



Every voice tells a story.



STUDENT NIGHT AT THE OPERA
Wednesday, October 21st, 2026

Student Night at the Opera is generously supported by the **City of San Diego**, the **Prebys Foundation**, **Elisabeth Crouch**, the **David C. Copley Foundation**, the **Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation**, **Ilene Mittman in memory of Dr. Charles Mittman**, and the many individual donors who care about introducing the next generation of opera lovers to this art form.

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THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE ATTENDING STUDENT NIGHT AT THE OPERA

- Opera is a story that is sung. As you watch and listen to the opera, think about how the words and music mix together to develop character relationships, conflict, and an overall artistic effect. Opera composers use different voice types to create a dramatic or comedic effect. How do the singers' voices impact you as you experience the opera?
- Opera singers sound very different from pop or rock 'n' roll singers because they do not use microphones. Instead, they use their bodies as amplifiers. Opera singers have the rare gift of being able to make their voices soar over an orchestra and a chorus without any electronic support.
- Opera is often performed in languages other than English. It was the most popular art form in Europe before movies, so operas were written in the language of the people who first attended them. Read the synopsis and listen to the musical excerpts before coming to the performance. The Civic Theatre projects supertitles, or translations, above the stage in English and Spanish for audience members to read along as the opera is performed.
- You will attend the final orchestra dress rehearsal. It's the last rehearsal before the public attends. Because this is a rehearsal, there may be starting and stopping, and some singers may "mark" (not sing fully).
- The opera you will attend is a live performance. The performers can see you and hear you in the audience – your polite behavior, applause, and cheers tell them you are enjoying the performance.
- There will be a photographer and videographer present during Student Night at the Opera. If any one of your students cannot be photographed for any reason, please let our staff know or notify us prior to attending the performance.
- Turn off and put away any distractions (electronic devices, like phones, tablets, etc.)
- Leave large purses and backpacks at home or on the bus. They will not be allowed inside the theatre.
- Food and gum are not allowed in the theatre.
- Give the performance your full attention. You are going to have an amazing time!

Location: San Diego Civic Theatre, 1100 Third Ave. San Diego, CA 92101

Date and Time: Wednesday, October 21st, 2026, 6:30 – 8:55 pm.

Running time is 2 hours and 25 minutes including one 20-minute intermission.

If your tickets were not mailed to you, they may be picked up at the table in front of the theatre beginning at 5:15 pm. All attendees must be in their seats by 6:20 pm.

VOCABULARY

OPERA AND LITERARY

Aria: A song written for one singer, also known as a solo.

Audience Seating: The area where people sit to watch the performance.

Character: A person in an opera or story.

Composer: The person who writes the music of an opera.

Conductor: The person who leads the orchestra and makes sure everyone plays together.

Dramatic Irony: A literary device in which the audience has knowledge that the characters on stage do not.

Duet: A song written for two singers.

Foreshadowing: A literary device that hints at future events in the narrative.

Ensemble: A song or musical passage written for a group of singers.

Librettist: The person who writes the story and the words of the opera.

Libretto: The story of an opera written out as a play or poem. It includes all the words sung.

Opera: A dramatic or comedic story told onstage by singers using words and music. Opera productions use sets, lights, and costumes to help create details of the story. Operas are usually accompanied by an orchestra led by a conductor.

Opera Seria: (Italian for "serious opera") is an 18th-century Italian musical genre defined by its formal structure, noble themes, and tragic or heroic mythological storylines. Dominated by the *bel canto* vocal style, it features a rigid alternation of dialogue (*recitative*) and expressive, virtuosic solos (*da capo arias*)

Opera Singer: A person who portrays a character in an operatic story by singing and acting.

Orchestra: A large group of musicians who play different instruments together, accompanying the singers in an opera.

Orchestra Pit: The area below the stage where the orchestra sits and plays their instruments.

Orchestration: The assignment and combination of musical instruments in an opera. Orchestration is a tool used by composers to create moods and enhance storytelling.

Overture: An instrumental piece of music often played at the beginning of an opera.

Stage: The area where the actors and singers perform.

Plot Summary: A summary of the opera's story.

ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

Dynamics: Both an element of music and an element of sound, dynamics indicate the volume at which a musician sings or plays. The element of dynamics gives musicians a way to add emotion and drama to music. In musical notation, a dynamic may be indicated by the Italian term or a musical symbol.

Duration: How long a sound lasts whether the sound is a single note or an entire piece of music.

Form: The structure of a piece.

Harmony: The simultaneous combination of two or more different pitches. Harmony provides a vertical backdrop built using intervals stacked together to form chords.

Consonance: Harmonious combinations of notes that sound stable, pleasant, and resolved.

Dissonance: Clashing combinations of notes that create friction, instability, or urgency.

Melody: The most singable element of music! Melodies combine multiple elements: a sequence of notes or pitches and specific rhythms that create a distinct musical line.

Meter: The mathematical organization of beats in a measure. In musical notation, time signatures indicate the meter.

Pitch: Both an element of sound and an element of music. Pitch describes the frequency of a sound wave. Each musical note has a specific pitch.

Rhythm: A pattern of duration of notes and silences. Rhythm drives us to move. The rhythm of a piece of music defines when sounds start, when they stop, and when there are spaces with no sound at all.

Tempo: Derived from the Italian word for “time” and describes the speed of the beat. (i.e., Presto - very fast, Allegro - fast, Moderato - moderately, Adagio-slow and at ease, Lento - slowly)

Texture: Can describe the relationship between a melody and harmony or a combination of instruments layered together to create a piece of music.

Timbre: The unique quality of the sound that a voice or musical instrument makes.

RIGOLETTO - POP CULTURE

WHEN OPERA MEETS COMMERCIALS, GAMES & CARTOONS

“La donna è mobile”

Opera may have been created hundreds of years ago, but its music continues to appear in the world around us. One of the most recognizable melodies in opera history is the famous aria, “La donna è mobile”

The tune is catchy, dramatic, and easy to remember—which is why filmmakers, advertisers, television producers, and video game creators have used it to grab attention of audiences.

The Duke sings “La donna è mobile” to express his belief that people’s feelings can change quickly. Ironically, the song reveals his own careless attitude toward love and relationships.

Today, this famous melody appears in unexpected places—from snack commercials to cartoons to video games!

1: OPERA MEETS ADVERTISING

Doritos Super Bowl Commercials

Doritos used “La donna è mobile” in Super Bowl commercials where the music becomes part of a humorous story. The dramatic opera sound contrasts with the silly action happening on screen, creating comedy.

Watch:

Doritos Opera Theatre Commercial

<https://youtu.be/qeuFknhBKqk?si=4n52PBXMNafUCOT3>

Doritos Family Feud Commercial

<https://youtu.be/es3ScrYyHP8?si=K8SAZ9aq1dLEKa7t>

Discussion Questions

- Why does a dramatic opera aria make a funny commercial even funnier?
- How does the music change the way you feel about the scene?

“La donna è mobile”

English translation

Women are flighty
Like a feather in the wind,
she changes in voice and in
thought,
always a lovely,
pretty face,
in tears or in laughter, she's
untrue.

