



San Francisco Opera's Charest's *THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE*

Curriculum Connections California Content Standards Kindergarten through Grade 12

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

MUSIC

STORYTELLING & MUSIC: WHAT IS AN OPERA?

Character and plot development through musical themes. What is the difference between major and minor keys and how do changes between keys help tell the story?

How does orchestral music enhance the action and emotions on screen? How does the orchestra become another character?

What kinds of musical groupings are there within this story?

How does music associated with a particular character enhance their personality?

How does orchestral music communicate a character's state of mind? Set a mood?

How do instruments represent characters? Identify repetition and variation of themes.

How does the music suggest the setting? (i.e. what do we know about time and place based on the music?)

Key plot points: The composer determines the placement of sounds to accompany the visual images to heighten emotion in the story.

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

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

Composition: Arias, recitative, overture, incidental music. Identify characters expressing themselves through sound.

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

Voice ranges: Soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone, bass-baritone, countertenor, bass.

"Jazz Manouche" or Gypsy Jazz, Gypsy Swing, Le Jazz Hot

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History of San Francisco Opera, the Adler Fellows program.

Benoît Charest: Biography, timeline of works, signature sound within genres. Listen to some of his other works.

Sylvain Chomet: Biography, timeline of works, signature sound within genres. Listen to some of his other works.

Listen to the film soundtrack. Compare the US version & French version.

Download the sheet music for Bach à la Jazz, written by Charest and Herkowitz for *Les Triplettes de Belleville* solo piano composition inspired by Bach's *Prelude No. 2 in C minor* from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

<http://www.mattherskowitz.com/pdf/Bach-a-la-Jazz.pdf>

Explore musical references found in *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Bach *Prelude in C minor* from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

Grandma and Champion watch Glenn Gould play the piece on the television.

https://youtu.be/_3MVZfLReo0

"Kyrie" - "Kyrie, eleison" (or "Lord, have mercy") Prayer of the Faithful- Mozart: Great mass in C minor, KV 427 I conducted by John Eliot Gardiner <https://youtu.be/TGCUPyrk4Eg>

Research other works of artists who influenced the sound of the 1920s and 1930s.

Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five <https://archive.org/details/LouisArmstrong-St.LouisBlues1929-1930>

Josephine Baker <https://archive.org/details/JosephineBaker-11-20>

Sidney Bechet <https://archive.org/details/SidneyBechet-TheCollection>

Fred Astaire <https://archive.org/details/TopHat1935AndTheGayDivorcee1934>

Duke Ellington Orchestra <https://archive.org/details/DukeEllingtonAndHisOrchestra1924-1927>

King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band <https://archive.org/details/KingOliversCreoleJazzBand-01-10>

Edith Piaf <https://archive.org/details/EdithPiaf268Songs>

Django Reinhardt and Gypsy Jazz <https://archive.org/details/DjangoReinhardt-TheCollectionI>

Charles Trenet <https://archive.org/details/CharlesTrenetBoum>

What are found objects in the musical sense?

What composers have used and still use found objects?

What found objects are used in *The Triplets of Belleville*? (Bicycle wheel, newspaper, vacuum cleaner, refrigerator shelf) Why won't the Triplettes let Madame Souza touch these objects in their apartment?

How does Grandma tune the bicycle spoke? With a tuning fork of course!

ACTIVITIES

Learn and memorize songs from *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Create your own music inspired by *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Research and perform music of the time, like that which The Triplets would have been singing in 1920s-1930.

Write themes, motifs for each character; start by writing themes for things in students' everyday lives.

Create mood music to go along with certain passages of the animated film.

Play the introductory passages for each character for students before they know the story of the film; have students respond to each piece of music, then see how it matches up to the story.

Create and perform songs for the characters/events of *The Triplets of Belleville*, using instruments and voices.

Graph out characters in the opera; while watching a clip of the film, fill out chart describing look, movement, voice of each character. How does the director tell the story through these details?

After seeing the cine-concert, write a critique of the music. Focus on how the music communicates the mood, the characters, etc.

Listen for the different instruments in the orchestra. How big is an orchestra usually?

Listen for the different styles of music in the opera; do different characters sing in different styles?

How is consonance and dissonance used in the opera?

Listen to clips of the musical score for the film; what moods do they set?

Listen for the way that the music is used to describe nature vs. the city.

Watch the finale of the film. How does the music enhance this film's climax and resolution?



VISUAL ARTS

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

LINE

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

COLOR

Symbolism of color; color associated with particular characters. (The warm color of sepia is used when Champion is a young boy)

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

Personal associations with color.

Revealing character traits through the use of color—how do the characters' costumes, including fabrics and colors, reflect their status?

Chomet uses color and light to great effect in creating moods of various scenes. What are some examples?

What is a color script? How is colors used in different scenes in the film?

How do the lighting colors onstage match what is going on in the music?

Symmetry/contrast in character pairings.

SHAPE

The use of shape in character design.

Positive & Negative Space—the stage is a frame.

What is abstraction?

TEXTURE

Texture: Material use in sets and costumes.

