

IL TRITTICO

Lesson Plan: THE PROP THAT MADE THE STORY

Written by Olga Bezrukova for L.A. Opera

Duration: 50 min

Grade Levels: 7th Grade

Subjects: Literature and English

Standards:

California State Board of Education

Language Arts Content Standards

- 2.2 Deliver oral summaries of articles and books:
- A. Include the main ideas of the event or article and the most significant details.
 - B. Use the student's own words, except for material quoted from sources.
 - C. Convey a comprehensive understanding of sources, not just superficial details.
- 2.4 Deliver persuasive presentations:
- A. State a clear position or perspective in support of an argument or proposal.
 - B. Describe the points in support of the argument and employ well-articulated evidence.

Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards- Theater

- 5.2 Demonstrate projection, vocal variety, diction, gesture, and confidence in an oral presentation.

Preparatory:

- 1) Copies of **Worksheet A** and **B**.
- 2) Copies of synopsis from *Il Trittico*
- 3) Optional: copy of librettos (available: http://www.opera-guide.ch/opern_komponisten.php?uilang=en&first-letter=P)

Procedure

- 1) The teacher will start the class by asking the students: "What makes the story interesting (in a theater context)?" The teacher will keep track of students' ideas on the board. (Answers such as: characters, the events, beginning, middle, end, climax, the type of story, how it relates to personal lives, **PROPS- see study guide**)
- 2) The teacher will divide the class into three groups and give them synopsis from *Il Trittico*. Group 1 will receive the synopsis of *Il Tabarro*, group 2—*Suor Angelica*, & group 3—*Gianni Schicchi*.
- 3) The teacher will monitor the groups as the groups will read the synopsis and fill out **Worksheet A**.
- 4) In groups, the students will decide whether the story would have been just as effective if the 'special prop' was missing from the story.

- 5) In groups, students will present the synopsis and ideas to the class using **Worksheet A**. The students will argue their point whether the ‘special prop’ in their story is an integral part that make the story or not.
- 6) As a class, the students will do **Worksheet B**. The teacher will write all of the ideas on the board.
- 7) The students will complete an assignment.

Goals:

- 1) To introduce students to elements which makes a story.
- 2) To allow students to use their analysis skills in reading and understanding a synopsis.
- 3) To allow students to decide on the importance of elements in the story.
- 4) To give students opportunity to present the group topic and to argue whether or not the prop in their story is an important element that makes the story.
- 5) Allow students to brainstorm props and ideas for writing a story and/or design/create/draw their own prop.

Assessment:

- 1) Students will be able to describe the elements that make up a story.
- 2) Students will be able to read and understand given material
- 3) Students will be able to fill out **Worksheet A** and **Worksheet B**.
- 4) Students will be able to present their topics and argue their points in front of a class.
- 5) Students will be able to brainstorm ideas/props and write a story around those props or design/draw their own prop.

Il Trittico

Synopsis Page

Group 1

Il Tabarro

Paris, 1910. As the sun sets, the stevedores Luigi, Tinca and Talpa, are finishing their work unloading Michele's barge docked on the Seine. Michele's younger wife, Giorgetta, serves wine to the workers, and they dance to the music of an organ grinder. Michele notices how Giorgetta looks at Luigi and dances with him. He wonders if she is still faithful to him. While a song-seller peddles his ballads, Talpa's wife Frugola enters, looking for her husband. Giorgetta shows the fruits her scavenging in the streets of Paris. Luigi laments his lot in life. Before he leaves, Luigi promise to meet Giorgetta at night. Giorgetta will light a match as a signal that it is safe to come. Michele reminisces with Giorgetta of the days before their child died, how all three would fit under his cloak. Although he knows she is straying, he wants to win her back. Darkness has fallen. Luigi, thinking that Michele's lit pipe is Giorgetta's signal, returns to the barge and is confronted by Michele. Michele forces Luigi to confess his affair. Alarmed, Giorgetta returns to the deck, but is somewhat reassured when she sees Michele sitting alone, quietly smoking. Still somewhat nervous, however, she endeavors to atone for her frigidity toward him, telling him that she recalls their early love and wishes she could again find shelter in the folds of his big cloak. For reply, Michele opens wide the cloak.

Group 2

Suor Angelica

A convent near Siena in the late 17th-century. Seven years before the story begins, a young noblewoman gave birth to an illegitimate son. To cover up the scandal, her family forced her to enter a convent and take the veil. Now known as Sister Angelica, she has lived within the peace of the convent walls. She spends her days in prayer and atonement for her sin, waiting for word about her family and her beloved child. The Abbess announces that Sister Angelica has a visitor, her first contact with the outside world since entering the convent. It is her aunt, the Princess. The old woman explains that Angelica's sister is to be married, and Angelica must sign a document renouncing her claim to her dead parents' estate in favor of her younger sister. Angelica pleads for some word about her little boy and finally learns that he had died from fever a few years earlier. The news is more than Sister Angelica can bear. She drinks a deadly poison. Suddenly realizing the full implication of what she has done, she begs the Virgin Mary to forgive her mortal sin. Seemingly in answer to her prayer, the Virgin Mary appears in a vision, bringing Angelica's son to lead her into heaven.