Refrain

Woman are flighty.
like a feather in the wind,
she changes in voice and in
thought,
and in thought! and in
thought!

Always miserable
is he who trusts her,
he who confides in her his
unwary heart!
Yet one never feels
fully happy
it is impossible to not fall in
love with her anyway!

Refrain

Women are flighty.
Like a feather in the wind,
she changes words,
and her thoughts! And her
thoughts!

- Would the commercial work the same without any music?

2. OPERA MEETS VIDEO GAMES

Grand Theft Auto

The music of *Rigoletto* has appeared in the soundtrack world of video games, including *Grand Theft Auto*.

Watch/Explore:

https://youtu.be/BcK9P-jO_bw?si=dM90emywI58tRp1u

Discussion Questions

- Why would a video game include music written more than 150 years ago?
- How can music help build the world of a game?
- What music would you choose for a video game scene?

3. OPERA MEETS CARTOONS

Tom and Jerry and Disney Movies like *The Prince and The Pauper*



Classic cartoons often use opera because the music is full of emotion, energy, and dramatic moments. *Tom and Jerry* and Disney movies like *The Prince and the Pauper* frequently used classical music to turn simple actions into huge, theatrical adventures.

In these cartoon samples, opera-style singing and dramatic music help transform the characters' actions into a larger-than-life performance. The characters may not speak much, but the music tells the audience what they are feeling.

Watch:

<https://youtu.be/0mcuHcuUbps?si=CAgA01mA02b2gCIB>

<https://youtu.be/q8uvGiO-0ew?si=OSMQ5sNYwuTYP7iJ>

Discussion Questions

- How does the music tell the story even without many words?
- How does the cartoon use exaggeration, like an opera?
- What emotions do you hear in the music?
- Why might a composer choose opera music for a cartoon?

RIGOLETTO

(Pronounced: ree-goh-LET-toh)

Rigoletto is a tragic opera in three acts composed by Giuseppe Verdi, with a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave. The opera explores themes of betrayal, revenge, abuse of power, parental love, and the consequences of a curse.

CREATION AND INSPIRATION

- **Composer:** Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), an Italian composer known for his operas.
- **Librettist:** Francesco Maria Piave, who collaborated with Verdi on several operas.
- **Literary Source:** The opera is based on Victor Hugo's controversial 1832 play *Le roi s'amuse* ("The King Amuses Himself"). Hugo also wrote *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.
- **Commission:** In 1850, Teatro La Fenice in Venice commissioned Verdi to compose a new opera for its 1851 Carnival season.
- **Why Verdi Chose the Story:** Verdi was interested in Hugo's play because of its dramatic situations and complex central character, a court jester who can be cruel in public but is a loving and protective father in private.
- **Original Title:** Verdi and Piave originally called the opera *La maledizione* ("The Curse"), emphasizing the curse that influences the events of the story.

CENSORSHIP AND THE CREATION OF RIGOLETTO

- **A Controversial Story:** Government censors objected to Hugo's original story, particularly its portrayal of an immoral king abusing his position of power.
- **Changing the King:** To gain permission to perform the opera, Verdi and Piave changed the historical King Francis I of France into the fictional Duke of Mantua.
- **Changing the Setting:** The action was moved from France to Mantua, Italy, and several character names and details were changed.
- **A New Title:** The opera was renamed *Rigoletto* after its central character, the Duke's court jester.

PREMIERE AND RECEPTION

- **World Premiere:** *Rigoletto* premiered on March 11, 1851, at Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Italy.
- **Initial Reception:** The opera was successful with audiences and quickly became part of the operatic repertoire.
- **Verdi's Career:** *Rigoletto* was composed during an important period in Verdi's career and was followed by two other major operas, *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*.

WHAT MAKES THE MUSIC DISTINCTIVE?

- Verdi uses the voices and orchestra to reveal the emotions and motivations of the characters.
- The music frequently moves directly from one dramatic moment into another, helping the story continue without long interruptions.
- Different characters are given distinct musical styles that help identify their personalities and relationships.
- The opera contains several well-known musical selections, including the Duke's aria "La donna è mobile" and the Act III quartet "Bella figlia dell'amore."

THE STORY AT ITS CORE

- Rigoletto is the court jester to the Duke of Mantua and mocks members of the Duke's court as part of his role.
- Away from court, Rigoletto is a protective father who has kept the existence of his daughter, Gilda, secret.
- When the Duke becomes involved with Gilda, Rigoletto's public and private lives collide.
- A curse pronounced against Rigoletto early in the opera becomes an important element throughout the story and shapes his fear of what may happen to him and his daughter.

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

***The Duke of Mantua* (pronounced MAHN-too-ah)(Tenor)**

The Duke

The ruler of the city and a spoiled, selfish playboy. He is charming but completely untrustworthy, caring only about his own entertainment. He tricks Gilda into falling for him by using a fake name.

***Borsa* (pronounced BOR-sah)(Tenor)**

A Courtier

Another nobleman in the Duke's inner circle. He helps organize the kidnapping and mostly serves to cheer on the Duke's bad behavior.

***Count Ceprano* (pronounced chay-Prah-noh)(Bass)**

A Nobleman

A wealthy nobleman who is the main target of Rigoletto's cruelest jokes. He is furious and leads the plan to sneak into Rigoletto's house.

***Countess Ceprano* (pronounced chay-Prah-noh)(Soprano)**

Count Ceprano's Wife

The Countess is the Duke's latest object of desire, which prompts Rigoletto to mock the jealous Count.

***Rigoletto* (pronounced ree-goh-LET-toh)(Baritone)**

The Court Jester

The tragic anti-hero and court jester. By day, he makes cruel jokes to amuse the selfish Duke. By night, he is a devoted and terrified single father doing everything he can to hide his teenage daughter from the corrupt world. His fatal flaw is his all-consuming desire for revenge.

***Marullo* (pronounced mah-ROOL-loh)(Baritone)**

A Courtier

A witty courtier who discovers that Rigoletto is hiding a young woman in his house. He mistakenly thinks the girl is Rigoletto's secret girlfriend (not realizing she is his daughter) and gathers the other nobles to kidnap her.

VOICE TYPES

Vocal Categories

Women

Soprano: Similar to a flute in range and tone color. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

Mezzo-Soprano: Similar to an oboe in range and tone color. Called an alto in choral arrangements, this voice can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers, and young men (trouser role).

Contralto: Similar to an English horn in range and tone color. Usually play unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches, and older women.

Men

Tenor: Similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color and acoustical "ring." Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

Baritone: Similar to a French horn in tone color. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

Bass: Similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men or foolish comic men.

Count Monterone (*pronounced mohn-ter-OH-nay*)(**Bass-Baritone**)

A Nobleman

An angry and grieving nobleman who curses Rigoletto. This curse acts as a dark cloud that hangs over the entire story

Sparafucile (*pronounced spar-a-foo-CHEEL-eh*)(**Bass**)

An Assassin

A spooky and dangerous assassin for hire. While he is a criminal, he oddly follows his own strict code of honor (like only killing when he is officially hired to do so).

Gilda (*pronounced JEEL-dah*)(**Soprano**)

Rigoletto's daughter

Rigoletto's naïve, sheltered, and teenage daughter. She has spent her whole life hidden away and knows very little about the outside world. Despite her father's strict rules, she falls deeply in love with the handsome Duke, not realizing he is up to no good.

