

Die Vögel [The Birds] by Walter Braunfels

Lesson Plans:

1. **Drama Tag and *The Birds***
2. **Historical Detectives**

Written for LA Opera by Olga Bezrukova

Note to teacher: This lesson plan works best with a class that is currently learning Greek Mythology.

Grade: 6

Duration: 2/50 periods

Subjects: Theater, Literature, and English

(3 if the teacher decides to review the listening guide with the class)

California State Board of Education:

Theatre Grade Six

- 2.1 Participate in improvisational activities, demonstrating an understanding of text, subtext, and context.
- 2.2 Use effective vocal expression, gesture, facial expression, and timing to create character.
- 4.2 Identify examples of how theatre, television, and film can influence or be influenced by politics and culture.

Language Arts

- 1.0 LISTENING AND SPEAKING STRATEGIES: Students deliver focused, coherent presentations that convey ideas clearly and relate to the background and interests of the audience. They evaluate the content of oral communication.
- 2.0 SPEAKING APPLICATIONS (GENRES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS): Students deliver well-organized formal presentations implying traditional rhetorical strategies. Student speaking demonstrates a command of Standard English and the organization and delivery strategies outlined in Listening and Speaking Standard 1.0.

Reading

2.0 READING COMPREHENSION (FOCUS ON INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS): Students read and understand grade-level-appropriate material. They describe and connect the essential ideas, arguments, and perspectives of the text by using their knowledge of text structure, organization, and purpose. The selections in *Recommended Readings in Literature, Kindergarten through Grade Eight* illustrates the quality and complexity of the materials to be read by students. In addition, by grade eight, students read one million words annually on their own, including a good representation of grade-level-appropriate narrative and expository text (e.g., classic and contemporary literature, magazines, newspapers, online information). In grade seven, students make substantial progress toward this goal.

- 3.0 LITERARY RESPONSE AND ANALYSIS: Students read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and

social science. They clarify the ideas and connect them to other literary works. The selections in *Recommended Readings in Literature, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* illustrates the quality and complexity of the materials to be read by students.

Writing

1.0 WRITING STRATEGIES: Students write clear, coherent, and focused essays. Writing exhibits awareness of audience and purpose. Essays contain formal introductions, bodies of supporting evidence, and conclusions. Students successfully use the stages of the writing process, as needed.

Preparatory:

- 1) **Copies of Worksheets**
- 2) **Copies of resource materials and Script**

Resources

The text to this drama can be accessed/printed from several sources:

Classic Authors Webpage (divided into 4 parts)

<http://aristophanes.classicauthors.net/BirdsThe/BirdsThe2.html>

Text version on Classics Webpage: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristophanes/birds.pl.txt>

Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3013>

To see the file as text on Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3013/3013.txt>

Goals & Objectives

- 1) Teacher will introduce the story of *The Birds* by Aristophanes.
- 2) Teacher will encourage the students to act out segments of the drama by playing Drama Tag.
- 3) Teacher will discuss the key elements in the story.
- 4) Teacher will introduce the opera, *The Birds* composed by Walter Braunfels.
- 5) Teacher will discuss with class both of the plots, focusing on their similarities or differences.
- 6) Teacher will help the students to be Historical Detectives and oversee the class as they are researching the historical events as well as the life of the composer Walter Braunfels.
- 7) Teacher will help the students to come up with some theories to answer the question, “why did Walter Braunfels change the end of the drama for his opera?”
- 8) Teacher will oversee the students as they prepare for their class presentation.

Procedure:

1st Class- Drama Tag and *The Birds*

- 1) Teacher will distribute a copy of the drama and assign students to read it before the next class period. (or require the students to go on the website and read the drama before class).
- 2) The teacher will assign volunteers to play the first couple of characters.

- 3) The class will play a game of Drama Tag. (Rules of the game: The teacher gets to be the coach and direct the first couple of characters to read and act out in front of the class for a set time [for ex. 1.5 minutes]. After the set time, teacher will call out “Tag.” Each of the students currently playing a character selects or tags a classmate to continue to act-perform in their place in front of the class. Note to teacher: make sure to call “Tag” during times when there is a new character coming, or a character leaving. Each student that is tagged reads a part. If the particular character that s/he is been tagged for is not in the scene, the tagged person becomes the next new character in the drama. Choruses can be treated as one person, or several depending on teacher preference.
- 4) The class will read/act the whole drama.
- 5) After acting out the drama, the class will fill out **Worksheet A, section 1**.
- 6) Homework: Teacher will distribute copies of **Worksheet B- Opera Synopsis of *The Birds***, composed by Walter Braunfels. The students will read the synopsis and fill out the second portion of the **Worksheet A**.
- 7) Note to teacher: It is suggested, but not required to review the listening guide—
 - a. A Listening Guide for the opera, is available:
<http://www.laopera.com/educom/lessonplans.aspx> (the listening guide takes approximately a class period)
 - b. A field trip to see the opera is also highly recommended.