Group 3

Gianni Schicchi

In Buoso Donati's bedroom, his family pretends to be sorry that he has just died. Betto has overheard someone say that Buoso, head of one of Florence's richest and most distinguished families, left his fortune to a monastery, which sends the family into a frenzied search for the dead man's last will and testament. Rinuccio finds it and asks his aunt Zita for permission to marry Lauretta, Gianni Schicchi's daughter, if Buoso has left him well-off. His aunt agrees, and Rinuccio sends for Schicchi, a *nouveau riche* man from the country, and his daughter. But everyone's hopes are dashed when they open the will and discover that, indeed, the old man left everything to the monks. Rinuccio suggests that Schicchi is the only person clever enough to save them, but his family will have none of it. To them, he's a low-born country bumpkin, but Rinuccio tries to convince them that just as Florence draws strength from the country, so can they rely on Schicchi

to help them.

Schicchi and Lauretta arrive. Zita refuses to give her nephew to a girl without a dowry, and Schicchi tries to persuade his daughter that greedy relatives will do her no good, but she only wants Rinuccio. Rinuccio asks Schicchi to take a look at the will; when he refuses, his daughter's pleas change his mind. Schicchi weighs the situation and hatches a plan: the Donatis must keep Buoso's death a secret long enough for Schicchi, disguised as the old man, to draw up a new will. The family eagerly agrees and each member tells Schicchi what they want, even offering him money for certain properties. The women put him into nightclothes and tuck him into Buoso's bed. When the notary arrives, Schicchi dictates the will: five florins to the monks, some pastures and country houses to the family, but the bulk of the estate, including the Donati house in Florence, to Buoso's good friend Gianni Schicchi. When the notary and the witnesses leave, Schicchi drives the Donatis out of his house. Rinuccio and Lauretta remain on the balcony, looking into each other's eyes, and Schicchi knows the money has been put to good use.

Props Study Guide

In each different language, the word that defines ‘props,’ has a different context. The word ‘prop’ defined in English is short for property, or to be more precise: theater property. In theater and motion pictures, any object that an actor handles, such as books, pens, and weapons are props. Some personal props can identify a character or give the audience an insight about the actor’s personality on stage. Props are objects that the actor carries on stage, for example glasses, a handkerchief, a fan, etc.

According a powells.com website synopsis of the book by Andrew Sofer in his *The Stage Life of Props (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance)*:

Props have often been taken for granted in our notions of the theater, yet they've helped alter the course of dramatic history by providing playwrights with a concrete way to keep theatrical meaning in motion.

In *The Stage Life of Props*, Andrew Sofer aims to restore to certain props the performance dimensions that literary critics are trained not to see, then to show that these props are not just accessories, but time machines of the theater. (<http://www.powells.com/biblio?isbn=9780472068395>)

If we look in theater history, often in the inventory of the theater company (as in Shakespear Company) they would have a listing of the costumes and property that a theater might own. Often an actor (especially if an actor has been known for a specific character throughout their career) would own their personal properties. In a play or an opera, props as well as their design is an important element and can add to the personality of the character as well as add drama to the story.

Since they could be such an intimate part of the character, reflecting ideas and character personality, actors could be very superstitious about their props....checking them right before going on stage for performance.

Lawrence Olivier is known as an actor who used props extensively to define his ‘characters.’ He would start with the exterior analysis of his character. He often would find a prop, a mustache, or a green umbrella and build the character using the props.

Worksheet A- “The Prop that Made the Story!?!?”

Read the synopsis of the opera your teacher gave you. Each synopsis has a special prop, which may be an important element to the story. After reading the synopsis, fill in the blanks and decide whether the special prop in the story is really “special.”

What is the title & what kind of a story is this (ex. romantic, drama, suspense)?

When does the story take place (what time in history)?

Where is the story set?

Who are the main characters, and what are their purposes in the story?

Fill in the blanks:

In the beginning of the story:

In the middle:

In the end:

Where is the climax in the story?

Is there an important element, a prop, which adds drama to this story?

Explain your answer. (Do you think that the story would have been different or the same if the prop used in this story was missing?)

Using this worksheet as a guide, present your topic to class. In front of the class discuss whether the prop that was used in your story is an important element that makes the story or not. Explain why or why not and give examples.

Worksheet B

The three stories-operas that make up *Il Trittico*, have props that the writer decided is important to the story. Take the three props, and pretend that you are a writer, writing a story to be made into an opera. You want your story to be original!!! Brainstorm some of the special powers for each of the props.

The Cloak	The Potion	The Will
<p><i>Ex.</i> -Makes the wearer disappear... -gives supernatural strength -allows you to travel between worlds (time travel)</p>	<p><i>Ex.</i> - makes one younger -makes one go back in time</p>	<p><i>Ex.</i> -wills you a magical ring -wills you eternal life -wills you a genie in a bottle...</p>

Assignment:

Option I: Using previously discussed ideas, come up with a story using the particular prop. Or, take the three props used for the three operas, give them special magical powers and create your own story around them.

Option II: Design/create and draw your special props. Make sure that the picture is clear to the special powers of the prop.

*Extra Credit: Research and write a paper on the job of being a writer.