Giovanna (*pronounced joh-VAHN-nah*)(**Mezzo-Soprano**)

Gilda's chaperone

Gilda's live-in nurse and housekeeper. Rigoletto pays her to guard Gilda and keep her hidden. However, she fails at her job because she accepts a bribe from the Duke, letting him sneak into the garden to talk to Gilda.

Page (**Mezzo-Soprano or Soprano**)

In the Duke's Court

A young messenger who works for the Duchess (the Duke's wife, who is mentioned but never seen). The page arrives with a message for the Duke, forcing the lying courtiers to nervously claim the Duke is "sleeping" when they have actually hidden Gilda in his room.

Maddalena (*pronounced mah-dah-LEH-nah*)(**Mezzo-Soprano**)

Sparafucile's sister

Sparafucile's sister, who helps him lure victims to their hideout. She is highly focused on money but briefly softens when she meets the charming Duke.

Vocal Colorings

Coloratura: A light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

Lyric: A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies.

Dramatic: Dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

GIUSEPPE VERDI



HE WAS A MUSIC REBEL! Verdi wasn't accepted into the prestigious Milan Conservatory because the faculty thought his piano technique was unconventional, and he was "too old" (he was 18). Instead of giving up, he studied privately and went on to become one of the most famous opera composers in history. After his death, that very same conservatory was renamed the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in his honor!

HIS NAME WAS A SECRET CODE! WHAT?!? During the mid-1800s, Italy was fighting for independence and unification. Audiences would shout "Viva VERDI!" in the Theatres. While it sounded like they were just cheering for the composer, it was actually a secret acronym for Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia (Long Live Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy). Verdi accidentally became a national hero and a symbol of freedom.

HE WAS THE KING OF "MELODIES!" Verdi had an incredible gift for writing catchy tunes. When he wrote the famous aria "La donna è mobile" from *Rigoletto*, he knew it was so catchy that people would leak it before the premiere. He made the tenor rehearse the aria in total secrecy and forbade him from whistling it outside the theatre so it would be a complete surprise on opening night.

HE WAS A SWELL GUY! Verdi used the fortune he made from his operas to build the Casa di Riposo per Musicisti in Milan, a retirement home for elderly musicians who had fallen in hard times. He referred to this home as his "most beautiful work" because it ensured that passionate artists would always have a dignity-filled place to live.

A PROUD FARMER! Even though he was super famous, his favorite hobby was being a farmer. He loved spending time on his large farm in Italy growing grapes and olives and taking care of his horses.

ADORED COFFEE! Verdi drank exceptionally strong coffee in massive quantities throughout the day to fuel his long hours of composing. He viewed caffeine as essential to his creative process, famously stating, "Coffee is the harmony of the heart and the spirit, there is nothing better than a good cup of coffee. "

A PASSIONATE ITALIAN FOODIE! When traveling to international opera premieres, Verdi brought his own regional delicacies with him. His luggage was always packed with Parmigiano-Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma, artisan salami, and Tuscan olive oil.

AND AN AMATEUR CHEF! Verdi's culinary masterpiece was risotto alla Milanese. He had zero tolerance for bad cooking and frequently hired professional chefs for his Sant'Agata estate, only to fire them weeks later for culinary incompetence. He categorized bad chefs as "murderers" of ingredients.

ABOUT THE LIBRETTIST

FRANCESCO MARIA PIAVE (1810-1876)

Verdi's Important Collaborator Francesco Maria Piave was one of the most important librettists (writers of opera texts) in the career of Giuseppe Verdi. He wrote the words and stories for several of Verdi's greatest operas, including *Rigoletto*, *Macbeth*, *La traviata*, and *Simon Boccanegra*.

Piave was born in 1810 on Murano, an island in the Venetian Lagoon that is still famous today for its glass-making. His father was a glass-maker, but Piave's first career goal was very different—he studied to become a priest. Eventually, he discovered that his true passion was writing, especially for theatre and opera.

After beginning his career writing opera libretti, Piave was introduced to Verdi. Their partnership lasted eighteen years and became one of the most successful composer–writer collaborations in opera history.

Verdi was known for having very high standards. He carefully supervised every part of his operas and expected the librettist to choose words that matched the music, characters, and drama perfectly. Although Verdi could sometimes be impatient and demanding, Piave remained dedicated to their work together. He respected Verdi's artistic ideas and often accepted his changes, saying, "That's how the Maestro wants it."

Working with Verdi helped Piave become a better writer. Verdi believed that opera stories should be powerful, clear, and focused, with no unnecessary words. Piave learned how to create dramatic scenes and memorable characters using simple but meaningful language.

Although Piave wrote libretti for other composers, it was his partnership with Verdi that brought him lasting recognition. Together, they created some of the most famous stories in opera, filled with strong emotions, conflict, love, betrayal, and tragedy.

In 1861, Verdi helped Piave receive an important position as resident stage director at La Scala, one of the world's most famous opera houses. However, Piave struggled in

WHY PIAVE MATTERS?

An opera is created through teamwork. The composer writes the music, but the librettist creates the words, characters, and dramatic situations that inspire the music. Without Piave's storytelling, many of Verdi's most famous operas would not exist in the form we know today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why is the relationship between a composer and librettist important in creating an opera?

Verdi had strong opinions about how his operas should be written. Why might a creative partnership sometimes involve disagreement?

What qualities do you think make someone a successful collaborator?

How do the words of an opera help the audience understand the characters and emotions?

Librettist: The person who writes the words and story of an opera

Libretto: The text or script of an opera

Collaboration: Working together to create something.

this role and was not successful. In 1867, he suffered a serious stroke that left him unable to speak or move. Verdi continued to support Piave and his family during this difficult time until Piave's death in 1876.

ABOUT THE WRITER

VICTOR HUGO (1802-1885)

Giuseppe Verdi based his masterpiece opera *Rigoletto* on Victor Hugo's controversial 1832 French play, *Le roi s'amuse* (The King Amuses Himself). To Verdi, Hugo's writing was "worthy of Shakespeare" because it took flawed, outcast characters and gave them deep human dignity.

WHO WAS VICTOR HUGO? (The Brief Backstory) He was a famous Novelist, best known for writing *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

SOCIAL JUSTICE FIGHTER: Hugo used his stories to fiercely criticize political corruption and the mistreatment of the poor.

BANNED IN FRANCE: His play *Le roi s'amuse* was so critical of the monarchy that the French government banned it after just one performance!

WHY VERDI WANTED HUGO'S STORY: Verdi was a theatrical rebel who hated old-fashioned operas where heroes were completely perfect and villains were totally evil.

HE WAS DRAWN TO HUGO'S WORK FOR A CORE REASONS: The Beauty in the "Grotesque": Hugo popularized the idea that a character could be physically deformed or socially awkward but possess a beautiful, loving soul inside. Verdi loved the contrast of a sharp-tongued, hunchbacked court jester who is secretly a fiercely tender, protective father.

