

Teacher Tool 36: Opera for Children

Opera for Children

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to describe the characteristics of an opera.
2. Students will critique a performance of an opera.
3. Students will write and perform an opera for, and performed by, children.

Type of Teacher Tool: Whole Class Activity

Targeted Grade Level(s): 4-8

Targeted Curriculum Areas: Fine Arts—Music, Theater

Targeted Standards(s):

Resources/Materials Needed:

1. Music 3 “The Very Last Green Thing”
2. Theater 17 “Interview with Director Doug Scholz-Carlson”
3. Theater 18 “Interview with Music Director Vince Lee”
4. Theater 19 “Interview with Set Designer Scott Neale”
5. Theater 20 “Interview with Costume Designer Stacy Harris”
6. Theater 21 “Interview with Lighting Designer Joe Clapper”
7. Computer
8. Writing materials for script and music
9. Performance Space

Teacher Instructions:

1. The teacher will prepare the students for watching the Music 3 video by describing an opera compared to a musical and/or straight play. It would be beneficial for the teacher to be familiar with the plot of the opera before students view the video performance. Teachers should also introduce vocabulary related to an opera production such as: musical score, libretto, cast, set design, costume design, lighting design, etc.
2. Students will watch the performance of The Very Last Green Thing that runs from the beginning until 36:40 of Music 3 video listed above.
3. After the viewing, the teacher will guide discussion as to the criteria of a performance that makes it an opera, not a musical or straight play.
4. The teacher will guide a discussion about how this particular opera is for and performed by children.
5. Invite the students to critique the performance as to the music, plot, libretto, costuming, set design, acting, singing performances, etc.
6. To give students an idea of what it means to perform in an opera, watch the second part of the Music 3 video. This is an interview with the cast and director of the opera seen in the performance. The interview begins at the 36:40 mark of the video and continues to its end.
7. Guide discussion about part 2 and begin to address the idea of developing an opera with the class.
8. Divide the class into small groups and have them brainstorm characters and a plot for their opera. Have them limit the number of characters and length and complexity of the plot in any way that makes the most sense for the students in your class and the time you have available for the activity. Have each group create a list of the characters in their opera and the major plot points of their opera to turn in to you.

9. After each group has turned in their brainstormed characters and plot list, begin a conversation about different backstage roles that are essential in the creation of an opera production: director, music director, set designer, costume designer, and lighting designer.
10. To give students the opportunity to learn more about those backstage roles from the people who performed them for the opera they watched, have them view the rest of the videos listed above.
11. After viewing the videos, guide student discussion and questions about the roles and have them think about which of those roles they would like to help with in the production of their original opera.
12. Now begin the process of determining the characters and plot for your opera. Present each group's character list and plot points, engage in class discussion, and eventually come to a decision about which plot and character list your class wants to use to develop into their opera.

Once the plot and characters have been determined, continue the process of creating your opera in the manner that best fits your class and time available. Perhaps this activity occurs in a short period of time such as two weeks or over the course of an entire quarter, semester, or school year, breaking up the work into different class periods over that span of time. Have students select what part of the process they want to help with: music writing, lyric/story writing, costumes, lighting, set design, etc. End with a performance by the class. Invite parents, other classes, administrators, etc. to be part of your audience.

Optional Thought: Consider having the plot of the opera be related to other curriculum you are studying in class. For example: explorers you may be studying in Social Studies, areas of investigation you are pursuing in Science, etc.

Assessment/Evaluation Option:

1. Have students write a short paper describing the process they used to create the class opera and important concepts they learned about an opera, music, teamwork, theater, the subject matter of the opera, etc.
2. Have students critique their performance for an exercise in self-evaluation.