other than a lecture presentation*.

Objective 3: I can write a critical review of the performance.

- First, ask students to create two lists:
 - Facts about the performance: who sang which roles, what the costumes looked like, the setting, etc.
 - Opinions they felt about the performance: how well the singers sang, if they liked the costumes, and whether they felt the setting was appropriate for the story, etc. Be sure students address what they *saw* and *heard* at the performance.
- Next, guide students to use their lists to write a brief description of the performance (facts) and what they thought about it (opinions).
- Then, encourage students to write about what they liked best about the performance and if they would recommend the opera to other people.
- Have students organize these components into one coherent critical review.
- To extend this activity, ask students to come up with five new adjectives to describe what they saw and heard at the performance. Encourage students to revise their first drafts to include more descriptive language where appropriate.
- Share reviews with your school media team and Lyric Unlimited at lyricunlimited@lyricopera.org.

Learning Standards

Preparing for and attending a Lyric Opera performance may address the following state and national student learning standards.

Illinois Arts Learning Standards

Music

Responding: MU:Re7.1.8b. Describe how understanding context and the elements of music inform the response to music.

Responding: MU:Re8.1.7a. Identify the meaning of musical selections, referring to the elements of music and context.

Responding: MU:Re9.1.8. Explain the influence of experience, analysis, and context on interest in and evaluation of music.

Connecting: MU:Cn11.1.8a. Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life as developmentally appropriate.

Theatre

Responding/Interpret: Pr8.b. Interpret how culture influences a performance.

Responding/Evaluate: Pr9.a. Develop and apply criteria to evaluate a drama/theatre work.

Responding/Evaluate: Pr9.b. Evaluate the effectiveness of the technical elements.

Responding/Evaluate: Pr9.c. Establish an active relationship between audience and performer.

Connecting/Empathize: Pr10.a. Explore the connections of theatre artists to their community and the world at large.

Connecting/Research: Pr11.2.a. Research societal, historical, and cultural context for a performance.

Common Core English Language Arts Anchor Standards

Reading

R.2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

R.3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Writing

W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Speaking and Listening

SL.1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Social Emotional Learning

3A.5b. Examine how the norms of different societies and cultures influence their members' decisions and behaviors.