

THE GOLDEN COCKEREL

Rimsky-Korsakov

Social Studies: Historical Settings for Opera

Students Will

- Read *The Golden Cockerel* synopsis
- Read **The Characters** for character analysis
- Research a civilization, landmarks, or literary work with which to set a story
- Write a brief setting and story as the basis for an opera

Copies for Each Student

- *The Golden Cockerel* synopsis
- **The Characters**
- Social Studies Activity Worksheet

Getting Ready

Prepare internet access for possible research for guided practice or group work. Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your group.

Introduction

Have your students read *The Golden Cockerel* Synopsis and **The Characters**. Give each student a copy of the **Social Studies Activity Worksheet** or display it on a screen. Give an overview of the assignment, and point out the information your students are expected to research and write about. To align with Texas TEKS, it is recommended that research topics be tailored according to grade level:

Grade 6: Societies of the contemporary world.

Grade 7: Texas history, from natural Texas to present.

Grade 8: United States history from the early colonial period through Reconstruction.

U.S. History Studies since 1877: U.S. History from Reconstruction to the present day.

World History Studies: Societies of ancient Greece, Rome, India, Persia, China, and Medieval to Renaissance Europe.

Guided/Independent Practice

Depending on your grade level, the ability of your students, and time constraints, you may choose to have students work as a whole class, in small groups, with a partner, or individually. Read the directions on the **Activity Worksheet**. Have students select topics and begin research. This can be done in class or as an outside assignment. Have students fill in their research information, characters, and write a short summary of their dramatic plot. Have students share their answers individually or by groups and tell why they chose their settings and story elements.

Evaluation

Have students present their ideas to the class for discussion and evaluation. The teacher may want to guide the discussion.

For Further Study

Students may want to do additional research on civilizations and landmarks in which to stage a drama or other related topics online or in their school library. Their findings can be shared with the class at the beginning of a later lesson.

TEKS: Social Studies

Grade 6

- (16) Culture. The student understands that all societies have basic institutions in common even though the characteristics of these institutions may differ. (A)
- (21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

Grade 7

- (21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

Grade 8

- (23) Culture. The student understands the relationships between and among people from various groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. (C)
- (29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

United States History Studies Since 1877

- (26) Culture. The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. (C)

United States History Studies Since 1877, continued

- (29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology.

World History Studies

- (25) Culture. The student understands how the development of ideas has influenced institutions and societies. (A and B)
- (29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (F)

TEKS: Language Arts

Grade 6

(12) Analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, and relationships. (F).

Grade 7

(12) Analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts and relationships. (F).

Grade 8

(12) Analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts and relationships. (F).

English Language Arts and Reading, English I

(5) Analyze how authors develop complex yet believable characters in works of fiction through a range of literary devices, including character foils. (B).

English Language Arts and Reading, English II

(5) Analyze differences in the characters' moral dilemmas in works of fiction across different countries or cultures. B.

English Language Arts and Reading, English III

(5) Analyze the internal and external development of characters through a range of literary devices. (B)

English Language Arts and Reading, English III

(5) Analyze the internal and external development of characters through a range of literary devices. B.

English Language Arts and Reading, English IV

(5) Analyze the moral dilemmas and quandaries presented in works of fiction as revealed by the underlying motivations and behaviors of the characters. B.

Correlates: Language Arts, Drama

Gardner's Intelligences: Verbal-Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical

Bloom's Taxonomy: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Synthesis, Evaluation

Bibliography

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The Golden Cockerel Synopsis

PROLOGUE

A mysterious Astrologer warns the audience that he is about to conjure up a cautionary tale.

ACT ONE

Dodon's Throne Room

Tsar Dodon complains that he is tired of warfare and that his neighbors threaten invasion. He asks his councilors and his two sons how to avoid future conflicts, but they offer differing opinions. The Astrologer appears with a magic Golden Cockerel who, from a high perch, can warn of any danger. Dodon is elated and promises any reward the Astrologer can name. The Astrologer wants a binding contract from Dodon, but he refuses, explaining that his whims and orders are the law. Later, the Cockerel offers reassurance to all for a restful evening. In his dreams, Dodon sees a vision of the Queen of Shemakho. Suddenly the Cockerel sounds the alarm and the army is mobilized, led by Dodon's two sons. Dodon dons his rusty armor, which he has grotesquely outgrown, and goes off to battle.