EXPOSING THE POWERFUL: Hugo's play didn't hold back against corrupt rulers. Verdi wanted to capture dangerous reality and fought hard against government censors who demanded that the story's royal villain be changed into a completely "moral" character.

THE "CURSE" FRAMEWORK: Hugo provided a tightly paced, tragic plot centered on a father's desire for revenge that accidentally destroys his own child. Verdi found this setup so powerful that his original title for the opera was simply *La maledizione* (The Curse).

THE STORY EVOLUTION: Play vs. Opera Because 19th-century government censors blocked both Hugo and Verdi from showing a corrupt, historical French king onstage, Verdi changed the names and locations to get the opera approved.

Element	Victor Hugo's Play (<i>Le roi s'amuse</i>)	Verdi's Opera (<i>Rigoletto</i>)
The Royal Setting	The grand historical court of King Francis I of France	The fictionalized court of the Duke of Mantua in Italy
The Corrupt Ruler	King Francis I (a real, historically scandalous monarch)	The Duke of Mantua (a smooth-talking, uncaring nobleman)
The Bitter Jester	Triboulet (bitter, deformed court comedian)	Rigoletto (named after the French verb <i>rigoler</i> , meaning "to laugh")
The Innocent Daughter	Blanche (kept hidden away from society)	Gilda (sacrifices herself due to tragic love)

RIGOLETTO PLOT SUMMARY

Rigoletto is a sharp-tongued court jester who works for the womanizing Duke of Mantua while secretly protecting his daughter, Gilda, from the corrupt world of the Duke's court. When Rigoletto mocks Count Monterone, whose daughter has been dishonored by the Duke, Monterone places a curse on him. Soon afterward, Gilda is kidnapped by the courtiers and taken to the Duke's palace. After discovering what has happened to his daughter, Rigoletto vows revenge and hires an assassin to kill the Duke. However, Gilda remains in love with the Duke and ultimately sacrifices her own life to save him. The tragedy concludes when Rigoletto opens the sack meant to contain the Duke's body, only to discover his dying daughter and realize that Monterone's curse has come true.

- **The anti-hero:** The story revolves around Rigoletto, a sharp-tongued, hunchbacked court jester who makes a living mocking the nobles at the Duke of Mantua's court.
- **The curse:** When Rigoletto mocks Count Monterone, a father furious that the Duke has dishonored his daughter, Monterone places a terrible curse on both the Duke and Rigoletto. Rigoletto becomes terrified that the curse may someday come true.
- **The secret daughter:** Away from the palace, Rigoletto has a very different life. He secretly keeps his beloved daughter, Gilda, hidden at home, hoping to protect her from the dangerous and corrupt world of the Duke's court.
- **The disguise:** The womanizing Duke has already noticed Gilda at church. He secretly enters her home disguised as a poor student named Gualtier Maldè and convinces Gilda that he is in love with her.
- **The kidnapping:** The courtiers discover where Gilda lives and mistakenly believe that she is Rigoletto's mistress. Wanting revenge for his cruel jokes, they trick a blindfolded Rigoletto into helping them with what he thinks is the kidnapping of another woman. In reality, he unknowingly helps them abduct his own daughter.
- **The painful discovery:** Rigoletto follows the kidnappers to the Duke's palace and learns that Gilda has been taken to the Duke. Desperate to reach her, he reveals to the shocked courtiers that Gilda is not his mistress—she is his daughter.
- **The vow of revenge:** Gilda tells her father what has happened, but despite the Duke's betrayal, she admits that she still loves him. Rigoletto, furious and heartbroken, vows to take revenge on the Duke.
- **The assassin:** Rigoletto hires Sparafucile, a professional assassin, to murder the Duke. He brings Gilda to Sparafucile's inn so she can witness the Duke flirting with another woman and finally see that he has been unfaithful to her.
- **The tragic choice:** Even after seeing the Duke's true character, Gilda still loves him. When she overhears Sparafucile and his sister Maddalena planning to kill the next person who enters the inn instead of the Duke, Gilda decides to sacrifice herself. Disguised as a man, she knocks on the door and is fatally wounded.
- **The fatal discovery:** Rigoletto returns and is given a sack that he believes contains the Duke's body. Just as he prepares to throw it into the river, he hears the Duke singing in the distance. Horrified, Rigoletto opens the sack and discovers his dying daughter inside.
- **The curse fulfilled:** Gilda forgives her father and dies in his arms. Devastated, Rigoletto realizes that Monterone's curse has finally come true.

ELEMENTARY / MIDDLE SCHOOL LESSON #1:

PREPARING TO ATTEND THE OPERA

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Performance and Audience Etiquette: Demonstrating Audience and Performance Decorum

Elementary School (Grades 3-5) PAE1: Demonstrate performance decorum and audience etiquette for the context, venue, genre, and style.

Middle School (Grades 6-8) PAE: Demonstrate performance decorum and audience etiquette for the context, venue, genre, and style.

Music Evaluation

Elementary School (Grades 3-5) MU:Re9.1: Demonstrate and describe how selected music connects to and is influenced by specific interests, experiences, purposes, or contexts.

Middle School (Grades 6-8) MU:Re9.1: Apply appropriate personally-developed criteria to evaluate musical works or performances.

Music Connections

Elementary School (Grades 3-5) MU:Cn10.0 & MU:Cn11.0: Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

Middle School (Grades 6-8) MU:Cn10.0 & MU:Cn11.0: Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

Outcomes:

This lesson will help students learn how the lay out of the Civic Theatre informs opera etiquette (behavior) at a live performance. We will explore what makes opera singers so special and how they work with a conductor and orchestra to tell an opera story.

ACTIVITY:

Explore the Civic Theatre layout, audience etiquette, and the roles of opera singers, the conductor, and orchestra in a live performance.

LESSON STEPS:

1. *Understand the theatre setting.*

As a class, look at the images of San Diego Opera's Civic Theatre where you will see San Diego Opera's production of *Rigoletto*.

- Look at a picture of the outside of the Civic Theatre.
<https://images.app.goo.gl/xRikMHdGAS7ei4Es7>
- Look at a picture of audience seating in the theatre. All the seats are facing the stage so everyone can watch the opera

<https://images.app.goo.gl/1Axs9L9DZUuNrxG46>

- This is a picture of the stage. This is where the opera singers will perform. They can see and hear the audience, just like the audience can see and hear them

<https://images.app.goo.gl/Bi67spU8XX9Mb3QS6>

- This is a picture of the orchestra pit; the orchestra pit is located between the stage and the audience. Up to 90 musicians and an opera conductor can play their instruments in the pit.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/YoC8Q9F33FVPwDy39>

2. *Discuss in small groups why the audience, stage and orchestra pit are set up this way.*

- Predict how this helps tell the story of the opera.
- Opera singers can see and hear the audience. How do you think this will affect how you watch the performance? Also, opera singers don't use microphones—they use their trained voices to be heard over the orchestra. Where on stage do you think they should stand to be heard best? Discuss how this will impact the way you react to each performance.

3. *Discuss in small groups audience etiquette.*

- Discuss what respectful audience behavior looks and sounds like during a live opera performance. Consider when it is appropriate to talk, applaud, cheer, use a phone, or leave your seat. Share one example of good audience etiquette with the class.

