

Lesson Plan: La Bohème

“I’LL NEVER GET OUT OF THIS OPERA ALIVE!”

Written for LA Opera by Ray Hedgpeth

Duration of Lesson: 40-45 minutes.

Grade Levels: 6-8.

Arts Standard Covered:

Music Content Standards

4.2: Explain how various aesthetic qualities convey images, feeling or emotion. This lesson is also cross-curricular, utilizing reading strategies from the Houghton Mifflin Language Arts Program such as Predict/Infer and Monitor/Clarify.

Goals and Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to describe how qualities in the music convey a specific emotion for a specific character (i.e., sympathy, disgust, humor, tragedy). They will also use the Predict/Infer strategy to draw a conclusion about how dramatic elements in the music and plot give the audience an indication of what is to come next.

Anticipatory Set:

The teacher explains to the class that one of the most frequent occurrences in opera is that of death coming to one of the main characters. The teacher will then write “I’ll Never Get Out Of This Opera Alive!” on the board and explain that this is the title of the activity they are about to begin. The character sheets will then be passed out.

Guided Practice:

The teacher explains to the class that one of these six characters (Marcello, Rodolfo, Mimi, Musetta, Colline, Shaunard) on their sheet will not make it out of the opera alive and their job is to use the Predict/Infer and Monitor/Clarify strategies to help them decide which characters are more likely to kick the bucket before the opera is over. The teacher will ask the students to think about how a character in a story such as this might die. What would be possible causes? The teacher will then give the Act I synopsis, excluding anything that might suggest Mimi to be the most likely candidate, then play an excerpt of the recording. The students will then be asked to X off a character whom they feel will not be the one to die by

the end of the opera. The Act II synopsis will follow, along with another excerpt from the CD; the students will make another X over another character's picture. (Note: The teacher must make sure not to include too much information about Mimi's sickness and to avoid terms like "dying" in order to maintain suspense right up to the end of the lesson.) By the time the teacher gets to the Act IV synopsis and plays a selection, the students will have three characters left on their sheet. The teacher, with a certain dramatic flair, will say, "One of these characters is going to die. Before I give you the synopsis of the final act, X off another character you think will live. This should leave you with two characters on your sheet." The teacher will then read the final synopsis and stop before the ending. The students will then X off their last character and be left with only one. The teacher will then read the ending and play another excerpt. The teacher will then reveal that those students who have Mimi left on their papers made the most accurate prediction.

Closure:

The teacher will lead a discussion with the class about what elements of the music or plot led them to believe that Mimi would be the one to die. Before the teacher collects these sheets, the students will be asked to write on the back a short paragraph explaining why they chose the character they did. What qualities in the music and what dramatic elements in the plot influenced them to X off characters as they went along? Was their final prediction right? Why or why not?

Extension:

This activity can be extended to any opera with similar death-in-the-final-act elements such as *Rigoletto*, *Aida* and *Madama Butterfly*.

Materials:

CD of *La Boheme*, photocopied sheet with pictures of the opera's six main characters (one copy per student), synopsis of each act for the teacher to read (available at www.metopera.org/synopses/boheme.html), pencils.

Assessment and Evaluation:

Informal assessment will be done at the closing of the lesson when the teacher begins the discussion. Formal assessment will be done after the papers are collected and the teacher can evaluate the responses written on the backs of the papers.

Idea 1:

I'LL NEVER MAKE IT OUT OF THIS OPERA ALIVE! Strategy: prediction/monitor/clarify. At the end of La Boheme, one of the characters will meet his or her doom. Marcello, Rodolfo, Mimi, Musetta, Colline, Schaunard. They're young, they're talented, but one is terribly sick and will die. Do the same with Rigoletto: Rigoletto, The Duke of Mantua, Rigoletto's daughter, Sparafucile, etc. Also with Aida: Aida, Radames, etc. Madama Butterfly.

Idea 2:

Design a poster. Class divided into 4 sections for each act. Boil down (summary, though more concise) the plot of that act. Use movie ads from a newspaper for ideas on slogans or catchy phrases. Posters should catch a person's eye, colorful. Standards: summarize, interpret, characters, elements of drama, which type of writing works best with a typical idea?