



SOCIAL STUDIES: Historical Settings for Opera/Becoming the Librettist

Students Will

- Read for information and answer questions
- Research an event, civilization, landmark, or literary work as a source for a setting
- Write a brief setting and story as the basis for an opera

Copies for Each Student: “Our Composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart”, “What is a Librettist”, Mozart Timeline, Activity Worksheet

Copies for the Teacher: “Our Composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart”, “What is a Librettist”, Mozart Timeline, Activity Worksheet, Answer Key

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 students.

Introduction

Explain to your students that a commissioned work is a piece of visual or performing art created at the request and expense of someone else. Begin the lesson by explaining to your students that “Mozart was 12 years old when he received a commission for the opera, *Bastien and Bastienne*. He had to work with the librettists, Friedrich Wilhelm Weiskern and J. A. Schachtner, to create music for the story”. Have your students read “Our Composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart” and “What is a Librettist”. Give each student a copy of “The World during Mozart’s Life” and 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, you may provide and tailor research topics according to grade level:

6th Grade: Societies of the contemporary world.

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

8th Grade: 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. The students will need to 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 librettists or 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.

If time allows

If time allows, have students write the words to a short two-line aria that will be sung by one of the main characters in their opera.

TEKS

Social Studies

6th Grade

113.18 b. 16 A Culture

The student understands that all societies have basic institutions in common even though the characteristics of these institutions may differ. The student is expected to: (A) identify institutions basic to all societies, including government, economic, educational, and religious institutions

113.18 b. 21 A 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. The student is expected to: (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; and artifacts to acquire information about various world cultures

7th Grade

113.19 b. 21 A 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. The student is expected to: (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas

8th Grade

113.20 b. 23 C 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. The student is expected to: (C) identify ways conflicts between people from various racial, ethnic, and religious groups were resolved

113.20 b. 29 A 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. The student is expected to: (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States

United States History Studies Since 1877

113.41 c. 26 C Culture

The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. The student is expected to: (C) explain how the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, gender, and religious groups shape American culture

113.41 c. 29 A Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (A) use a variety of both primary and secondary valid sources to acquire information and to analyze and answer historical questions.

World History Studies

113.42 c. 25 A,B Culture

The student understands how the development of ideas has influenced institutions and societies. The student is expected to: (A) summarize the fundamental ideas and institutions of Eastern civilizations that originated in China and India; (B) summarize the fundamental ideas and institutions of Western civilizations that originated in Greece and Rome

113.42 c. 29 F Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (F) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, drawing inferences and conclusions, and developing connections between historical events over time.

Correlates: Language Arts, Music

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

Bloom's Taxonomy: Remember, Understand, Apply, Evaluate, Create

Sources:

Warrack, John and West, Ewan, *The Oxford Dictionary of Opera*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

Freeman, John W., *Stories of the Great Operas*, W. W. Norton & Company, 1984.

Goulding, Phil G., *Ticket to the Opera*, Fawcett Columbine, 1996.

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

"Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2004. *Encyclopedia.com*. (March 10, 2014). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404704620.html>

MICHAEL KENNEDY and JOYCE BOURNE. "Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus." *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*. 1996. *Encyclopedia.com*. (March 10, 2014). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O76-MozartWolfgangAmadeus.html>

Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Vol. 1, A-d. New York: Grove, 1992.

Bastien and Bastienne

Our Composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Austria, where most people speak German. Wolfgang is a German name that means 'wolf path' and his middle name, Amadeus (Am-uh-day-us), means 'God's love' in Latin. Mozart is most famous for writing music. He was a composer, and is still one of the greatest musicians of all time. He was famous as a child because he could play and write music from the age of 4. He grew up to write some of the most beautiful music ever heard.

Mozart was born on January 27, 1756, in the town of Salzburg, in Austria. He lived before there were cars, trains or planes. When Mozart travelled around Europe, he went in a coach pulled by horses or by boat. The internet, cell phones and CD players did not exist. When people wanted to hear music they had to play it themselves, or go hear it performed live because there were no recordings. Mozart's mother and father were both musicians, and they knew he was a musical prodigy.

Wolfgang could play the keyboard at the age of 3 and by the time he was 5, he was writing his own songs. His talent was apparent and he seemed to have music in his head. He could pick up a violin and play it, without even being shown how. Mozart's sister Maria Anna was a good musician too. Mozart called her Nannerl, and they were very good friends. They made up their own secret language, and told stories about a magic kingdom where they were king and queen. Leopold, Wolfgang's father, took his two children to Vienna (the capitol of Austria) where they played for the Emperor of Austria at his palace. Everyone was amazed at the musical phenomenon, and the Emperor called Mozart a 'little magician'.