ACT TWO

A Mountain Gorge

Looking in vain for the battle, Dodon stumbles upon the bodies of his two sons, who have apparently stabbed each other to death. The beautiful Queen of Shemakha appears, singing her Hymn to the Sun, and brazenly declares that she has come to subdue Dodon, not by force, but through seduction. At her request, Dodon banishes his loyal commander Polkan, and orders his beheading in an attempt to impress her. The Queen agrees to return with Dodon as his wife.

ACT THREE

The Capital

A procession welcomes Tsar Dodon and his Queen to the capital. The Astrologer reappears to claim his promised reward, demanding the Queen of Shemakha. Dodon flares up in fury, striking down the Astrologer. The sky darkens. The Golden Cockerel, loyal to the Astrologer, pecks Dodon to death. When light returns, both the Cockerel and the Queen of Shemakha have vanished. The terrified crowd laments.

EPILOGUE

The Astrologer announces the end of his story, reminding the audience that what they have witnessed was "merely illusion." He leaves with the cryptic assurance that only he and the Queen of Shemakha were real people; all the rest were dream and delusion.

Courtesy of Santa Fe Opera

The Characters

Tsar Dodon: (bass) Ruler of a fairy-tale kingdom. He wants to rule his kingdom by his whims and is worried about being invaded.

General Polkan: (bass) The King's most trusted advisor.

Astrologer: (tenor) The narrator of the opera and an adviser to the Tsar. He gives Dodon the Golden Cockerel in exchange for a binding contract.

Tsaritsa of Shemakha: (soprano) queen of the kingdom at war with Tsar Dodon, her goal is to conquer Tsar Dodon through seduction.

Golden Cockerel: (soprano) A magical bird who can warn of coming danger.

Social Studies Activity Worksheet

The creative genius of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov created *The Golden Cockerel*. The characters and main plot could possibly be set in any time-period in any society on earth. A lazy ruler fearing invasion and defeat, the one person who can bring about defeat, a warning sign of inevitable danger, and the danger of corruption - all could be reinterpreted to other settings and eras you have studied. Or maybe a different story is in order.

Assignment

Your assignment is to plan an opera of your own. You may choose to use the story of *The Golden Cockerel* or you can create an entirely new opera of your own. Select a time period, society, or culture that you may have previously read about in social studies as research for your characters and main plot. Be sure to select a place for the action to happen. It may be a real place, like the Acropolis in Athens, the Forbidden City of China, Machu Picchu in Peru, the Alamo, or even the Civil War South. You will need to do a little research on your topics, obtain information and possibly images, write out your idea, and present your plan to the class.

Your Opera

Your plan for a new dramatic opera should contain the following:

1. What era, civilization, or society would be the basis for your opera?
2. Briefly write about two or three main characters in your opera. Names are not necessary, but tell us who these people are.
3. What place would be the setting? Would you use a landmark that still exists, or something generic, like a Native American village in Texas?
4. Briefly tell the story you would like to portray. What is the main conflict or problem of the story?
5. Explain why you chose the time and place that you selected, and share your research on the topic, either from the library or web.

All of this information can be as brief or as detailed as your teacher requests. The basic facts would likely fit on a single sheet of notebook paper or you may use the **Planning Your Opera** sheet. Your research may yield much more information.

Name _____

Date _____

**Social Studies Activity Worksheet
Planning Your Opera**

1. What era, civilization, or society would be the basis for your opera?

2. Briefly write about two or three main characters in your opera.

3. What place would be the setting?

4. Briefly tell the story you would like to portray. What is the main conflict or problem of the story?

5. Explain why you chose the time and place that you selected, and share your research on the topic, either from the library or web.
