

THE LITTLE PRINCE

Social Studies: Planning Your Opera

Students Will

- Read for information
- Research a civilization, landmarks, or literary work in which to set a story
- Write a brief setting and story as the basis for an opera

Copies for the Teacher and Students

- "The Story of the Opera"
- "The Characters"
- "The People Behind the Opera"
- Activity Worksheet: Planning Your Opera

Getting Ready

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

Introduction

As a class or individually, have your students read:

- "The Story of the Opera"
- "The Characters"
- "The People Behind the Opera"

Tell Students: The composer and librettist team of Rachel Portman and Nicholas Wright created this opera, *The Little Prince*. They based the opera on a book of the same title written by author, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. While the exact time period in which the opera or book is set is not specified, the book was written and published in the early 1940s during World War II. Many times, authors will write stories drawing from situations they have experienced in their own lives. The setting of *The Little Prince* is based on a plane crash that Saint-Exupéry experienced in the Sahara Desert in 1935. While the story moves between the earthly desert setting and the planets in outer space visited by the Little Prince, the characters and plot could possibly be set in any time period in any society.

Give each student a copy of the **Activity Worksheet** or display it on 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 3: Contributions to the cultural heritage of communities, including literary works.

Grade 4: Contributions by various ethnic groups to Texas, including literary works.

Grade 5: Contributions by various groups to the United States, including literary works.

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 individually as an outside assignment. Have students fill in their research information, characters, and write a short summary of their plot. If students are working with a partner or in small groups, give them time to discuss their answers before writing them down. Have students share their answers individually or by groups and explain 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 3**

- (15) Culture. The student understands the importance of writers and artists to the cultural heritage of communities. (A)
- (17) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

Grade 4

- (19) Culture. The student understands the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups to Texas. (A)
- (21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

Grade 5

- (22) Culture. The student understands the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups to the United States. (A)
- (24) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

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)
- (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)

Correlates

Music, Drama, Language Arts

Gardner's Intelligences

Verbal-Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical

Bloom's Taxonomy

Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Synthesis, Evaluation

Online Resources

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

<https://rachelportman.co.uk/>

The Story of the Opera

A young pilot introduces himself to the audience. He explains how grown-ups never really understood him and that now, as an adult, he earns a living soaring through the sky. The stars sing to him as he glides through the air, but, despite the pleasant atmosphere, he suddenly loses control of his plane and crashes into the Sahara Desert.

The pilot looks over the damage and begins to try and fix the plane. But just as he grabs his tools, he's interrupted by a small boy who curiously asks the pilot to draw a sheep. Though confused at first, the pilot comes to know the boy as "the Little Prince," and, slowly, the prince reveals his unusual story.

We learn the prince was once the proud owner of a tiny asteroid, where he cared for a lovely rose whom he adored but who was also very difficult to please. She challenged him to leave his home and gain more wisdom in order to be able to take care of her better, and so... he set out to visit some neighboring planets. During his travels he met several strange adults, including a king, a vain man, a drunkard, a businessman, and a lamplighter. After meeting these men, the Little Prince—not quite satisfied with what he'd discovered so far—decided to journey to planet Earth.

The prince continues his story while the pilot listens. On Earth, the prince says, he met a slithering snake who claimed that his deadly poison could "ease" all the prince's worries. The Little Prince then encountered a garden full of roses and cried at the thought that his own rose might merely be one out of a million other common flowers.

The prince resumes his tale. Soon after meeting the roses, he adds, he was comforted by a friendly fox. The fox, who begged the prince to tame her and make her his own, gently explained that everything worthwhile is invisible and that such things cannot be touched, but can only be felt with the heart. She also told him that the bonds of love are what make all things—including ordinary flowers—uniquely special.

The pilot then cuts off the prince's story, saying that the two of them will need water if they are to continue to survive in the desert. Exhausted, they travel to a spot directly beneath the prince's planet (which sits high in the night sky) and discover a well. As they collect cool water from the crystal-clear well, the pilot realizes his friendly affection for the prince and begins to understand the fox's message.

Still, the prince longs to return to his rose as he has promised. Will the tired and weary Little Prince make it home? Will the pilot be able to keep the prince's lessons in his heart if the Little Prince disappears?

Synopsis Courtesy of Washington National Opera

The Characters

The Little Prince (Asteroid 612): A little boy who leaves his home planet and his beloved rose, to journey around the universe, ending up on Earth. There, he meets a pilot and tells him of his journey to several planets and the characters he has encountered along the way.

The Pilot: A young pilot who suddenly loses control of his plane and crashes into the Sahara Desert. While stranded in there trying to fix his plane, he is approached by the Little Prince.

The Rose: A single rose who is the object of the Little Prince's affection on his planet. She challenges him to leave his home and gain more wisdom to be able to take care of her better. Throughout his travels, she is always in his thoughts and heart.

The Fox: The Little Prince meets the fox in the desert on Earth. She is a wise creature, who teaches the Little Prince about the essence of life. After they become friends, the fox asks the Little Prince to tame her, which he does.

The Snake: The first living creature that the Little Prince encounters on the planet Earth is a snake, who speaks in riddles. The snake claims that his deadly poison could "ease" all the Little Prince's worries.

The Water (*off-stage singing*): When the Little Prince and Pilot travel through the desert, they hear singing coming from water in a well they discover.

