

La Traviata

Lesson: Jobs in the Opera

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Duration: 1 lessons/ 50 minute

Grade Levels: 9-12

Subjects: Literature, English, Theater

California State Board of Education Language Arts Content Standards

Grade 9/10; 2.0 Reading Comprehension (focus on informational materials): Students read and understand grade-level-appropriate material. They analyze the organizational patterns, arguments, and positions advanced.

Grade 9/10; 2.3 Generate relevant questions about readings that can be researched

Objectives:

1. Introduce students to opera.
2. Introduce students to what goes into putting on a performance.
3. Introduce students to jobs available in theater/opera.
4. Introduce students to the story of “La Traviata.”
5. Allow students to work in a group to explore how each job relates to a performance.
6. Allow students to rehearse and perform in front of their peers.

Classroom Teacher Prep/Materials:

1. Copies of Worksheet A, **JOBS IN THE OPERA**
2. **Libretto: can be accessed http://www.opera-guide.ch/opern_komponisten.php?uilang=en&first-letter=V**
3. Computer lab with access to internet.

Lesson Plan Description/Procedure:

1. The students will be given Worksheet A, **JOBS IN THE OPERA.**
2. The students will research the jobs in the opera and fill out Worksheet A.
3. Teacher will lead students in a class discussion and overview of the answers.
4. **EXTRA CREDIT:** Students will choose a profession in which they are interested and write a paper discussing the chosen topic.

Assessment:

1. Students will be able to independently research and fill out Worksheet A.
2. Students will be able to discuss their findings with the class.
3. Students will have an understanding of the variety of jobs available in theater.

Name: _____

Worksheet A: **JOBS IN THE OPERA**

Job Title	Functions: What does s/he do?	Responsible for?
Conductor		
Stage Director		
Assistant Director		
Set Designer		
Costume Designer		
Lighting Designer		
Technical Director		
Costume Director		

Production Manager		
Stage Manager		
Make-Up and Wig Master		
Prompter		
Performers: Singers /Actors/Supers		
Instrumentalists		

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION:

What is your favorite job and why?

How are the jobs in the opera different from similar jobs in film, television, and theater?

Worksheet A – Guide for Teachers

Behind the Scenes at an Opera Company

This section relates to Grade 9-12 Advanced Achievement Standard of the National Standards for Arts Education for Music and Theatre.

Opera is one of the most popular forms of art in the world and is growing in popularity in the United States – particularly among young people. The combination of spectacle, music, and drama continues to thrill audiences even now.

Opera is truly an international art form. While each company has its own orchestra and chorus, or group of singers, opera companies all over the world share opera productions (the sets and costumes of opera), and singers travel all over to sing the roles that made them famous. But there is more to opera than famous singers, orchestra and spectacle. Many people work hard to make each opera performance happen. Opera companies employ administrators and production personnel who are responsible for the productions you see.

Students might wish to explore careers in the arts. Here are some professions at an opera company that might interest you or your students.

Conductor

Many opera companies have their own resident conductor and invite guest conductors to conduct specific operas. Conductors are accomplished, highly trained musicians who play several instruments and read music with the fluency that they read their native language. Not every conductor wants to conduct opera; conducting for the voice is a highly specialized skill. Conductors also specialize in different kinds of music; some conductors are known for early music; others specialize in composers, like Mozart or Rossini, and others are skilled in conducting contemporary or new music.

The conductor usually has an **assistant** who accompanies in rehearsals. A **chorus master** works with the chorus, conducting them in rehearsals and supervises them while they learn the music.

Stage Director

The director is responsible for the overall concept of the production, for the performers' interpretations of their roles, and for moving the action on the stage. Directors are usually hired for a specific production, and again, they specialize in different styles. Opera directors often work internationally. The director often works with an **assistant** who, among other duties, takes staging notes during rehearsals.

Set Designer

The set designer works closely with the director to create the look of the opera. The director determines where and when the opera will take place (many directors choose to update operas to a more recent time), and the designer will sketch the locations. S/he might do this after extensive research. A set designer must know a great deal about construction and materials, so that it may be created to be lightweight, sturdy, and practical. S/he must also know about light, so that the colors of the set must work with the lights that illuminate the stage.

Costume Designer

The costume designer works closely with both the director and the set designer to create the costumes for every character in the opera. The costume designer will draw his ideas for each character. **Costume constructors** build (or sew) the costumes. Some characters change their costumes many times – a young girl in Act One may be portrayed as an old woman in Act Three – and the designer must develop specific details – down to the kind of fabric to be used – for each costume.

Lighting Designer

The lighting designer must be knowledgeable about electricity, color, and theater techniques to create a design that will work for the opera. A lighting designer must be a good draftsman, for he or she will draw the “light plot,” or a rendering of every light to be used and its placement in the theater. The lighting designer creates mood, atmosphere, and locale through the clever use of light and color.

Technical Director

The technical director oversees all the technical aspects of the company’s production. S/he works with the designers and with the stage crew to make sure the sets, props, and lights are effective and work together.

Costume Director

The costume director supervises all aspects of costumes. S/he works with the costume designer to make sure all his requests are met; s/he supervises construction of costumes or arranges to buy or rent costumes that the company doesn’t make. S/he makes sure all the costumes fit the singers and supervises the wardrobe staff who makes sure the costumes are clean and in good repair.

Production Manager

The production manager supervises all other aspects of the production, including the stage management staff (see below), wig, make-up, rehearsal schedules, and more.

Stage Manager

Stage managers are responsible for “calling” the show: during the rehearsals and performances, s/he tells the person who controls the lights when to change them; s/he tells the person who opens and closes the curtains when to do his job; she tells the performers when to enter and exit stage. S/he is the boss of the production during performances.

Make-Up and Wig Master

Just like in the movies, opera singers wear make-up on stage. Sometimes the make-up is elaborate (a young singer must be made-up to look old, for example) and sometimes it is simple. But in order for the singers’ faces to be seen under bright lights and in a large auditorium, all must wear make-up. Wigs are often used, even when the singers’ own hair will look fine, because it is easier for the wig master to set the wig than work with the singer’s natural hair.

Prompter

Prompter is responsible for giving **lines** to singers/actors during the performance. This job could be quite challenging, considering that opera is a multilingual art form. Additionally, it requires the prompter to be a superb musician and communicator.

Singers/Instrumentalists/ Actors/Supers

The **principal singers** are cast in the primary rolls of the opera, and make the story come alive by simultaneously singing and acting on stage. There are different voice types for women and men. Operas are usually sung in the language in which they were composed, which means that opera singers must be able to sing Italian, German, French, Spanish, Czech, Russian and many other languages. Each opera **orchestra** is made up of many instruments: string, wind, and percussion, to name a few. Each instrument has a unique sound when played by itself, and when played together, they create a powerful and impressive ensemble who infuse the opera with emotion and feelings while telling the story and reinforcing the personality of each of the opera’s characters. In opera, non-singing **actors** perform on stage as fully realized characters. They sometimes have lines and often have music written specifically to support their character. Supernumeraries (or **supers**) perform as extras who move about the stage to support the story and the director’s vision. The chorus is made up of professional singers who perform as a group to support the principal singers and advance the story.