

Language Arts Lesson Plan: An Opera Review

Students will

- Learn the role of theater and opera critics
- Read the *Don Carlo Synopsis* and *The Characters* information sheet
- Listen to the musical excerpts and read examples of opera in preparation for attending the opera.
- Attend TDO's production of *Don Carlo* or watch excerpts from another production and make careful observations.
- Answer questions about the opera production and write an opera review

Copies for Each Student

- *Don Carlo Synopsis* and *The Characters*
- **Activity Worksheets**

Getting Ready

Prepare excerpts and opera review samples appropriate for your grade level. Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your group. Prepare web access with audio and video to access the listening examples on YouTube.

Introduction

Begin a discussion with your students concerning the role of an opera critic, ensuring that your students understand the functions, responsibilities, and influence of critics. Be sure the students consider the differences and similarities between live theater critics and movie critics. Students should discuss how such reviews inform and influence decisions.

Tell your students that opera critics often research about the opera before attending a performance to ensure they are able to focus on the production choices (singers, orchestra, costumes, set design, and directing). Have your students read the *Don Carlo Synopsis* or review the synopsis as a class. Give each student a copy of the information sheet **The Characters** or display it on the screen as the students listen to the musical examples provided. Lead a discussion about the different conflicts the characters face and help students list different ways to express such conflicts through opera.

Guided/Independent Practice

Choose which portion(s) of the Activity Worksheet you wish your students to complete depending on your grade level, the ability of your students, and time constraints. Portions of the writing activity can be used as persuasive writing practice or practice for the entire 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 other sources and types of media for review. Students may want to do additional research on Giuseppe Verdi, original sources for *Don Carlo*, and with 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: Language Arts

Grade 6 (110.22.B.11 (C))

Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--genres. The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful. The student is expected to compose multiparagraph argumentative texts using genre characteristics and craft.

Grades 7-8 (110.23.B.11/110.24.B.11)

Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--genres. The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful. The student is expected to compose informational texts, including multiparagraph essays that convey information about a topic, using a clear controlling idea or thesis statement and genre characteristics and craft.

English I (110.36.C.10.B)

Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--genres. The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful. The student is expected to compose informational texts such as explanatory essays, reports, and personal essays using genre characteristics and craft.

English II (110.37.C.10.B)

Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--genres. The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful. The student is expected to compose informational texts such as explanatory essays, reports, and personal essays using genre characteristics and craft.

English III (110.38.C.10.B)

Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--genres. The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful. The student is expected to compose informational texts such as explanatory essays, reports, resumes, and personal essays using genre characteristics and craft.

English IV (110.39.C.10.B)

Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--genres. The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful. The student is expected to compose informational texts such as explanatory essays, reports, resumes, and personal essays using genre characteristics and craft.

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

Don Carlo Libretto

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

Online Resources

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

www.metopera.org

www.aria-database.com

Don Carlo
Don Carlo Synopsis

ACT ONE

In the monastery of San Juste, monks pray at the tomb of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Don Carlo comes to lament his ill-starred love for Elisabeth de Valois, who, for reasons of state, has been married to Carlo's father, King Philip II. He is joined by his friend Rodrigo, Marquis of Posa, who urges Carlo to forget his private grief and join him in Flanders to aid the Protestant population there, oppressed by Philip's Catholic regime.

Awaiting the queen, Princess Eboli amuses the ladies of the court by singing the Veil Song, about a Moorish king and a veiled beauty who turns out to be his neglected queen. When Elisabeth joins them, Rodrigo brings the queen a letter from her mother. He also gives her another note, a request from Don Carlo for a private audience, and distracts Eboli (who thinks Carlo is in love with her) while Elisabeth reads it. She agrees to see Carlo and dismisses her ladies.

Carlo asks Elisabeth to help him gain Philip's consent to leave for Flanders. He cannot refrain from speaking also of their past love. Alarmed by the dangerous change in subject, Elisabeth tells him that, as queen, she must remain aloof, but admits that to live beside him would seem like paradise. Overwhelmed, Carlo sinks to the ground. When he regains consciousness and attempts to embrace her, she breaks away. Carlo flees in despair.

Philip arrives to find his queen unattended, and angrily banishes her lady-in-waiting, the Countess of Aremberg, for neglecting her duty. The queen bids her friend a somber farewell. Rodrigo lingers behind with the king and begs him to adopt a more tolerant policy toward his Flemish subjects. Philip refuses and warns Rodrigo to beware of the Grand Inquisitor. Nevertheless, he is impressed with this young man who seeks nothing for himself; he confides to Rodrigo his jealous suspicions about Don Carlo and the queen.