Visual Texture: Pattern and repetition in sets and costumes. How is texture used to convey status?

SPACE

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

LIGHT

The use of lighting to establish mood and setting.

Examine contrast of light and dark; use of lighting.

The use of lighting to establish mood and setting.

How does time of day affect the lighting and the mood on the stage?

How are shadows and shading used in the opera to convey meaning?

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Listen to the music and watch the film prior to attending the cine-concert. Choose design elements based on the music and text.

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

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

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

Study use of lighting in production design.

Study clothing of the time and setting for *The Triplets of Belleville*. What materials would have been used?

ACTIVITIES

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

Draw the characters from *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Free-association drawing to music. Ex. Maurice Sendak's Fantasy Sketches .

Create a flip book animation.

Look at scenes from *The Triplets of Belleville*. Create a 3D model.

Create your own everyday instruments for *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Design your own props for the characters in *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Create dioramas of scenes from *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Design sets and costumes for a production of *The Triplets of Belleville* set in a different time and place of your choosing. Make sure the costumes reflect the characters.

Create costumes for the characters true to the time period; clothes that are suitable for different tasks.

Create paper dolls of the characters, with outfits for different scenes.

Create illustrations and storyboards outlining the plot of *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Explore the history of typefaces; design the title in an appropriate typeface.

Create posters and advertisements for the opera, or for a particular character in of *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Create an automata toy (a mechanical moving sculpture)

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Watch other animated films by Chomet, such as *Old Lady and the Pigeon*, *The Illusionist*, and *Mars et Avril*

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.

See how bicycles have been depicted in books, art & film by artists such as The Lumiere Brothers, De Sica, Tati and Ai Weiwei.

Learn about Disney's **Twelve Basic Principles of Animation**, a set of principles of animation introduced by the Disney animators Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas in their 1981 book *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/12_basic_principles_of_animation

- 1) Squash and Stretch
- 2) Anticipation
- 3) Staging
- 4) Straight ahead and Pose to Pose
- 5) Follow Through and Overlapping Action
- 6) Slow-Out and Slow-In
- 7) Arcs
- 8) Secondary Action
- 9) Timing
- 10) Exaggeration
- 11) Solid Drawing
- 12) Appeal

Explore the work of artists who have contributed to the history of the caricature and animation:

George Cruikshank <http://www.clevelandart.org/research/in-the-library/collection-in-focus/satire-and-social-commentary-life-george-cruikshank>

Honoré Daumier <http://www.wikiart.org/en/honore-daumier>

Walt Disney <http://waltdisney.org/>

Albert Dubout <http://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/pool/ubsimpl/search/Dubout%20Albert>

Max Fleischer <http://www.fleischerstudios.com/>

Hergé (Georges Rémi) <http://en.tintin.com/>

Al Hirschfeld <http://www.alhirschfeldfoundation.org/>

William Hogarth <http://www.wikiart.org/en/william-hogarth>

Katsushika Hokusai <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/hokusai-manga-the-hokusai-sketchbooks#/>

Francisco Goya <http://www.wikiart.org/en/francisco-goya>

George Grosz <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-grosz-george.htm>

Käthe Kollwitz <http://www.moma.org/collection/artists/3201>

Winsor McCay <http://www.comicstriplibrary.org/>

Thomas Nast <http://cdm16100.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15387coll2>

Jose Guadalupe Posada <http://www.wikiart.org/en/jose-guadalupe-posada>



THEATRE

STAGING

Stage vocabulary: Upstage, downstage, levels, blocking.

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

Stage etiquette & audience behavior.

Examine storyline, character development through theater games (similar to writing exercises in ELA connections).

Explore different tones/feelings in monologues vs. dialogues vs. crowd scenes.

Explore soliloquies in theater, movies, etc.

Create entrances and exits for different characters in opera; what would their music be?

How do the performers act when they're singing their thoughts vs. singing to each other?

How do performers move onstage differently than offstage? How do they have to move so that the audience can translate their movements?

Stage and practice the movement required for crowd scenes. How do individuals act like individuals in a crowd scene?

Play "status" games. How do people act differently toward you based on your class or job status? How do the performers act when they're singing their thoughts vs. singing to each other?

How does the film mark the passage of time? How does the audience know time has passed between acts?

How would you tell the story of *The Triplets of Belleville* in a different theatrical style, like slapstick comedy?

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

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

ACTIVITIES

Act out scenes about the themes from the film: loneliness, obsession, friendship and loyalty, etc.

Create movement and gestures to react to particular lines of the script and to particular musical moments.

Practice moving as a large ensemble.

Create props used by the characters – Madame Souza's shoe or Champion's bicycle.

If you were voicing Champion or Bruno, how would they sound when we first meet them?

How would you have to walk if you were playing Madame Souza?

"Hot seat" Activity: children ask questions of someone in the "hot seat" as if that someone were a character in the opera

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Research additional theatrical works related to *The Triplets of Belleville*, such as *Old Lady and the Pigeons*, or *Swing Papa Swing*



DANCE

Dance and Creative Movement in Stage-Blocking. Ex: The Triplets Dance “Rendez-Vous Belleville.”

