



SAN FRANCISCO OPERA EDUCATION

San Francisco Opera's Donizetti's *THE ELIXIR OF LOVE FOR SCHOOLS*

Curriculum Connections

California Content Standards
Kindergarten through Grade 12

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

[Music](#)

[Visual Arts](#)

[Theatre](#)

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[Media Arts](#)

MUSIC

STORYTELLING & MUSIC: WHAT IS AN OPERA?

Character and plot development through musical themes. Explore how the composer creates different kinds of music for different moments in the story. Patter song vs. Nemorino's ballad.

Musical moods. Legato vs. staccato, adagio vs. allegro.

Instruments representing characters and emotions (bassoon at beginning of Nemorino's aria); repetition and variation of themes.

Key plot points: The composer and librettist determine the placement of arias within the libretto to heighten emotion in the story.

Call and response between singers and instruments.

Definition of overture. How is orchestra set up in pit? What are instruments in an orchestra? Tuning of different instruments.

What is a fanfare? How is it used in this opera?

Source material for Opera: Novels (Puccini's *La Bohème*, Tan & Wallace's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*); Films (*The Fly*), Real-life events (Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Adams' *Nixon in China*); Related genres – Musical Theater (*Sweeney Todd*, *Rent*), Rock Opera (*Tommy*), popular song versions of opera.

VOCABULARY

[Music and Composition Vocabulary](#)

Musical Structure: Solos, duets, trios, choral numbers.



Composition: Arias, recitative, overture, incidental music.

Musical Instructions: Tempo, legato; pianissimo; crescendo, etc.

Voice ranges: Soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone, bass-baritone, countertenor, bass. Identify voice parts of different characters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Research the [history of San Francisco Opera](#), [the Adler Fellows program](#).

Research famous sopranos, tenors, and baritones who have played the roles of Adina, Nemorino and Dulcamara.

Gaetano Donizetti: [Biography](#), [timeline of works](#), signature sound.

ACTIVITIES

Listen to multiple recordings of *The Elixir of Love* and study different interpretations.

Learn and memorize songs from *The Elixir of Love*.

Create and perform songs for the characters/events of *The Elixir of Love* using instruments and voices. Study natural vs. amplified sound. Study high vs. low voices. Study head voice vs. chest voice.

Research songs from 1914.

Study the evolution of patter song.

Explore musical instruments used in this opera; have they changed since Donizetti's time?

What kinds of musical instruments are used in opera today? What are different sounds, volumes of different instruments?

Build simple string instruments with rubber bands and boxes, strings and any space.

Set parts of opera to different styles of music. Ex. Dulcamara's patter song as a rap.

(See musical selections in "Media, Visuals, and Audio" resource materials for [The Elixir of Love](#)).

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VISUAL ARTS

How are line, color, shape, and texture used in costumes and sets of *The Elixir of Love*?

[Slideshow: San Francisco Opera / Jose-Maria Condemi / Allen Moyer Set Plans and Photos \(2008 Production; same as DVD\)](#)

LINE

Use of line qualities: soft or hard, wavy or angular, silly spirals.



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COLOR

Symbolism of color; color associated with particular characters. How do colors of costumes define characters?

Symmetry/contrast in character pairings. Ex. Adina/Nemorino.

Examine contrast of light and dark; use of lighting.

The emotion of color. Ex. red=passionate, blue=calm, yellow=cheerful.

The color palette of opera uses tints, not primary colors. What effect does the color choice have on the feeling of the production? Dulcamara is the only one with shiny costume, bright color—why? How are character traits revealed through the use of color?

Explore personal associations with color.

The use of lighting to establish mood and setting.

SHAPE

The use of shape in character design.

Positive & Negative Space—the stage is a frame.

How can patterns and repetition of shape be used to create the illusion of perspective?

TEXTURE

Texture: Material use in sets and costumes.

Visual Texture: Pattern and repetition in sets and costumes.

SPACE

Set design: From 2D plans to 3D construction.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Examine work of [James Flag](#)—creator of Uncle Sam.

Examine work of Grant Wood—effect on set, American image.

Examine art of signage, advertising.

Examine the art of 1914.

ACTIVITIES

Create illustrations and storyboards outlining the plot of *The Elixir of Love*.

Design your own production of *Elixir*: dioramas, scale models, backdrops, props, costumes. Set in a box.

Study uniforms, create costumes for characters. Design hats.

Create a tunnel book of set.

Create an ice cream prop. Create bottle props.

Design a community space for a different time, setting.

Puppetry: Create your own version of *The Elixir of Love* using puppets (paper bags, stick puppets, shadow puppets, marionettes, and bunraku).



