

# THE GOLDEN COCKEREL

*Rimsky-Korsakov*

## Language Arts: An Opera Review

### Students will

- Read for information, listen to the musical excerpts, and understand how to review an opera
- Attend or watch an opera production and make careful observations.
- Write a review of the production.

### Copies for Each Student

- *The Golden Cockerel* synopsis
- The Characters
- Opera Review Guide

### Getting Ready

Tell your students that art and theater critics play an important role in every artform. Guide a class discussion about opera critics and reviews, being sure to focus on the benefits and possible disadvantages of having a critic review a performance. Visit the following links to read and prepare examples of opera reviews for the class: <https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/opera> or <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts/opera>

While reading, ensure the students are mindful of the following questions in relation to the class discussion:

- What kinds of details about a performance are included in an opera review?
- What categories of the performance are mentioned?
- Does an opera critic have the ability to influence whether or not readers will attend the show?
- What responsibilities does a critic have when reviewing a performance?
- According to the critics you found, what makes an opera performance “good” or “bad”?

Tell your students they will now become opera critics and will write a review about an opera performance or scenes from an opera. Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your group. Prepare web access with audio and video to access the listening examples of *The Golden Cockerel*.

### Introduction

Have your students read *The Golden Cockerel* synopsis. Give each student a copy of The Characters or display it on the screen. Listen to the musical examples provided and discuss the conflicts and problems the characters face.

### Guided/Independent Practice

Choose which portions of the Opera Review Guide you wish your students to complete. Depending on your grade level, the ability of your students, and time constraints, you may choose to have the students

complete the assignment as a class, in groups, with a partner, or individually. The activity can be used as persuasive writing practice and as a tool to practice completing the writing process.

### **Evaluation**

Have students share their reviews individually or in groups and provide feedback on their use of literary elements.

### **For Further Study**

The teacher may want to have students research the original sources of *The Golden Cockerel*. Students may want to do additional research on Rimsky-Korsakov, along with other related topics online or in their school library. Students may also want to research and review other operas, plays, and performances. Their findings can be shared with the class at the beginning of a later lesson.

### **TEKS: Language Arts**

#### **Grade 6 (110.18.B.18)**

Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write persuasive essays for appropriate audiences that establish a position and include sound reasoning, detailed and relevant evidence, and consideration of alternatives.

#### **Grades 7-8 (110.19.B.18 / 110.20.B.18)**

Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write a persuasive essay to the appropriate audience that: (A) establishes a clear thesis or position; (B) considers and responds to the views of others and anticipates and answers reader concerns and counter-arguments; and (C) includes evidence that is logically organized to support the author's viewpoint and that differentiates between fact and opinion.

#### **English I (110.31.B.16)**

Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write an argumentative essay to the appropriate audience that includes: (A) a clear thesis or position based on logical reasons supported by precise and relevant evidence; (B) consideration of the whole range of information and views on the topic and accurate and honest representation of these views; (C) counter-arguments based on evidence to anticipate and address objections; (D) an organizing structure appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context; and (E) an analysis of the relative value of specific data, facts, and ideas.

#### **English II (110.32.B.16)**

Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write an argumentative essay to the appropriate audience that includes: (A) a clear thesis or position based on logical reasons supported by precise and relevant evidence; (B) consideration of the whole range of information and views on the topic and accurate and honest representation of these views (i.e., in the author's own words and not out of context); (C) counter-arguments based on evidence to anticipate and address objections; (D) an organizing structure appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context; (E) an analysis of the relative value of specific data, facts, and ideas; and (F) a range of appropriate appeals (e.g., descriptions, anecdotes, case studies, analogies, illustrations).

**English III (110.33.B.16)**

Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write an argumentative essay (e.g., evaluative essays, proposals) to the appropriate audience that includes: (A) a clear thesis or position based on logical reasons supported by precise and relevant evidence, including facts, expert opinions, quotations, and/or expressions of commonly accepted beliefs; (B) accurate and honest representation of divergent views (i.e., in the author's own words and not out of context); (C) an organizing structure appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context; (D) information on the complete range of relevant perspectives; (E) demonstrated consideration of the validity and reliability of all primary and secondary sources used; and (F) language attentively crafted to move a disinterested or opposed audience, using specific rhetorical devices to back up assertions (e.g., appeals to logic, emotions, ethical beliefs).

**English IV (110.34.B.16)**

Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write an argumentative essay (e.g., evaluative essays, proposals) to the appropriate audience that includes: (A) a clear thesis or position based on logical reasons with various forms of support (e.g., hard evidence, reason, common sense, cultural assumptions); (B) accurate and honest representation of divergent views (i.e., in the author's own words and not out of context); (C) an organizing structure appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context; (D) information on the complete range of relevant perspectives; (E) demonstrated consideration of the validity and reliability of all primary and secondary sources used; (F) language attentively crafted to move a disinterested or opposed audience, using specific rhetorical devices to back up assertions (e.g., appeals to logic, emotions, ethical beliefs); and (G) an awareness and anticipation of audience response that is reflected in different levels of formality, style, and tone.

**TEKS: Music**

Historical/cultural heritage: The student relates music to history, to society, and to culture. The student is expected to: classify representative examples of music by style and by historical period or culture, justifying the classifications; describe the effects of music on society, culture, and technology.