Research dances of the time period. How are they similar/different to the dances of today.

How is dance incorporated into the opera, into the music of the opera?

How is age and gender communicated through the way performers move in a dance?

What are the roles of choreographers, dance captains and dancers?

Dancing inside v. Dancing outside: who dances where, and how is that reflective of their class?

ACTIVITIES

Character Dances: Mirror dancing—partners and symmetry.

Match movement with vocabulary. Ex. glide, slither, leap, tremble.

Interpret emotions through dance. Ex. Joy, fear.

Create movements for characters’ emotions. Show how characters’ movements change when they’re in different situations.

Try your hand at Body Music. Body Music around the world with Keith Terry <https://youtu.be/gKzko9z8jU8>

The Triplet’s dance was inspired by the “gumboot,” handclapping and thigh-slapping step. Learn more about the historical origins of the dance. <http://worldartswest.org/plm/guide/printablepages/gumboot.pdf>

Choose a dance style that best represents each character. Ex. The Triplets are individually known as Rose, Blanche and Violette. Choreograph a new routine for The Triplets in which the characters relate to each other.

Choreograph a dance for the Triplets on stage inside theatre, and one for the audience outside in the street. How are they different?

Create dances to your favorite parts of the animated film.

Interpreting the action through dance— improv as music.

Work with media arts students to create a dance with projected backgrounds.

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Research famous dances of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Josephine Baker’s infamous banana dance https://youtu.be/W_uETOtEQYQ and Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers doing The Continental. <https://archive.org/details/SwingTimeTrailer>

Research the use of dance in animated films.

The show, STOMP, inspired Benoît Charest’s musical compositions using ordinary objects for *The Triplets of Belleville*. Create your own STOMP-inspired dance. <https://youtu.be/urfc3QLifjc>



SAN FRANCISCO OPERA EDUCATION

MEDIA ARTS

Watch DVDs of *The Triplets of Belleville*. Watch different productions and compare.

View clips of *The Triplets of Belleville* found on the Internet.

Learn about projectors and projections, and various ways to project images with light. Create media that can be projected. Explore how images can influence mood.

Explore ways to explore negative space through media.

Research archival photographs of New York City and Paris during the early 1900's when *The Triplets of Belleville* was written and compare/contrast with images from those countries using today's Flickr & Instagram photostreams.

Create media pieces inspired by *The Triplets of Belleville*.

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.

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 to teach media literacy.

How is opera advertised? Research San Francisco Opera's advertising and media efforts.

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

Opera Imaginaire, a collection of animated interpretations of twelve of opera's most popular arias, features Mozart's "Voi Che Sapete" from *The Marriage of Figaro*, as animated by artist Susanne Danco

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Films & DVD of *The Triplets of Belleville* and other operas, based on well-known children's stories such as Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, Portman's *The Little Prince*, Knussen's *Higglety Pigglety Pop* and *Where the Wild Things Are*.

Watch trailers for films by directors that influenced Chomet's animated film, *The Triplet of Belleville*:

Max Fleisher's Talkartoons <https://archive.org/details/SwingYouSinners>,

Winsor McCay *The Sinking of the Lusitania* https://archive.org/details/Sinking_of_the_Lusitania

Walt Disney's *Aristocats*, <http://video.disney.com/watch/to-the-rescue-4c51ef047efc42743580f26e>

Walt Disney's *101 Dalmations* <http://video.disney.com/watch/cruella-de-vil-cruella-de-vil-if-she-doesn-t-scare-you-50ad6e421c34662bf0e35b9c>

Walt Disney's *The Jungle Book*. <http://video.disney.com/watch/finding-the-music-the-jungle-book-4f127c32e141e02ecef27af0>

Jacques Tati's *Jour de Fete* (1949) <https://youtu.be/HV5mBY2Oaow>

Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (1956) <https://youtu.be/QwqeEm9ocdk>

ACTIVITIES

Sylvain Chomet talks about animation. An excerpt from *'The Secret of Drawing'*, a television documentary broadcast on the BBC in 2005. <https://vimeo.com/12397782>

Try inking the blue line storyboard sketches from *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Create a line test – a short animated sequence.

Create your own character for *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Try 3D rendering on the computer.

Create a color script for your own version of *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Storyboard an action scene; see blue line sketches for *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Record your own scratchtrack, a preliminary soundtrack, for a scene from *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Create a montage of scenes for a trailer to promote *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Film and Animation: Explore animation and photographic stop motion techniques. Ex. Use digital media to create 1-minute scenes from *The Triplets of Belleville*.

Create video interviews of various characters.

Create podcasts from the points of view of various characters.

Create a poster to advertise a performance of *The Triplets of Belleville*. What information needs to be included?

Create a graphic treatment for the opera's title. What typeface would be appropriate?

Use digital audio to record student readings, musical performances.

Create a 30-second audio spot, a one-minute podcast, and/or a *The Triplets of Belleville* activities website.

Create a fake blog or Facebook page for one of the characters. What would *The Triplets* username be?

Create a #hashtag to use for your school visit to the cine-concert

Create YouTube video testimonials for characters in the opera.