4. *Review the role of the conductor.*

- The opera conductor helps the singers, and the orchestra work together. The conductor uses a baton in their hand to guide the music.
- When you are watching the performance, look for the conductor at the center of the orchestra pit. Describe how the singers keep eye contact with the conductor and other singers on stage.

5. *After you attend Student Night at the Opera:*

Describe the relationship between the audience and the singers during a live performance and how it is different from watching TV or a movie.

HIGH SCHOOL LESSON #1: PREPARING TO ATTEND THE OPERA

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: HIGH SCHOOL

Performance and Audience Etiquette: Demonstrating Audience and Performance Decorum

High School (Grades 9-12) TH:Pr6.1: Perform a scripted drama/theatre work for a specific audience, demonstrating performance decorum and audience etiquette appropriate to the context, venue, genre, and style.

Music Evaluation

High School (Grades 9-12) MU:Re9.1: Justify evaluation of musical works and performances using criteria, context, and research.

Music Connections

High School (Grades 9-12) MU:Cn10.0 & MU:Cn11.0: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make music; demonstrate understanding of relationships between music, other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life, possibly using research.

OUTCOMES:

Students will understand the roles necessary to create a live performance.

ACTIVITY:

Preparing for Student Night at the Opera by researching and discussing the expertise required for these roles.

LESSON STEPS:

1. *Identify the roles needed to create a live performance.*

- Imagine you and your classmates are responsible for creating a live performance.
- In small groups, list all the roles you think are needed to make the performance happen.
- Remember that many important roles take place behind the scenes and are not seen on stage.

2. *Explore the skills and responsibilities of each role.*

- As a group, discuss the expertise and responsibilities required for each role on your list.
- Each group member should choose one role to research.
- Present a short description of that role to your group. Resource links are provided below.

3. *Discuss how people train for careers in live performance.*

- Consider how people develop the skills needed for each role.
- Discuss whether these skills are learned through experience, trade school, college, conservatory programs, apprenticeships, or other training.
- Compare the amount and type of training required for different careers.

4. *Identify the shared goals of a performance team.*

- Create a Venn diagram with your group showing the common goals shared by people working on a live performance.
- Discuss how working toward shared goals can affect the quality of the audience's experience.
- Consider how the audience's response may also influence the performers and production team.

5. *Observe a career role during Student Night at the Opera.*

- Choose one role from your discussion that interests you.
- During Student Night at the Opera, look for evidence of that role in action.
- After the performance, share your observations with your group and teacher.

RESOURCES AND INFORMATION ABOUT CAREERS IN OPERA:

<https://www.sfopera.com/learn/about-opera/people-at-the-opera/>

<https://www.berklee.edu/careers/communities/opera>



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LESSON #2: CHARACTER

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Key Ideas and Details: Reading Literature

Elementary School (Grade 3) RL.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a story, referring to details from the text as the basis for answers.

Elementary School (Grade 3) RL.3: Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

Elementary School (Grade 4) RL.1: Refer to details and examples in a story when explaining what the text says and when making inferences.

Elementary School (Grade 4) RL.3: Describe a character in depth using specific details from the character's words, actions, and feelings.

Elementary School (Grade 5) RL.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says and when drawing conclusions about a character.

Music Creation

Elementary School (Grades 3–5) 3MC2. MU:Cr2.0: Describe how music relates to its purpose or context and how it conveys feeling.

OUTCOMES:

Students will work in small groups to examine the words and music from an aria in *Rigoletto*. They will use clues from the character's words, actions, and music to make predictions about the character's personality and feelings.

ACTIVITY:

Exploring *Rigoletto*'s character by reading an aria, identifying clues in the text, and listening to how the music expresses his emotions.

LESSON STEPS:

1. Read with a Partner

Read the following excerpt from the opera *Rigoletto*.

This aria takes place in Act II. *Rigoletto* is singing about his sadness and the pain he feels after his daughter, Gilda, is in danger.

Take turns reading the aria aloud.

RIGOLETTO

Yes, my daughter!
Why are you not laughing now?

She is in there.
I want her back. Give her to me!

You cruel men,
what did you get for taking my daughter?

You may do anything for money,
but my daughter is worth more than anything.

Give her back!
I may have no weapon,
but I will do anything to protect my child.

Open that door!

Ah! You are all against me!

He begins to cry.

All of you are against me.

Marullo, please tell me—
where have you hidden her?

She is in there, isn't she?
Why won't you answer me?

Please, forgive me.
Have mercy on me!

Give an old father back his daughter.

It costs you nothing to return her,
but to me, she is everything.

Please,
give me my daughter back.

She is everything to me.

2. Find Clues

With your partner, look for clues in Rigoletto's words that tell us about his personality.

Discuss these questions:

- How does Rigoletto want other people to see him?
- How does Rigoletto actually feel inside?
- What words show that Rigoletto loves his daughter?
- Why do you think Rigoletto hides his sadness from other people?

With your partner, describe Rigoletto's feelings.

Is he happy, angry, afraid, or sad?

How do you know? Use examples from the aria to explain your answer.

3. Listen to the Music

Listen to Rigoletto's aria from the opera *Rigoletto*.

Suggested listening:

https://youtu.be/GYUIn_PJq_0?si=XsMsRKdgdD4GSUL8

Listen carefully for clues in the music and think about:

- The tempo. Is the music fast or slow?
- The mood. Does the music sound joyful or serious?
- The emotions. Does the singer's voice sound powerful, gentle, or upset?
- How does the music help us understand Rigoletto's feelings?

4. Discuss What You Heard

Talk with your partner about what you noticed after hearing the music.

Discuss these questions:

- How do the words and music help us understand Rigoletto's character?
- What parts of the music match the emotions in the words?
- Did the music make Rigoletto seem stronger, weaker, happier, or sadder? Explain why.
- What did the music add to the story that the words alone did not show?



EXTENSION ACTIVITY: CHARACTER DETECTIVE

Create a “Character Detective” chart about Rigoletto.

Character Clue	What It Tells Us About Rigoletto
He makes people laugh as a jester	
He worries about his daughter	
His music sounds sad and emotional	
He says he hides his pain	

Final Question:

If you met Rigoletto today, what would you want to tell him? Use what you learned from the story and music to explain your answer.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL LESSON #2: LIBRETTO

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Key Ideas and Details: Reading Literature

Middle School (Grades 6–7) RL.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text

Middle School (Grades 8) RL.3: Analyze how dialogue and incidents in a drama reveal aspects of a character and provoke decisions.

High School (Grades 9–10) RL.3: Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text and how their actions advance the plot or develop themes.

High School (Grades 11–12) RL.3: Analyze the impact of author choices regarding how characters are developed and how their conflicts contribute to meaning.

Music Standards (Middle School and High School)

MU.1: Analyze how musical elements, structure and context contribute to understanding a musical work.

MU.1: Support interpretations of musical works using evidence from the music.

MU.1: Evaluate musical works using criteria related to expressive intent and artistic choices

OUTCOMES:

Students will analyze how Verdi uses music and text to reveal the emotions, motivations, and conflicts of four characters in *Rigoletto*. Students will examine how simultaneous melodies, vocal styles and dramatic choices allow the audience to understand different perspectives within the same scene.

