

What is Opera?

A Study Guide for Grades K-6

from the

**Opera Guild
of San Antonio**



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Overview

This guide was developed to further enhance the understanding and educational benefits of attending an opera. Information is provided about opera for the teacher and students. Suggestions are provided for student activities to engage in before, during and after the experience to multiply learning even more.

All activities are keyed to TEKS, particularly the following:

Language Arts:

- Listening and speaking skills
- Vocabulary development
- Reading comprehension
- Literary response
- Culture
- Writing purposes
- Viewing and representing

Social Studies:

- History
- Culture

Music:

- Perception
- Creative expression and performance
- Historical and cultural heritage
- Response and evaluation

Theater:

- Perception
- Creative expression and performance
- Historical and cultural heritage
- Response and evaluation

Art:

- Perception
- Creative expression and performance

The activities in this guide also can be used in the following applications:

- Active learning
- Integrated units of study
- Differentiated instruction
- Brain-based learning
- Multiple intelligences
- Learner-based instruction
- Balanced literacy
- Modifications for special needs students

What is Opera?

TEKS. MUSIC. K.1, 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1. THEATER. K.4, K.5, 1.4, 1.5, 2.4, 2.5, 3.4, 3.5, 4.4, 4.5, 5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.8, K.12, K.13, 1.11, 1.15, 1.16, 2.8, 2.12, 2.13, 3.8, 3.12, 3.13, 4.9, 4.13, 4.14, 5.9, 5.13, 5.14, 6.9, 6.13, 6.14. SOCIAL STUDIES. K.11, 1.15, 2.15, 3.14, 4.20, 5.22, 6.18.

Opera. Opera uses words and music to tell a story. An opera is different from a play. In opera, the actors sing rather than talk. Operas can be based on stories, plays, history or real life. Some operas are tragic (sad) and others are funny comedies. An opera is divided into two or three acts, and the acts are divided into scenes. Each scene includes songs. Sometimes dance is also part of the opera.



Music. Music is the heart of opera. Music moves the story, expresses feelings, and reveals the characters. A composer writes the opera music, which is presented by an orchestra and singers.

Overture. Before the singers and actors appear, the orchestra plays an overture. The overture is a "preview" of the songs the audience will be hearing.

Themes. Throughout the opera, special pieces of music are repeated for different characters, situations or emotions.



Voices. Each role in an opera is written for a particular kind of voice, such as the following:

Women's voices:

- soprano—highest
- mezzo-soprano—middle
- contralto—lowest

Men's voices:

- tenor—highest
- baritone—middle
- bass—lowest

Aria. An aria is a solo, a song sung by one singer. In opera, the voice is considered the singer's musical "instrument." An aria shows the power, talent and beauty of a single human voice.

Ensemble. An ensemble is music sung by several singers at the same time. Sometimes the singers sing the same melody. Sometimes each singer sings a different melody. In the ensemble, the singers may have the same or different points of view. Examples of ensembles:

- duet—two people (sometimes in love) sing together
- trio—three people sing together
- quartet—four people sing together

Chorus. Large groups of people sing at the same time. Sometimes the chorus provides background music for other parts of the opera.

Words: The libretto is all the words in the opera. The words help the music tell the story and express different feelings. In some operas, all the words that are not sung are done in recitative. Recitative is half-way between singing and speaking. Recitative is similar to chanting, rapping, or "sing-song."



Drama. The drama is in the exciting events and acting in the opera. There is a hero/heroine with a problem to solve. The villain of the opera tries to prevent them from being successful. Like all stories, the opera has a beginning, middle and end.

Sets. The sets are the painted backgrounds, props and furniture that tell where and when the opera takes place. The sets show the "setting."



Costumes. The outfits worn by the singers express their personalities. The costumes also tell something of the culture or historical time that the opera takes place.

Props. Moveable furniture and items carried by hand are called "props" or "properties."

Spectacle. In a spectacle, there is a lot to see. Many operas make everything big—the story, the drama, the music, the feelings. Sometimes there are large numbers of people in the opera, with lots of action. The costumes, sets, lights and other designs are often large-sized and colorful, as well. Some operas even show ships at sea and other special effects. In this way, some operas are similar to rock concerts, circuses and even wrestling matches.

Who's Who in Opera

TEKS. MUSIC. K.1, 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1. THEATER. K.4., K.5, 1.4, 1.5, 2.4, 2.5, 3.4, 3.5, 4.4, 4.5, 5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5. SOCIAL STUDIES. K.11, 1.15, 2.15, 3.14, 4.20, 5.22, 6.18.

Many, many people are needed to create and promote an opera, including the following:

Composer. The composer writes the music for an opera. He/she also writes the words or works with a librettist who writes them.

Artistic director. The artistic director chooses the production and the people who bring it to life. He/she must "sell" the opera to the public and must raise money for its production.

Stage director. The operatic stage director works with the singers, technical staff and others to put together the opera. He/she determines the style and pace of the production. He/she decides what and who goes where. He/she tells everyone involved ways to make the opera better.