ACT TWO

Don Carlo comes to the garden in response to an unsigned note which he believes is from Elisabeth. However, the letter is from Eboli, who arrives dressed in a veil. Mistaking her for the queen, Carlo passionately declares his love. Enraptured, the princess uncovers her face; she quickly realizes, however, that his ardent speeches were not for her. Rodrigo enters and tries to undo Don Carlo's indiscretion. Eboli, furious, threatens to tell the king that Elisabeth and Carlo are lovers. Rodrigo tells the imperiled Don Carlo to entrust him with any sensitive political documents in his possession.

The Spanish populace and royal court assemble to witness an auto-da-fé, in which those condemned by the Inquisition are to be burned to death. Don Carlo approaches his father with a group of Flemish deputies who have come to plead for clemency. Philip is unmoved by their entreaty. Carlo infuriates his father by continuing the discussion, asking that the rule of Flanders be entrusted to him. Seeing that words are of no use, Carlo draws his sword. Philip calls for his guards and nobles to disarm the defiant prince, but no one moves to obey him. Finally, Rodrigo steps forward and asks Carlo for his sword, which he then gives to the king. Philip leads his wife to the auto-da-fé as guards remove Carlo to prison. In the distance, a heavenly voice is heard in prayer for the souls of the condemned.

Don Carlo
Don Carlo synopsis continued

ACT THREE

Philip has spent the entire night in his study in melancholy reverie. His queen, he realizes, never loved him. Don Carlo, whom he suspects of an illicit love for Elisabeth, has now committed open treason against him. The Count of Lerma announces the arrival of the Grand Inquisitor, whom Philip has summoned to discuss Carlo's punishment. The blind, aged man is led into the king's presence. Philip hesitates to invoke the death penalty against his son, but the Grand Inquisitor absolves Philip in advance of all guilt, pointing out that God sacrificed His own son for the redemption of the world. The Grand Inquisitor then denounces Rodrigo as a heretic for his efforts on behalf of Flanders; he demands Rodrigo's death. Philip defends Rodrigo, the only man in his court he can trust. The Inquisitor accuses the king himself of failing in his duty before the Holy Office. Philip's will collapses; he abandons Rodrigo's defense.

Elisabeth bursts in: a box containing her jewels and personal effects has been stolen. Philip points to the box, which is on his table, and asks her to open it. When she refuses, he breaks it open and finds a portrait of Carlo inside. Elisabeth defends her innocence in the face of Philip's fury, but faints when he accuses her of adultery. When Philip calls for help, Eboli and Rodrigo rush into the room. As Eboli looks after the queen, each is troubled by private thoughts. Philip realizes that he has not been betrayed; Eboli repents of her treachery now that she sees its results; Rodrigo resolves that he must sacrifice himself for Spain. When Elisabeth recovers, Philip and Rodrigo withdraw. Eboli confesses to the queen that it was she who gave the jewel box to Philip, in reprisal for being spurned by Carlo. Elisabeth forgives her. Eboli's contrition also forces her to admit that she herself has committed adultery with Philip. At that, Elisabeth commands Eboli to choose either exile or the cloister. Alone, Eboli resolves to save Don Carlo's life before she seeks peace in a convent.

Rodrigo comes to Don Carlo's prison cell to say farewell. He has obtained Carlo's freedom by claiming ownership of the incriminating papers Carlo gave him. Carlo protests, but Rodrigo is adamant. He is sacrificing himself so that Carlo may live, reign and save Flanders. Suddenly, a gunshot sounds and Rodrigo falls. Mortally wounded, he tells Carlo that Elisabeth knows everything and will meet Carlo the next day at the monastery of San Juste. As he dies, he enjoins Carlo once more to save Flanders. Philip enters to free Carlo, but Carlo turns on him, bitterly accusing him of complicity in Rodrigo's death. A courtier rushes in to tell Philip that an angry mob has gathered, demanding Carlo's freedom. Philip orders the gates thrown open, and the mob fills the room. In the confusion, Eboli, disguised, urges Carlo to flee. The Grand Inquisitor appears and invokes the power of God to quell the disturbance.

ACT FOUR

Waiting in the monastery, Elisabeth kneels and unburdens her heart in prayer. Don Carlo arrives for their last meeting. Rodrigo hovers in their thoughts as they speak of Don Carlo's mission to Flanders. They formally renounce their love and dedicate themselves to their respective duties in a solemn, platonic farewell. Philip enters with the Grand Inquisitor, ready to deliver his son to the Inquisition. From the tomb of Charles V, the figure of a spectral monk emerges leading Don Carlo away into the darkness of the tomb and death.