Students will identify how the quartet creates dramatic tension by allowing each character to express a different emotional reality at the same time.

ACTIVITY:

Analyzing the quartet “Bella figlia dell’amore” by reading the libretto, listening to the music, and watching the staging to compare how Verdi gives each character a different emotional perspective within the same scene.

LESSON STEPS:

Below is an example from the libretto in *Rigoletto*. The example is the quartet “Bella figlia dell’amore” and is sung by The Duke, Maddalena, Gilda and Rigoletto.

1. Work with a partner or in a small group. Read each character’s section of the libretto and discuss the questions below.

- Based on the text, describe the relationship between each pair of characters.
 - a. The Duke and Maddalena
 - b. Gilda and the Duke
 - c. Rigoletto and Gilda

*Use specific examples from the libretto(below)to support your ideas

- What clues tell you that the four characters are experiencing the same event differently?

*Use specific words or phrases to explain your answer.

- Which conflicts are internal and which are external?

2. Read and Compare

Read the libretto again and pay close attention to the language each character uses.

- **The Duke**
What words does he use to persuade Maddalena?
Does he sound sincere? Why or why now?
- **Maddalena**
How does she respond to the Duke?
What clues suggest she may not believe him?
- **Gilda**
Which words show that she feels betrayed?
How has her opinion of the Duke changed?
- **Rigoletto**
How does his language reveal his role as a father?
How does his attitude change during the scene?

Rigoletto Quartet ***“Bella figlia dell’amore”***

Duke

Beautiful lady,
I am completely captivated by you.
If you would only say one kind word,
You could ease all my longing.
Come closer-
Feel how fast my heart is beating.

Maddalena

(laughing)

Your sweet talk doesn’t fool me.
Words like those are easy to say.
I’ve heard promises like your before,
And I know how little they can mean.
I’ve met plenty of men

Who speak just as smoothly.

Gilda

(watching from a distance)

Those are the same loving words
He once said to me.
My heart is broken.
I believed him,
But he has betrayed my trust.

Rigoletto

(To Gilda)

Quiet now.
Tears cannot change what has happened.
Now you see
That his promises were false.
Come with me.
Leave the rest to me.
Justice will come swiftly,
And he will answer for what he has done.
Listen carefully.
Go home.
Take this money and a horse.
Wear the clothes I prepared for you
And travel at once to Verona.
I will join you there tomorrow.

Gilda

Please come with me now.

Rigoletto

I can't

Gilda

I'm frightened.

3. Listen/Watch and Compare

Students transition from analyzing the words on the page to evaluating how Verdi set the words to music

LISTEN

Play the audio recording of the Quartet ("Bella figlia dell'amore"). Instruct students to close their eyes and focus on the musical layers of the voice parts.

- **Vocal Ranges** Identify the different vocal ranges of each character (Soprano, Alto/Mezzo, Tenor, Baritone, Bass).

- **Tempo & Style:** How does the tempo and style of each voice match the character's mood?
- **Vocal Line and Articulation:** Can you hear the difference between the lyrical, flowing lines and the agitated, staccato (short, detached) lines?

WATCH

Play the video and observe the physical staging(blocking) and acting

- Notice how the stage is divided. How are the individual characters staged?

Pavarotti/Sutherland <https://youtu.be/HFAfvcT9Sgg?si=pbLhXrWErPWJ-Lnn>

COMPARE

Circle the following-Possible answers below

Character	Vocal Range	Musical Style & Articulation	Physical Staging / Blocking	Dramatic & Emotional Function
The Duke	Tenor	Lyrical, legatissimo (long melodic line), expansive, open melodies.	Inside the inn, physically close to Maddalena, moving confidently.	Flirtation, superficial charm, arrogance.
Maddalena	Mezzo-Soprano	Fast, staccato notes, descending runs resembling laughter.	Inside the inn, dodging or teasing the Duke.	Flirtation, skepticism, amusement, control over the interaction.
Gilda	Soprano	Fragmented, breathless phrases, high pitches, sobbing syncopations.	Outside in the dark, peering through a crack, in grief.	Heartbreak, profound betrayal, loss of innocence, despair.
Rigoletto	Baritone	Low, sustained pitches, rigid rhythms, declamatory speech-like tone.	Outside, near Gilda, offering emotional support as they watch the Duke flirting.	Protective, calculations for vengeance, parental sorrow.

ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL LESSON #3 MASKS IN *RIGOLETTO*

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Key Ideas and Details: Reading Literature

Elementary School (Grades 4–5) RL.3: Describe and compare characters in a story or drama using specific details from the text, including their thoughts, words, actions, and motivations.

Middle School (Grades 6–7) RL.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Middle School (Grade 8) RL.3: Analyze how dialogue and incidents in a drama reveal aspects of a character and provoke decisions.

High School (Grades 9–10) RL.3: Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text and how their actions advance the plot or develop themes.

High School (Grades 11–12) RL.3: Analyze the impact of author choices regarding how characters are developed and how their relationships and conflicts contribute to meaning.

Speaking and Listening

Elementary School (Grades 4–5) SL.1: Engage in collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly.

Middle School (Grades 6–8) SL.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions, using evidence to support ideas and responding thoughtfully to others.

High School (Grades 9–12) SL.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly and logically, using details appropriate to the purpose and audience.

Visual Arts Standards

Visual Arts (Elementary School) VA:Cr3.1.5a: Use art vocabulary to describe and explain personal choices made in creating artwork.

Visual Arts (Middle School) VA:Re8.1.8a: Interpret how subject matter, visual elements, media, and artistic choices work together to communicate ideas, meaning, and mood.

Visual Arts (High School) VA:Re8.1.HS1a: Interpret an artwork using relevant evidence from the work and its context to support an understanding of its meaning.

OUTCOMES:

Students will learn how theatrical masks have been used to represent characters and emotions. They will explore the idea of a public mask and a private self by examining characters from *Rigoletto* and creating a two-sided mask that shows both sides of a character's personality.

ACTIVITY:

Exploring the history of theatrical masks and creating a two-sided character mask that represents the difference between how a character appears to others and how they truly feel inside.

LESSON STEPS:

1. *Learn About Theatrical Masks*

As a class, discuss how masks have been used in theatre for hundreds of years.

- In ancient Greek theatre, masks helped actors show different characters and emotions.
- Two famous theatrical masks represent **Comedy** and **Tragedy**.
- In Italian ***Commedia dell'arte***, actors used masks to help audiences quickly understand a character's personality.
- Discuss how a mask can tell us something about a character before they even speak.

2. *Make the Connection to Rigoletto*

Introduce Rigoletto as a court jester.

- At court, Rigoletto makes jokes and insults people as part of his job.
- Other people see him as funny, cruel, and confident.
- In private, he is a worried and loving father who wants to protect his daughter, Gilda.
- Explain that Rigoletto does not wear a mask all the time, but his behavior can act like a mask that hides his true feelings.

Ask students:

- What does Rigoletto show other people?
- What does he hide from them?
- Why might someone act differently in public than they do in private?

3. *Explore the Two Sides of a Character*

Choose a character from ***Rigoletto*** and identify their public and private sides.