Conductor/Music director. The conductor leads the orchestra during rehearsal and performance. He/she works with the Stage Director and singers to deliver a good production.

Singer. The professional opera singer needs both talent and hard work. Everyday he/she must work on his/her voice—just as other musicians practice on their instruments. Many times, the singer must sing in a foreign language. The singer must also be a good actor and keep the audience involved in the opera.

Coach. The coach learns as much as possible about the opera and its history. He/she also knows a good deal about singing and performing. The coach helps the singers work with the Stage Director and deliver a good performance.

Designer. A designer or design team will create all the sets, costumes, lights and other artistic elements for the opera for the Stage Director. Sometimes he/she has to express a specific culture or time in history. Sometimes the production has to be large-sized or have special effects. Many times, there are limits on how much money can be spent to create all the designs.

Audience Etiquette

TEKS. MUSIC. 1.6, 2.6, 3.6, 4.6, 5.6, 6.6. THEATER. K.5, 1.5, 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.1, 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 6.3. SOCIAL STUDIES. K.8, 1.10.

Be a good audience member. Help the performers do their very best job.

- Before going to the opera, ask your teacher when it is okay to laugh or clap.
- At the opera, listen quietly and watch closely.
- Do what your teacher does:
 - ✓ Do not talk.
 - ✓ Try not to make noise or movement of any kind.
 - ✓ Do not leave your seat.
 - ✓ At the end of each act, applaud.
 - ✓ At the end of a good song, applaud.
 - ✓ At the end of the entire opera, give the performers a "standing ovation" by standing, clapping and saying, "**Bravo!**"

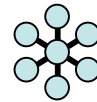
ACTIVITIES

Before Going to the Opera

Connect and motivate.

TEKS. MUSIC. K.3, 1.5, 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5. THEATER. K.4, 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.2, 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.

Involve the students in an activity that relates the theme or main idea of the opera to their own opinions, experiences or interests. Ask students what they already know or feel about the main idea. Put their responses into a conceptual web.



Read and discuss.

TEKS. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.9, 1.12, 2.9, 3.9, 4.10, 5.10, 6.10.

- Read and discuss the rules of etiquette.
- Try to predict what the opera will be about, just from hearing the title.
- (Older students) Read about the composer and historical context. Compare to modern times.
- Read a synopsis (summary) of the story. Ask small groups to choral read different sentences or paragraphs.
- As you read, try to predict both what the characters are feeling and what will happen next.
- Also, as you read, imitate some of the gestures, expressions, and sounds mentioned in the synopsis.
- Read the words from some of the songs. What character is singing? What is the main idea being expressed?

Listen and discuss.

TEKS: MUSIC. K.1, 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1. LANGUAGE ARTS: K.1, K.2, 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4.

Opera music sounds very different from popular music. Listen to music from the opera you will be attending.

- Is the music sad? funny? dramatic? romantic? scary?
- How many voices do you hear singing?
- How does the music make you feel?

During the Performance of the Opera

Listen to the overture.

TEKS. MUSIC. K.1, 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1.

Think about the following:

- What repeated themes do you hear?
- What feelings are expressed?



Design and spectacle.

TEKS. ART. K.1, 1.1, 2.2, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1. LANGUAGE ARTS. 4.23, 5.23, 6.23.

What do you see? Notice the following:

- colors
- sets
- furniture, props
- costumes
- movement
- lights
- special effects
- number of people onstage



Arias.

TEKS: MUSIC. K.1, 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1. LANGUAGE ARTS: K.1, K.2, 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4.

Listen carefully and consider the following:

- Who is singing?
- How is she/he feeling?
- How high or low is the singer's voice?
- Can you understand the words?
- What sounds does the singer make?

Ensembles.

TEKS: MUSIC. K.1, 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1. LANGUAGE ARTS: K.1, K.2, 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4.

Listen carefully and consider the following:

- How many people are singing?
- Are they all singing the same thing?
- How different are their voices?
- How many different feelings are being expressed?
- How do they sound all together?

Story.

TEKS. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.9, 1.12, 2.9, 3.9, 4.10, 5.10, 6.10.

Consider the following:

- What happens at the beginning? middle? end?
- What is the problem?
- How is the problem solved?

After Going to the Opera

React.

TEKS. MUSIC. K.4, 1.6, 2.6, 3.6, 4.6, 4.6, 5.6, 6.6. THEATER. K.5, 1.5, 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.10, 1.13, 2.10, 3.10, 4.11, 5.11, 6.11.

Write or talk about the following:

- Did you like the opera or not? Why or why not?
- What did you like best or least?

(Older students) Write a review of the opera.

Retell.

TEKS. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.9, K.10, 1.12, 1.13, 2.9, 2.10, 3.9, 3.10, 4.10, 4.11, 5.10, 5.11, 6.10, 6.11.