Synopsis courtesy of Lyric Opera of Chicago

The Characters

King Philip II: (bass) The King of Spain, Don Carlo's father. He is married to Elisabeth who was previously engaged to Don Carlo and is still in love with him.

Don Carlo: (tenor) Infante of Spain, son and heir to the King. He is torn between his love for Elisabeth and his duty to his country during the dark times of the Inquisition.

Rodrigo: (baritone) Marquis of Posa, Don Carlo's friend and the only person King Philip feels he can trust. Rodrigo sacrifices himself for his country and his friend.

The Grand Inquisitor: (bass) The head of the Church during the Spanish Inquisition. He gives counsel to the King.

Elisabeth of Valois: (soprano) The Queen of Spain, married to King Philip. She is still in love with Don Carlo and struggles between her love for him and her duty as Queen.

Princess Eboli: (mezzo-soprano) A Spanish aristocrat, she is in love with Don Carlo and learns of his love for the Queen. Feeling rejected, she tells King Philip.

A monk: (bass) The apparition of the deceased Emperor Charles V.

Listening Examples

Act II: "Dio, che nell' alma infondere" | Don Carlo and Rodrigo share their troubles and swear eternal friendship.

<https://www.metopera.org/discover/video/?videoName=don-carlo-dio-che-nell-alma-infondere-alagna-keenlyside&videoId=686124999001>

Act IV: "Ella giammai m'amò" | Philip realizes that his wife has never loved him and will never love him. He wishes that he could read the minds of others. Alas, though, the crown does not allow him this power and he will only be at peace when he dies.

<https://www.metopera.org/discover/video/?videoName=don-carlo-ella-giammai-mamo-ferruccio-furlanetto&videoId=1472947180001>

Act V: "Tu, che le vanità" | While waiting for Don Carlo to meet her, Elisabeth asks for strength to see him leave her forever for his own safety. Her thoughts then turn to her beloved France where her love for Carlo began.

<https://www.metopera.org/discover/video/?videoName=don-carlo-tu-che-le-vanita-marina-poplavskaya&videoId=686124997001>

Name: _____

Date: _____

Opera Review Guide

Part I: Preparing to review the performance

Before the performance: Become familiar with the opera or show you are reviewing. Have a basic understanding of the plot, characters and the production you are attending. Take notes about the show and the production from the synopsis and information available online.

<https://dallasopera.org/performance/don-carlo/>

Read three examples of an opera review from news sources online and answer the following questions.

<https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/opera> or <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts/opera>

1. What kinds of details about a performance are included in an opera review?

2. What responsibilities does a critic have when reviewing a performance?

3. According to the critics you found, what makes an opera performance “good” or “bad”?

4. Does an opera critic have the ability to influence whether or not readers will attend the show?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Opera Review Guide

Part II: Taking notes about the performance

During the performance: Actively observe and take notes about the performance.

1. What is the overall feeling of the production?

2. How are the performers handling their roles? Are there any first time performers making a “debut”?

3. Is the set design supporting the production? Does it help tell the story and contribute to the mood in an effective way?

4. How is the orchestra performing? Is the conductor leading the orchestra in an effective way?

5. 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 classmates and teacher about what you all saw.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Opera Review Guide

Part III: Writing a review

Introduction: Paragraph One

1. What is the name of the opera and the name of the composer? When and where did the opera premiere?

2. What are three words you could use to describe your feelings towards the opera?

3. What are three words you could use to describe 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).

**Three-point thesis statement*

Summary: Paragraph Two

1. Where and when does the opera take place? (the setting)

2. What is the central theme or lesson presented in the opera?

3. Who are the important characters involved in the opera and what do they want?

4. What problems do(es) the main character(s) face?

5. How do(es) the main character(s) deal with these problems?

**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. How do the theme, setting, and point of view contribute to the opera?

2. Tell the audience why you chose your first word to describe the opera. Provide a brief description of the example. Be sure to include the Act, scene, and information about what happened.

3. Tell the audience why you chose your second word to describe the opera. Provide a brief description of the example. Be sure to include the Act, scene, and information about what happened.

4. Tell the audience why you chose your third word to describe the opera. Provide a brief description of the example. Be sure to include the Act, scene, and information about what happened.

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 considering age, location, experience, and time.

3. Provide three reasons why this opera would be recommendable to such a person as you described above.