Students may explore:

- **Rigoletto**: A mocking court jester / A loving and frightened father
- **The Duke**: A charming romantic / A selfish man who uses his power to get what he wants
- **Gilda**: An innocent and obedient daughter / A young woman with powerful emotions who makes her own choices
- **Maddalena**: An accomplice to an assassin / A woman who feels compassion and tries to save someone

With a partner or small group, discuss:

- How does this character want others to see them?
- What might the character really be thinking or feeling?

- What actions in the opera give us clues about both sides of the character?

4. Design a Two-Sided Mask

Using the mask template provided, create a mask that shows both sides of the chosen character.

- One side should represent the character's **public mask**—how they appear to other people.
- The other side should represent the character's **private reality**—what they truly think, feel, or want.
- Use colors, shapes, facial expressions, lines, and patterns to represent each side.
- Think carefully about how each design choice connects to the character.

For example:

- Bright colors might represent confidence, humor, or charm.
- Darker colors might represent fear, sadness, anger, or secrecy.
- Sharp lines might suggest danger or cruelty.
- Soft or curved lines might suggest kindness or vulnerability.

5. Explain Your Design

After completing the mask, explain the choices you made.

Students should describe:

- Which character they selected.
- What each side of the mask represents.
- Why they chose particular colors, shapes, expressions, or symbols.
- What the mask teaches about the difference between the character's outward appearance and inner feelings.

6. Share and Discuss

Share the completed masks with the class or in small groups.

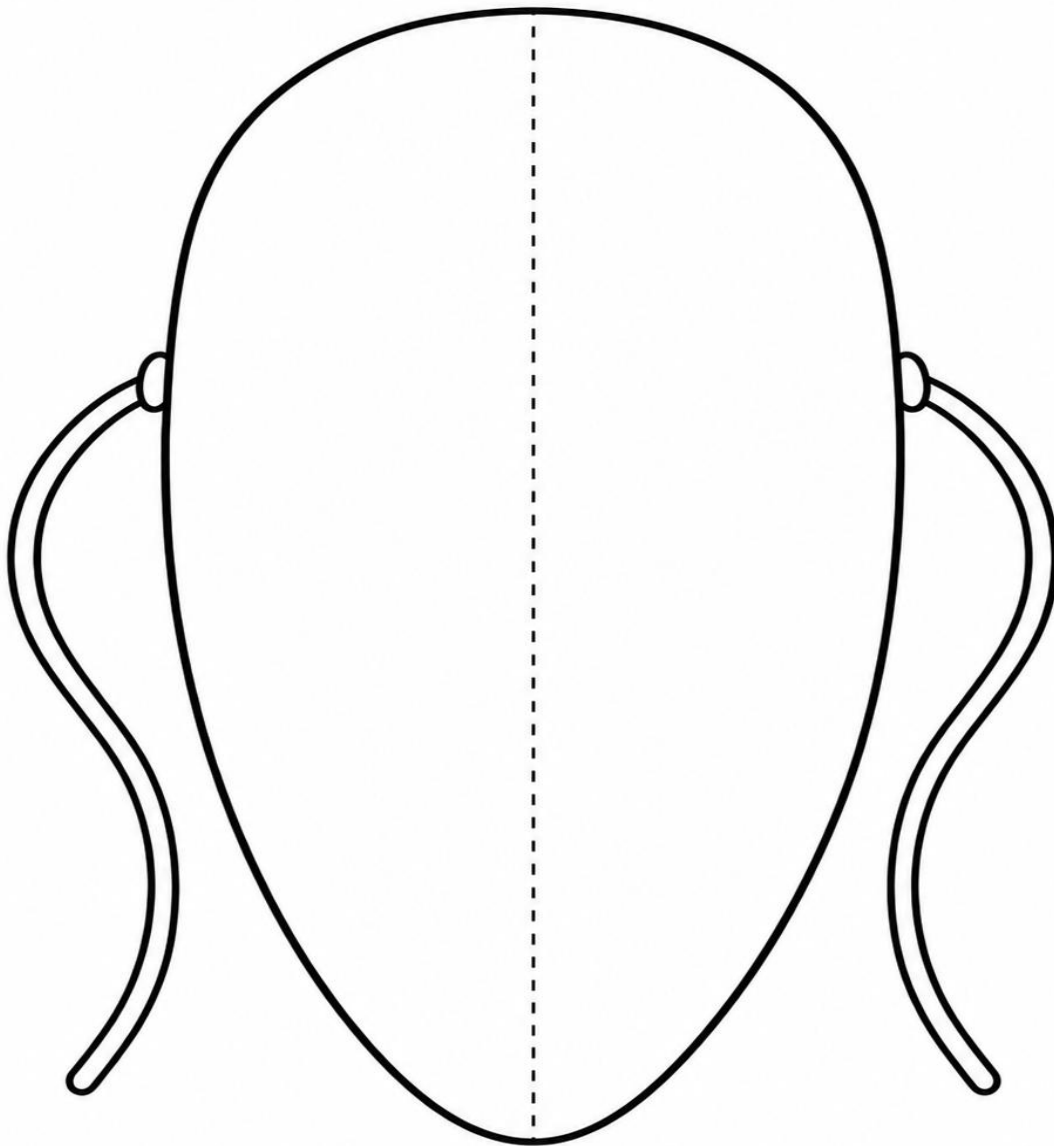
Discuss:

- Which character was easiest or hardest to represent?
- What did you learn about the character by creating the mask?
- How can costumes, masks, music, and acting help an audience understand a character?
- Why do you think the idea of hiding our true feelings is important in *Rigoletto*?

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LESSON #4: THE NEED FOR KINDNESS

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Key Ideas and Details: Reading Informational Text

Elementary School (Grade 4) RI.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

Elementary School (Grade 4) RI.2: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details.

Elementary School (Grade 5) RI.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

Elementary School (Grade 5) RI.2: Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details.

Speaking and Listening

Elementary School (Grade 4) SL.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly.

Elementary School (Grade 5) SL.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly.

OUTCOMES:

Students will learn that court jesters were entertainers who were expected to make kings, queens, and members of the royal court laugh.

Students will identify the difference between laughing with someone and laughing at someone and discuss how words and actions can affect other people.

Students will recognize that a person's outward behavior may not always show how they are feeling inside.

Students will connect the experiences of court jesters to Rigoletto and consider how kindness, empathy, and respect can change the way we understand other people.

ACTIVITY:

Exploring the hidden life of the court jester by reading a short historical passage, discussing the difference between laughing with someone and laughing at someone, and connecting the jester's public smile to the emotions that may be hidden underneath.

LESSON STEPS:

1. *Learn about the role of a court jester.*

As a class, read the passage below.

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, kings and queens often had entertainers called jesters living and working in their royal courts. Jesters wore colorful clothing and used jokes, music, storytelling, funny movements, and other skills to make people laugh. But being a jester was not always fun. Some people who looked, spoke, or moved differently from others



were brought into royal courts specifically to entertain the king, queen, and their guests. They were sometimes treated as people to laugh at rather than people deserving the same respect as everyone else. Jesters were also expected to entertain even when they might be tired, lonely, frightened, or sad.

Imagine having to smile and make people laugh when you were having a very bad day.