Second Class: **Historical Detectives- Using History to Find Answers**

For the second class:

- 1) Teacher will go over the **Worksheet A, 2nd section** as well as the questions at the end of the worksheet with class.
- 2) The teacher will ask the class to brainstorm for the ending question, “Why do you think the composer changed the end of the story?” The teacher will explain to class that personal experiences or surrounding events may cause writers and librettists to change original stories. In such instances, it takes a historian to look at the events in history and the life of the individual to come up with answers to questions.
- 3) The teacher will divide the class in groups, **and will ask the groups to be Historical Detectives and find information on Walter Braunfels as well as some of the events in history from 1915 to 1920 that might have influenced Walter Braunfels to change the end of the drama, *The Birds*. Suggested website links to direct the students:**
 - a. **History-** www.historyorb.com; www.thepeoplehistory.com
 - b. **Composer-** The Orel Foundation website
http://orelfoundation.org/index.php/composers/article/walter_braunfels/
 - c. Another good resource is the life-table that is available on:
<http://www.walterbraunfels.de/Walter%20Braunfels%20-%20CV.htm>
- 4) The groups will research the years of 1915-1920 and come up with hypotheses on what of the events might have influenced the composer to create an alternate ending to the story. Each of the groups will present their findings and ideas to class and give supporting evidence. Note to the teacher: There are multiple answers to this question, some of the most common answers should be: WWI, Braunfels was a soldier, Braunfels converted to Catholicism, and identification of some of the Art movements of the era; Braunfels was affected by the music of Wagner, particularly *The Ring*.

- 5) As homework, **Worksheet D**, students will write a paper answering one of two questions:
- a. "If I was to re-write the story of *The Birds*, how similar/different would it be to the original story and what current events, if any, would influence my writing choices?"
 - b. In your opinion, state the similarities and/or differences between the two versions of the drama, *The Birds*. Write some of the historical events discussed in class that might have influenced both of the stories (historical events in the life of Aristophanes, and Braunfels). Pick the events that you think are the most influential to the story, and support your ideas with the research done in class.

Assessment:

- 1) Students will be able to read *The Birds* by Aristophanes.
- 2) Students will be able to act out segments from the drama by playing Drama Tag.
- 3) Students, will be able to be a part of a class discussion and voice their opinions on the key elements in the story, plots, and drama similarities or differences.
- 4) Students will be able read the opera synopsis, *The Birds* composed by Walter Braunfels.
- 5) Students will be able to be Historical Detectives and in groups research historical events as well as the life of the composer Walter Braunfels.
- 6) Students will be able to come up with some answers and theories to answer the question, "Why did Walter Braunfels change the end of the drama for his opera?"
- 7) Students will be able prepare for their class presentation.
- 8) Students will be able to write a coherent essay using the information discussed in class.

Worksheet A

Name: _____

In a sentence or two, explain what happens at particular points in the story.

	<i>The Birds</i> by Aristophanes- 1 st portion	<i>The Birds</i> by Walter Braunfels- 2 nd portion
Beginning		
Middle		
Climax		
End		

Do you see any similarities in the story, and if so, what are they?

Do you see any differences and if so, what are they?

*Why do you think the composer changed the end of the story?

Worksheet B

Synopsis of *The Birds* composed by Walter Braunfels, downloaded from L.A.Opera

Prologue The Nightingale welcomes the audience to the realm of the birds, extolling its utopian virtues. Nevertheless, she confesses to an unfulfilled longing within her own soul.