**Correlates**

Music, Drama

**Gardner's Intelligences**

Verbal-Linguistic, Musical, Interpersonal

**Bloom's Taxonomy**

Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Evaluation, and Synthesis

**Sources**

*The Golden Cockerel* Libretto

Warrack, John and West, Ewan, [The Oxford Dictionary of Opera](#), Oxford University Press, 1992.

**Online Resources**

[www.oxfordmusiconline.com](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com)

[www.metopera.org](http://www.metopera.org)

[www.aria-database.com](http://www.aria-database.com)

## ***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.

## **Listening Examples**

**Act II:** “Hymn to the Sun” | Tsaritsa Shemakah sings to the sun, praising its beauty and light-giving powers. She tells Tsar Dodon and General Polkan how her country is beautiful and happy because of the joy that the sun brings to it.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AF4Y7kaB\\_g8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AF4Y7kaB_g8)

**Act III:** “Wedding Procession” | Dodon brings Tsaritsa Shemakah back to his city as his bride.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tzvjG8OReI>

## **Opera Review Guide**

### **Writing a performance review**

#### **Before the performance:**

Become familiar with the opera you are reviewing, *The Golden Cockerel*. Have a basic understanding of the plot, characters and the production you are attending by reading the synopsis and learning about the performers, conductor, designer, or director.

#### **During the performance:**

- Actively observe and take notes. Some things to consider:
- What is the overall feeling of the production?
- How are the performers handling their roles? Are there any first time performers making a “debut”?
- Is the set design supporting the production? Does it help tell the story and contribute to the mood in an effective way?
- How is the orchestra performing?
- Write down the moments that make an impression – good or bad – and why.

#### **After the performance:**

- Continue to write down your observations and reflections on the production. Talk with your classmate and teacher about what you all saw.
- Use the following paragraph outline to help as you write your review.

## **Paragraph Outline**

### Introduction: Paragraph One

1. What is the name of the opera and the name of the composer?
2. What is the period the opera was written in?
3. What are three words you could use to describe your feelings towards the opera and the composer's musical style? (ex. humorous, uninteresting, fascinating, amusing, dull, moving, dramatic).
4. What rating would you give the opera production? (ex. 1-5 stars, 5 meaning you really loved the performance).

\*Your review must have a three-point thesis statement.

### Summary: Paragraph Two

1. What is the central idea or theme presented in the opera?
2. What problems does the main character face?
3. How does the main character deal with these problems?
4. Where and when does the opera take place? (the setting)
5. Who are the important characters involved in the opera and what do they want?

\*The summary could be broken down into two paragraphs. Ex. One paragraph analyzing the opera's theme, setting, and point of view and another paragraph explaining the problems that the main character faces.

### Reaction: Paragraph Three

1. What is the first word you used to describe the opera? Select specific examples from the show to explain why you chose that word to describe it.
2. What is the second word you used to describe the opera? Select specific examples from the show to explain why you chose that word to describe it.
3. What is the third word you used to describe the opera? Select specific examples from the show to explain why you chose that word to describe it.

\*Properly integrated quotations with in-text citations must be used.

### Recommendation/Conclusion: Paragraph Four

1. Restate your rating of the production and briefly explain why you chose this rating.
2. Provide a specific recommendation for this production (consider age, interests, etc...)
3. Provide three reasons why this opera would be recommendable to such a person as you described above.

### Works Cited Page

1. Provide a proper MLA-format reference to the opera.

## **Paragraph Organizer**

### Writing a Three-Point Thesis Statement

The three-point thesis statement will be your rating of the opera in the introductory paragraph.

For example: I would give the opera, \_\_\_\_\_, three out of five stars because \_\_\_\_\_  
→, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

Your three reasons or points should outline your body paragraphs.

### Introduction: Paragraph One

1. What thought-provoking hook can I use to draw in my readers? Include name of opera and composer.
2. In what period and style is the opera?
3. What are three words I would use to describe the opera?
4. What rating do I give the opera? (Three-point thesis statement)

### Summary: Paragraph Two

1. How do the theme, setting, and point of view contribute to the opera? (This could be a paragraph on its own if you would prefer it to be).
2. Where and when does the opera take place?
3. What is the central idea or theme present in the opera?
4. What problems does the main character face? Who are the important characters involved in the opera and what do they want? Do they help or hinder the main character?
5. How does the main character deal with these problems?

Reaction: Paragraph Three

1. What is the first word you used to describe the opera?
2. What is an example from the show that can help to explain why you chose this word?

\*Your quote should not stand alone: introduce it, state it, cite where it happened in the opera and explain it. For example: I chose the word \_\_\_\_\_ to describe the opera because in Act \_\_\_\_, scene \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (state what happened in detail). In this selection, \_\_\_\_\_ which supports my word choice.

3. What is the second word you used to describe the opera?
4. What is an example from the opera that can help explain why you chose this word?
5. What is the third word you used to describe the opera?
6. What is an example from the show that can help explain why you chose this word?

Recommendation/Conclusion: Paragraph Four

1. What is your overall rating of the opera and why did you choose this rating?
2. Who would you recommend this opera to? (even if you did not enjoy it). Remember to state the age and interests of the ideal audience for this production.
3. Why would this opera be a good choice for this audience to attend? Provide three reasons.
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.