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Masks: Create masks of *The Elixir of Love* characters.

Design character make-up, costume, sets and props for classroom operas.

Design paper dolls of characters. Dress them for different eras.

Design a production: dioramas, scale models, backdrops, props, costumes.

Listen to audio-only examples prior to viewing the opera. Choose design elements based on the music and text.

Explore scale in production design; how do imposing sets make people look small? How do you make something that fits on an opera set? What is the scale of a tree on a set?

Set and costume designers' portfolios.

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Opera & Visual Art: Study the work of visual artists who have designed performing arts productions: Gerald Scarfe, David Hockney, Julie Taymor, Marc Chagall, Maurice Sendak, Oskar Kokoschka, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, William Kentridge, Gianni Versace, Bill Viola.

Illustrated children's books of *The Magic Flute* and other operas.

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THEATRE

Commedia characters; opera buffa origins in commedia.

History of vaudeville, stock characters.

Stock theater types: boy meets girl; traveling salesman.

Compare to similar stories in musical theater (*Oklahoma*, *Music Man*).

What are characters' motivations? How do they grow?

How would theater have looked in 1914?

What is audition process for opera? What criteria are involved in getting a role?

STAGING

Stage vocabulary: Upstage, downstage, levels, blocking.

Theater Exercises: Tableaux, pantomime, improvisation, vocal projection.

How does scene fill space of stage?

Stage etiquette & audience behavior.

Talking to the 4th wall.

THEATRE JOBS

Opera Production Team: Director, stage manager, choreographer, designer, diction coach, artistic administrator, choreographer, lighting, adaption, abridgement, supernumeraries, etc.

In-House Personnel: Marketing, accounting, ticket takers, ushers etc.



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ACTIVITIES

Act out characters and emotions in gestures: shyness, snobbery, bravado, persuasion. How can you exaggerate gestures to show emotion? Other students guess who you are.

Act out scenes from opera in different settings and times (Dulcamara as QVC salesman).

Students pick characters to portray; determine how they would act out story. Examine how characters play off each other. Partnering.

Create tableaux of different scenes.

Improvise prologues and epilogues to the story.

Choreograph football game and boxing match.

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DANCE

Dance and Creative Movement in Stage-Blocking. Ex: Nemorino's different dances with chorus (Charleston, waltz), fight scene, football pile-up.

Examine history of dance around 1914 (Castle Walk).

Examine fight and football choreography.

ACTIVITIES

Create character dances.

Create gestures for elements of opera (music, drama).

Match movement with characters.

Create a gesture to embody each character.

Create relationship dances between characters.

Do the whole story in a dance.

Interpret emotions through gesture and dance. Static and in motion. Ex. Joy, bravado.

Interpreting the instruments through dance— improv to music.

Create dances for scenes that need it.

Create dances based on movements that can be seen at a football game and/or a boxing match.

Mirror dancing—partners and symmetry.

Choose a dance style that best represents each character. Ex. Adina and the waltz.

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MEDIA ARTS

Research how innovations in technology have influenced the development of Opera: Acoustics and Lighting, Audio Recording, Film and Video, the development of Supertitles, Internet.

Learn about technology currently used by SF Opera: Technology used in staging, SFO's Media Suite, podcasts, cinemacasts, simulcasts, opera vision, etc.

Explore role of editors in creating film and DVD. Explore role of film director.

Research use of blue screen.

List camera angles; note when camera angles change.

Study use of media for propaganda, especially in war.

Study use of subtext in advertising, propaganda.

Study available media in 1914. Books, newspapers, broadsheets, town crier, telegraph, etc.

Study history of recording.

Learn about experiments in future technology use involving opera, such as the development of Personal Opera @ MIT Media Lab, *Death and the Powers*.

Use television, films, web content about opera to teach media literacy.

Opera & Popular Culture: Cartoons (Bugs Bunny in *What's Opera, Doc?*, *The Wabbit of Seville*); Television (*Sesame Street*); Movies (*The Godfather*); Commercials (Nike's 1993 ad *Charles Barkley of Seville*); Event themes (*Nessun Dorma - 1994 World Cup*).

Watch films & DVD of *The Elixir of Love* and other operas.

ACTIVITIES

Film and Animation: Explore photographic stopmotion techniques. Ex. Use digital media to create 1-minute scenes from *The Elixir of Love*.

Storyboard the opera.

Use digital audio to record student readings, musical performances.

Create a 30-second audio spot, a one-minute podcast, or *The Elixir of Love* activities website.

Create an ad for Dulcamara's elixir, visual or video.

Explore history of opera recordings.

Create a montage of scenes from the opera to tell the story.

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