In 1763 when Mozart was 7 years old, Leopold took the children on a tour of Europe. They went to France, and then took a ship to England. They stayed in London for a year where the children played for King George III. Wherever Mozart traveled he enthralled audiences, and he collaborated with many famous musicians and composers from whom he learned a great deal. His father took him to Italy, and there he saw opera for the first time. His father requested that he write his own opera, and at the young age of 12 he wrote *Bastien and Bastienne*. Mozart astonished everyone with his impressive talent. If he heard a song once, he could go home and write down all the notes from memory.

When he was older, Mozart gave piano lessons, but wasn't very responsible and seldom had money despite his lucrative compositions. In 1777 his mother went with him to Germany where he hoped to get a job as a musician in the royal court. Back then, monarchs had their own orchestras. In Germany, he fell in love with a singer, Aloysia Weber, but it was not meant to be. Aloysia married someone else, and Mozart later married her sister Constanze. Mozart was eccentric, and often bungled his relationships with his employers, so he continued in his nomadic lifestyle before he finally settled in Vienna. Mozart never stopped writing music. He wrote music for piano and violin, for orchestras and singers and chamber music for a quartet (4 players). He also wrote a substantial amount of church music.

Mozart could write music very quickly and once wrote an opera in 3 weeks. He also wrote 41 symphonies. He wrote parody operas, such as *Così fan tutte* (*All Women Are Like That*) and serious ones like *The Magic Flute*. He wrote solemn church music, and shorter, carefree pieces such as *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (*A Little Night Music*). Mozart was working on a piece of funeral music, called a Requiem, in the summer of 1791, when he became ill. No one knows what was wrong with him, but he succumbed to the illness and died in December 1791. The great composer was so poor he was buried with other poor people in an unmarked 'paupers' grave'. Today Mozart's music is enjoyed all over the world. People still listen to it and it has had immense influence on the music world.

Bastien and Bastienne

What is a Librettist?

The titles of many famous operas are normally introduced by the composer or person who wrote the music. However, opera is a product of teamwork between the composer and the librettist.

The librettist is the person responsible for the lyrics or words of an opera. It is his or her job to tell the story in a way that is both poetic and easy to sing and understand. Librettists are often poets or writers who use different sources such as famous plays, literature, historical events, current events, and their imagination as the basis for an opera. The librettist must work closely with the composer to ensure the lyrics work well with the music to create a masterpiece. The libretto (words for the opera) can be written by a single person or a team of writers. At the age of 12, Mozart worked with librettists, Wilhelm Weiskern and J. A. Schachtner, to create the opera, *Bastien and Bastienne*.

Although they each have slightly different responsibilities, the composer and librettist both have a common goal, and they ultimately share in the successes and failures of an opera. There have been successful composer-librettist partnerships with well-known librettists throughout the years. Mozart teamed with famous librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, for his 3 famous operas *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Lorenzo da Ponte also worked with other composers and wrote libretti for over 20 operas.

Because there were no cell phones during Mozart's lifetime, composers and librettists often communicated through letters or by meeting one another to discuss the likes, dislikes, and progress of an opera. Now, in the 21st century, many composers and librettists communicate through email, over the phone, or in person. The methods for each composer-librettist partnership may be different, but the overall goal remains the same; to create a great opera.

Bastien and Bastienne

The World During Mozart's Time 6th – 8th Grade

World Timeline

- 1756: French and Indian War begins between Britain and France. Seven Years War Begins
- 1760: George III becomes King of Britain.
- 1763: Treaty of Paris ends French and Indian War.
- 1765: First paved roads appear in London
- 1767: Joseph Priestley invents carbonated water - soda water.
- 1770: The Boston Massacre occurs.
- 1771: The first volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica is published
- 1773: The Boston Tea Party occurs.
- 1775: American Revolution begins (Paul Revere's ride, Battle at Bunker Hill)
Alexander Cummins invents the flush toilet
- 1776: The Colonies issues Declaration of Independence.
Adam Smith publishes The Wealth of Nations.
- 1779: Photosynthesis was first discovered by Jan Ingenhousz
- 1781: Spanish settlers founded Los Angeles.
William Herschel announces discovery of the planet, Uranus.
- 1783: American Revolution ends with the signing of The Treaty of Paris.
Joseph Michel Montgolfier and Jacques Etienne Montgolfier invent the hot-air balloon.
- 1784: Benjamin Franklin possibly invents Bifocals.
Joseph Bramah invents the safety lock.
- 1787: United States Constitution was written in Philadelphia and submitted to the states for ratification.
- 1788: United States Constitution is ratified by the signature of New Hampshire
- 1789: Washington is inaugurated as the President of the United States
The Bastille is stormed in Paris, initiating the French Revolution
- 1790: Washington, D.C. is founded as the permanent federal capital of the U.S.
- 1791: The first Ten Amendments to the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, are ratified.
Early bicycles are invented in Scotland