Act I Good Hope and Loyal Friend, disillusioned with their fellow men, have journeyed to a desolate region in search of the Hoopoe, king of the birds. They encounter the Wren, who is suspicious of humans, but they manage to persuade her to summon her master. Awakened from sleep, the Hoopoe—who had once been a man himself—confronts Good Hope and Loyal Friend, who declare their desire to live among the carefree birds. When the Hoopoe sighs that the birds have no real kingdom to call their own, Good Hope observes that the sky is their domain. The Hoopoe demurs, remarking that the air belongs to all creatures. Loyal Friend has a sudden brainstorm. He proclaims that the birds should build a great city in the clouds, fortified against men below and the gods above. Good Hope is skeptical, but the Hoopoe embraces the scheme wholeheartedly and summons the birds to his side, announcing that two men have arrived with a plan that will benefit the birds. The birds' first reaction is to denounce the men as wicked and treacherous. However, despite a warning from the Eagle, the Hoopoe prevails upon the mob to hear them out. Playing on their emotions, Loyal Friend harks back to a golden age when the birds were revered by men, and incites them to reclaim their lost glory. Galvanized, the birds commit to the scheme hatched by Loyal Friend, even if it means war. Good Hope is caught up in the excitement too, naively envisioning a better world within reach. Emboldened by his success, Loyal Friend demands that the birds honor him as their lord and master, and they willingly acquiesce. Amid much rejoicing, the birds rush off to begin their grand undertaking.

Act II It is the following night. Good Hope is awakened by the song of the Nightingale. He feels revitalized, intoxicated by her sweet voice. Good Hope entreats the Nightingale to come closer, and asks her to teach him to see the world through her eyes. At first she tells him that he can never understand what it means to live in harmony with the universe, but his declaration of love sways her, and she imparts a kiss to his forehead, granting his desire. The air is filled with the voices of the scent of flowers, and Good Hope succumbs to their enchantment, sinking unconscious to the ground.

Daybreak illuminates the citadel in the sky built by the birds. Led by the Hoopoe and Loyal Friend, the birds vaunt their lofty achievement and their imminent dominion over all living things. A wedding procession makes its way through the crowd, led by the Wren, who proudly heralds the arrival of the first newlyweds to enter the great city. Everyone joins the nuptial celebration, which culminates in a ceremonial dance led by two Doves as the bride and groom. The mood is shattered when more birds rush in, clamoring that a mighty creature has broken through the barricades. The stranger enters, heavily cloaked, and the birds cower in fear. The Hoopoe and Loyal Friend challenge the intruder, who announces that he has come as a friend to admonish them; through the grace of Zeus, they have been given a chance to mend their ways and submit to the will of the gods. The birds react defiantly, whereupon the stranger reveals that he is the titan Prometheus, who himself had once rebelled against the gods and had been punished severely. Despite this dire warning and the misgivings voiced by Good Hope and the Hoopoe, Loyal Friend brashly exhorts the birds to wage war against the gods. Suddenly a terrible

storm breaks forth, manifesting the wrath of Zeus, and a thunderbolt destroys the citadel of the birds. Chastened, the birds sing a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to Zeus. Loyal Friend emerges from hiding, clearly rattled but putting up a good front. Dismissing the whole adventure among the birds as a foolish lark, he urges Good Hope to return with him to the comforts of home in the city. Good Hope lingers for a moment, reflecting upon his brief encounter with the Nightingale, an experience which will live forever in his heart. As he turns to leave, the call of the Nightingale is heard once more; overwhelmed with emotion, Good Hope sets out on his journey home.

Worksheet C, Walter Braunfels and Historic Events of 1915-1920

In groups, be Historical Detectives and find information on Walter Braunfels as well as some of the events in history from 1915 to 1920 that might have influenced Walter Braunfels to change the end of the drama, *The Birds*. Suggested website links start your search:

- c. **History-** www.historyorb.com; www.thepeoplehistory.com
- d. **Composer-** The Orel Foundation website
http://orelfoundation.org/index.php/composers/article/walter_braunfels/
- e. Another good resource is the life-table that is available on:
<http://www.walterbraunfels.de/Walter%20Braunfels%20-%20CV.htm>

Below, fill out the table

Event (Include a date if there is one)	How/Why does it effect the story? State your findings:

Worksheet D

Using your research as a History Detective and discussion in class, write an essay answering one of two questions:

- 1. “If I was to re-write the story of *The Birds*, how similar/different would it be to the original story and what current events, if any, would influence my writing choices?”**
- 2. In your opinion, state the similarities and/or differences between the two versions of the drama, *The Birds*. Write some of the historical events discussed in class that might have influenced both of the stories (historical events in the life of Aristophanes, and Braunschweig). Pick the events that you think are the most influential to the story, and support your ideas with the research done in class.**