The King: (Asteroid 325*): A resident of the first planet that the Little Prince visits after leaving his own planet. The king demands that his authority be respected and does not tolerate disobedience.

The Vain Man (Asteroid 326*): A conceited man living on the second planet the Little Prince visits. The vain man insists that everyone else admire him. He does not listen to anything but compliments and expects the Little Prince to shower him with praise.

The Drunkard (Asteroid 327*): Inhabitant of the third planet the little Prince visits. When the Little Prince asks the drunkard what he is doing, the drunkard tells the Little Prince that he is drinking to forget that he is ashamed of drinking.

The Businessman (Asteroid 328*):

The businessman lives on the fourth planet the Little Prince visits. The businessman always sits and counts stars on his planet. He thinks that he owns the stars, making him rich. The Little Prince explains to the businessman that he is of no use at all to the stars that he owns.

The Lamplighter (Asteroid 329*): A resident of the planet the Little Prince visits after leaving the businessman. On this planet, the lamplighter's job is to light and put out a lamp. He thinks that he has a terrible job because he must light the lamp once every minute so that his planet can make a complete turn every sixty seconds. The Little Prince, however, admires his dedication.

**Planet names found in the book that will not be named in the opera*

The People Behind the Opera

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry - author of book (or novella) on which the opera is based

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (June 29, 1900-July 31, 1944) —aviator, novelist, poet, and journalist— was born in Lyon, France as Antoine Marie Jean-Baptiste Roger de Saint-Exupéry. He had three sisters and a younger brother, Francois, who died at 15 during World War I. Francois' death greatly affected Saint-Exupéry, with imagery of him even appearing in *The Little Prince*.

As a young man, Saint-Exupéry tried to join the Naval Academy, but failed twice. Saint-Exupéry turned to the *2e Régiment de chasseurs à cheval* (2nd Mounted Hunters Regiment) in 1921. Through this military service, he took flying lessons and transferred from the French Army to the French Air Force. There, Saint-Exupéry had his first of many aircraft incidents. As a result, his then fiancée, Louise Lévêque de Vilmorin, influenced him to find an office job instead.

By 1926, he was no longer engaged and began flying again, this time for international postal flights. He worked for Aeropostale, flying to Senegal and South Morocco while stationed in Toulouse, France. In 1929, Saint-Exupéry was put in charge of Aeroposta Argentina, moving to Buenos Aires. His time with Aeropostale resulted in his first book, *Courrier Sud*- published in 1929, and the 1931 book, *Night Flight*. Both books were inspired by his tenure with Aeropostale. *Night Flight* was eventually adapted as a movie featuring John and Lionel Barrymore, Clark Gable, and Helen Hayes.

One of Saint-Exupéry's more famous crashes is when he and his co-pilot crashed in the Sahara while attempting to break a flight record. They were lost for three days in the desert, rescued by Bedouins, a nomadic Arab tribe. This would directly inspire *The Little Prince*.

In the 1930s, Saint-Exupéry's writing expanded to newspapers and more journalistic writing, covering events, critiquing and advocating for action. World War II and the opposing factions in France prompted his "Open Letter to Frenchmen Everywhere," calling for support against Nazi oppression. These actions led to his works being censored by both Vichy France (occupied by Nazi Germany) and Free France.

During the occupation of France, Saint-Exupéry and his wife, Consuelo Suncin, fled to the U.S.A. by way of Portugal. He spent time in New York City, Long Island, and Manhattan, with an extended stay in Quebec City, Canada. They stayed in North America from January 1941 to April 1943. His most famous work, *Le petit prince* (*The Little Prince*), was published in April of 1943, becoming one of the best-selling books in the world. Saint-Exupéry's passion for France and its fate led him to join the Free French Air Force in April of 1943. At 43, his health was declining for his multitude of previous crashes, even crashing once more during his stint with the Free French Air Force. He disappeared during a reconnaissance flight on July 31, 1944.

Rachel Portman - composer who set the libretto (i.e. the opera's "script") to music

Rachel Mary Berkeley Portman (December 11, 1960-), an Emmy and Academy Award-winning composer, was born in Haslemere, a town in Surrey, England. Portman studied Music at Worcester College, Oxford. Her first composing credit was *Privileged* (1982) and by 1996, with the composition for *Emma*, she was the first female composer to win an Academy Award. All in all, Portman has composed over 100 works for film, television, and theatre.

Nicholas Wright- librettist who converted Saint-Exupéry's book to a libretto ("script") for the opera.

Nicholas Verney Wright (1940-) was born in Cape Town, South Africa. As a child actor, he moved to London at 18 to continue his acting training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Before becoming a dramatist, he was a Casting Director and Artistic Director. Wright began writing and adapting work in the late 1970s. Since then, he has written over two dozen plays and adaptations.

Activity Sheet: Planning Your Opera

You will plan a new opera of your own. You can either plan your own version of *The Little Prince* or you may choose to create a new story for a new opera altogether. You will select a time period, society, or culture that you may have previously read about in social studies or history. You may plan your characters and their story. You might also select a famous work of literature to present. 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 another planet, like Mars. 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 opera should contain the following:

1. What era, civilization, or society would be the basis for your opera?
2. What characters would you use? 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 based.

Note: 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, but your research may yield much more information.