Mozart Timeline

- 1756: January 27, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is born in Salzburg, Austria
- 1762: Mozart plays for the Bavarian elector and the Austrian Empress
- 1763: Wolfgang and his sister, Nannerl, tour Europe as child prodigies
- 1764: Wolfgang composes his first symphony at the age of eight
- 1766: Mozart travels to Vienna
- 1768: Premiere of Mozart's first opera at the age of twelve in Vienna, *Bastien und Bastienne*
- 1770: *Mitridate, re di Ponto* is a great success in Milan at age fifteen
Ludwig van Beethoven is born
- 1775: *La Finta Giardiniera* is a success in Munich
- 1777: Wolfgang begins traveling Europe with his mother, Anna Maria Mozart
- 1778: Anna Maria Mozart dies in Paris
- 1779: Mozart begins working for the cathedral and court in Salzburg
- 1781: *Idomeneo* premieres in Munich. Mozart moves to Vienna
- 1782: Mozart marries Constanze Weber following success of *The Abduction from The Seraglio* premiere in Vienna
- 1783: Mozart composes the *Mass in C minor*
- 1784: Mozart's son, Karl Thomas Mozart, is born.
Mozart meets Joseph Haydn.
- 1786: *The Marriage of Figaro* premieres in Vienna and is a tremendous success in Prague the following year
- 1787: Leopold Mozart dies.
Don Giovanni is a great success in Prague.
Beethoven possibly meets Mozart
- 1790: *Così fan tutte* premieres in Vienna but is not successful
- 1791: Mozart's son, Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart, is born.
The Magic Flute premieres in Vienna.
Mozart dies at age 35.

Bastien and Bastienne

Social Studies Activity 6th - 8th Grades

The creativity of 12 year old Mozart and librettists, Wilhelm Weiskern and J. A. Schachtner, formed the opera *Bastien and Bastienne*. This story tells the tale of young love, temptation, and redemption – all of these concepts can be reinterpreted and set in any place, with any character, in any time period.

Librettist often used different events in history, dramatic plays, famous literature, or personal experiences as sources for their stories. Imagine that you are a librettist and have just received a commission to create an opera. Select an event from “The World during Mozart’s Life” or events from your own life as inspiration for your story. You may use the theme and characters of *Bastien and Bastienne*, create a sequel to Mozart’s original story, or create an entirely new story. You may also use a time period, society, or culture that you may have previously read about in social studies as research for your characters and main plot. 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 Plan

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

1. Will you use an event listed in the timeline? If so, what event will you use as the setting for your plot? If not, what event, era, civilization, or society would be the basis for your opera?
2. Tell why you chose the event, time, and place that you selected. Be sure to share your research on the topic, either from the library or web.
3. Who are the characters in your opera? Names Are not necessary, but provide a few details about each character.
4. Briefly tell the story you would like to portray. What is the main conflict or problem of the story? How many acts or scenes will be in the opera?
5. If you could choose any musician to compose the music for your opera, who would you choose?

Bonus Assignment: Words and Music

While it is the composer’s job to create the music, the librettist must write the lyrics and text for opera. Write the first two lines of an aria (song) that will be sung by one of the main characters in your opera. You may write the complete aria (song) if time allows.

See the Dallas Opera’s *Bastien and Bastienne* Music II Lesson for more practice on writing the text/lyrics for arias in an opera.

All of this information can be as brief or as detailed as your teacher requests. The basic facts would probably fit on a single sheet of notebook paper, or you may use the planning form below. Your research may yield much more information.

Bastien and Bastienne
Social Studies Activity Worksheet 6th - 8th Grades
Planning Your Opera

1. Will you use an event listed in the timeline? If so, what event will you use for the setting of your story? If not, what event, era, civilization, or society would be the basis of your opera?

2. Tell a little about the setting for your opera and why you chose the event, time, and place you selected. Be sure to share your research on the topic?

3. Who are the characters in your opera? Names are not necessary, but provide a few details about each main character.

4. Briefly tell the story of your opera. What is the main conflict or problem of the story? How will the conflict be resolved? How many acts or scenes will be in the opera?

5. If you could choose any musician or composer to compose the music for your opera, who would you choose?

Social Studies Activity Worksheet 6th - 8th Grades

Planning Your Opera

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

All answers will be unique and individual.

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

All answers will be unique and individual.

3. What place would be the setting?

All answers will be unique and individual.

4. What is the main conflict or problem of the story?

All answers will be unique and individual.

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

All answers will be unique and individual.