Answer the following questions:

- What was the main idea of the opera?
- Who were the main characters?
- What was the setting?
- What happened in the beginning, middle and end?
- What was the problem and how was it solved?
- Was the opera funny or serious?

Fill out a "story map."

Retell the opera in "25 words or less."

<i>Name of opera:</i>	
<i>Name of composer:</i>	
Characters:	Act One:
Setting:	Act Two:
Problem:	Act Three:
Solution:	

Explore the opera further in one or more of the following ways:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act out (or dance) your favorite part of the opera. • Use your face and body to express the feelings of the characters. <p>TEKS. THEATER. K.2, 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.9, K.10, 1.12, 1.13, 2.9, 2.10, 3.9, 3.10, 4.10, 4.11, 5.10, 5.11, 6.10, 6.11.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create puppets or masks of the characters. • Use puppets or masks to retell the opera or create a new one. <p>TEKS. ART. K.2, 1.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2. THEATER. K.2, 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.9, K.10, 1.12, 1.13, 2.9, 2.10, 3.9, 3.10, 4.10, 4.11, 5.10, 5.11, 6.10, 6.11.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a song to express the main idea. • Write a new song for one of the characters. <p>TEKS. MUSIC. K.3, 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.9, K.10, 1.12, 1.13, 2.9, 2.10, 3.9, 3.10, 4.10, 4.11, 5.10, 5.11, 6.10, 6.11.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw a picture to show a favorite part of the opera. • Create new designs for costumes, sets and other parts of the opera. <p>TEKS. ART. K.2, 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.9, K.10, 1.12, 1.13, 2.9, 2.10, 3.9, 3.10, 4.10, 4.11, 5.10, 5.11, 6.10, 6.11.</p>

Relate.

TEKS. MUSIC. K.3. 1.5, 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5. THEATER. K.4, 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.2, 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.

Compare the opera to one or more of the following:

- a book or story
- real life
- a song
- history
- a movie
- another opera

Can you relate the opera to other areas of the curriculum?

- writing
- reading
- math
- science
- social studies
- cooking, practical arts

Write something original.

TEKS. LANGUAGE ARTS: K.15, 1.18, 2.14, 3.18, 4.15, 5.15, 6.15. MUSIC: K.2, 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.



- Write a song, story or poem for one of the characters in the opera.
- Write a story, song, poem or skit with the same main idea as the opera.
- Write a story, song, poem or skit with other ideas from the opera.
- Write a new ending for the opera.

Research. (older students)

TEKS. MUSIC. 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5. THEATER. 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4. LANGUAGE ARTS. 3.3, 3.12, 4.13, 5.13, 6.13. SOCIAL STUDIES. 3.14, 4.20, 5.22, 6.1, 6.2, 6.18.

- Find out more about opera and opera composers.
- Find out more about the culture or historical time of the opera.
- Find out more about careers in opera.

Create an Opera

To extend learning across the curriculum, try some or all of the following activities:

Write.

TEKS. MUSIC. K.3, 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4. THEATER. K.3, 1.3, 2.3, 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3. LANGUAGE ARTS: K.15, 1.18, 2.14, 3.18, 4.15, 5.15, 6.15. MUSIC: K.2, 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.

Older students can work in teams. Younger students should work as a whole class.

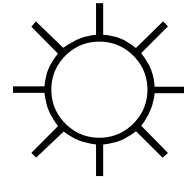
- Choose a favorite story and divide the story into scenes.
- Write one or more songs for each character. Use familiar melodies for the songs.
- Write any other dialogue that is needed.

Prepare.

TEKS. MUSIC. K.3, 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4. ART: K.2, 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.3, K.9, 1.3, 1.13, 2.3, 2.9, 3.3, 3.10, 4.5, 4.11, 4.25, 5.5, 5.11, 5.25, 6.5, 6.11, 6.24.



- Create puppets or make costumes for live actors.
- Create background murals or transparencies.
- Create sets, props and other special effects.
- Record the music. (If using puppets, record the entire words and music on tape.)



Practice.

TEKS. THEATRE: K.2, 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2. LANGUAGE ARTS. K.3, K.9, 1.3, 1.13, 2.3, 2.9, 3.3, 3.10, 4.5, 4.11, 5.5, 5.11, 6.5, 6.11.

- Assign parts. (Note: You need not have just one child for one part. Several children can sing together or take turns singing a part or using a puppet.)
- Rehearse the scenes and songs. Younger students should be allowed to improvise their parts and let the opera change somewhat from rehearsal to rehearsal.
- Rehearse changing the scenes and the other "technical" parts of the production.
- Do a "dress rehearsal." (This rehearsal should look like the finished product.)
- Present to another class or audience, if desired.

Reflect.

TEKS. MUSIC. K.4, 1.6, 2.6, 3.6, 4.6, 5.6, 6.6. THEATER. K.5, 1.5, 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5.

Ask students:

- What have you learned about opera?
- What have you learned about working in a group?
- What have you learned about your own skills, talents and interests?

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