

OPERA UNIT

Day Two



OBJECTIVES:

- Learn generic vocabulary associated with opera including some generic backstage terms.
- Learn to identify these new elements by viewing opera footage.

LESSON PLAN:

“When an opera star sings her head off, she usually improves her appearance.” – Victor Borge

Voice Parts

Soprano	The highest of the women’s voices.
Mezzo Soprano	The 2 nd highest of the women’s voices. Mezzo means “middle” in Italian.
Countertenor	The highest of the men’s voices.
Tenor	The 2 nd highest of the men’s voices.
Baritone	The 2 nd lowest of the men’s voices.
Bass	The lowest of the men’s voices.

ACTIVITY: Ask the class of singers they know that fit each category and why. You will have to know your popular singers! Perhaps ask what category they themselves would fit into...

Orchestral Components

Orchestra	A group of people who play instruments and play along with the singers.
Conductor	The person who leads the orchestra.

Behind the Scenes

Scenery	Backdrops, hangings, furnishings and other accessories on a stage that represent the location of the scene.
Lighting	How a scene should be illuminated. Can set a mood or a time of day.
Costumes	What the singers wear.

Opera Skeleton

Composer	The person who writes the music.
Libretto	The words to the opera.
Score	The written version of the composer's music.

Opera Anatomy

Aria	A song sung by one person.
Duet	A song sung by two people.
Ensemble	A group singing together.
Recitative	A vocal line sung by a singer that resembles the natural rhythms of speech.

ACTIVITY: To demonstrate recitative (as it is difficult to explain), ask the class for 4 sentences as if 2 people were having a conversation. The weirder the better. Then demonstrate how recitative works by creating musical recitative using these 4 sentences. You can place it in the key of C or G and modulate accordingly.

END ACTIVITY: To put all of these vocabulary words to use, watch a video of any opera of your choosing and have the class point out any elements discussed previously. Do they like the scenery, costumes, etc.? Why or why not? Does it fit the music? What would they do different?

A recommended opera to use is The Metropolitan Opera's version of The Magic Flute (Die Zauberflöte) by Mozart. This production was created by Julie Taymor who also did The Lion King on Broadway. The sets, costumes, and singers are great. The DVD is available through the Met Opera's website and can be bought in its entirety sung in the original German, or in a cut down kid-friendly version sung in English. Either one will be good. Here is the link to a preview of the opera:

<http://www.metoperafamily.org/metupload/video/2008-09/MagicFlute/index.html>

ASSESSMENT: Create a Crossword Puzzle using the vocabulary words and their definitions as a guide.