The bright clothes and funny jokes people saw on the outside did not always show what the jester might have been feeling on the inside.

2. *Discuss laughing “with” someone and laughing “at” someone.*

Ask students to think about the difference between two kinds of laughter.

Write on the board:

Laughing WITH Someone

Laughing AT Someone

As a class, brainstorm examples for each.

Possible examples:

Laughing WITH Someone

- Everyone enjoys the joke.
- The person telling the joke is having fun too.
- No one feels embarrassed or hurt.
- The joke helps people feel included.

Laughing AT Someone

- Someone is being made fun of.
- A person feels embarrassed or uncomfortable.
- The joke focuses on something a person cannot control.
- One person is having fun at another person's expense.

Discuss:

- What is the difference between laughing **with** someone and laughing **at** someone?
- How can you tell whether a joke is hurting someone's feelings?
- Can something be funny to one person but hurtful to another?
- What can you do if you realize that a joke has hurt someone?

3. Look beyond the smile.

Explain that we cannot always know what someone is feeling simply by looking at them.

Write:

What We See | What We Might Not See

Ask students to brainstorm what people might show on the outside and what they might be feeling on the inside.

Possible answers:

What We See	What We Might Not See
Smiling	Sadness
Laughing	Worry
Telling jokes	Fear
Acting silly	Loneliness
Performing	Nervousness
Helping others have fun	Having a difficult day

Discuss:

- Can someone smile even when they are sad?
- Can someone tell jokes even when they are worried?
- Why might someone hide how they are really feeling?
- Why is it important to be kind even when we do not know what another person is going through?

4. Imagine a day in the life of a jester.

Ask students to imagine the following situation:

You are the court jester. You are having a very difficult day, but the king announces that a large celebration is beginning and tells you to make everyone laugh.

Discuss:

- How might you feel?
- What might you be thinking?
- What would the people at the celebration see?
- What feelings might you be hiding?
- What would you want someone at the celebration to notice about you?

Students may discuss their answers with a partner before sharing with the class.

5. Connect the lesson to Rigoletto.

Explain that **Rigoletto is the Duke of Mantua's court jester.**

At the Duke's court, Rigoletto makes jokes and makes fun of other people as part of his job.

But Rigoletto has another side that the people at court rarely see.

He is also a father who deeply loves and wants to protect his daughter, Gilda.

Discuss with students:

- Do you think Rigoletto acts the same way with the Duke as he does with his daughter?
- Why might someone behave differently at work than they do with their family?
- If Rigoletto makes people laugh, does that automatically mean that he is happy?
- What might Rigoletto be feeling underneath his jokes?
- How does knowing more about Rigoletto change the way you think about his character?

MIDDLE SCHOOL LESSON #4: THE PRESSURE TO PERFORM

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: MIDDLE SCHOOL

Key Ideas and Details: Reading in History/Social Studies Standards

Middle School (Grades 6–8) RH.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Middle School (Grades 6–8) RH.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source and provide an accurate summary of the source.

Speaking and Listening

Middle School (Grades 6–8) SL.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly.

OUTCOMES:

Students will examine the unusual social position of court jesters and understand the difference between being **close to power** and actually **having power**.

Students will analyze how jesters could use humor to communicate difficult ideas to powerful rulers.

Students will explore how a person's public behavior can hide private emotions such as fear, sadness, anger, or stress.

Students will connect the historical role of the court jester to Rigoletto and compare his public identity as the Duke's jester with his private identity as Gilda's father.

ACTIVITY:

Exploring the role of the court jester through historical reading and discussion to understand how power, humor, and hidden emotions shape Rigoletto's character.

LESSON STEPS:

1. *Read about the pressure of being a court jester.*

As a class, read the passage below.

Court jesters occupied an unusual position in royal society. They wore colorful clothing, told jokes, performed music, and used physical comedy to entertain kings, queens, and their guests. Because of their role, jesters could spend a great deal of time near powerful rulers. However, being close to power did not mean that the jester was powerful.

The jester depended on the ruler's approval and had to constantly pay attention to the ruler's mood. Some jesters also used jokes, riddles, stories, and clever wordplay to communicate difficult ideas that others might be afraid to say directly.

This meant that humor could be both a form of entertainment and a kind of shield.

Discuss:

- What is the difference between being close to power and having power?
- Why might a jester need to understand the mood of the King or Queen?
- Why could it take courage to tell a powerful person something they do not want to hear?

2. Explore humor as a shield.

Ask students to imagine the following situation:

The kingdom has lost an important battle. Everyone is afraid to tell the King, so the Jester must deliver the bad news.

Discuss:

- How might the Jester feel?
- Why might the Jester use humor instead of speaking directly?
- How could a joke make difficult information easier to hear?
- What might happen if the King does not find the joke funny?

Ask students to create one sentence the Jester might use to deliver the bad news in a humorous or clever way.

Then discuss:

How can humor help someone speak to a person who has more power than they do?

3. Look beyond the performance.

Explain that a person's public behavior does not always show how they are feeling inside.

What Others See

Smiling

Telling jokes

Acting confident

Making people laugh

Performing energetically

What the Jester Might Feel

Sadness

Nervousness

Fear

Stress

Exhaustion

Discuss:

- Why might someone hide their true feelings?
- Can someone appear happy while feeling stressed or afraid?
- How could constantly having to entertain others create pressure?
- Why is it important not to judge someone only by what we see on the outside?

4. *Connect the lesson to Rigoletto.*

At court, Rigoletto is sarcastic, confident, and often cruel. He makes the Duke laugh by insulting other people.

But when Rigoletto is with his daughter, Gilda, we see a very different side of him. He is loving, worried, and deeply protective.

Compare:

Rigoletto at Court	Rigoletto with Gilda
Sarcastic	Loving
Confident	Worried
Makes jokes	Speaks seriously
Insults others	Protects his daughter
Appears fearless	Shows fear

Discuss:

- Why might Rigoletto behave differently at court than he does with Gilda?
- Is Rigoletto actually powerful, or is he protected by someone who is powerful?
- What emotions might Rigoletto hide while he is performing his job?
- How does understanding his role as a court jester change the way you see his character?

HIGH SCHOOL LESSON #4: THE ILLUSION OF IMMUNITY

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: HIGH SCHOOL

Key Ideas and Details: Reading in History/Social Studies Standards

High School (Grades 9–10) RH.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

High School (Grades 9–10) RH.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source and provide an accurate summary of how key ideas develop over the course of the text.

High School (Grades 11–12) RH.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

High School (Grades 11–12) RH.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source and explain the relationships among key details and ideas.

Speaking and Listening

High School (Grades 9–12) SL.1: Initiate and participate effectively in collaborative discussions, using evidence to develop ideas and respond thoughtfully to different perspectives.

OUTCOMES:

Students will analyze the complicated social position of court jesters and examine the difference between access to power and actually possessing power.

Students will explore how humor and satire can be used to criticize authority, communicate uncomfortable truths, and protect the person delivering the criticism.

Students will examine the emotional and social contradictions of the jester and connect these ideas to Rigoletto's position at the Duke of Mantua's court.

Students will analyze Jan Matejko's painting *Stańczyk* and consider why the image of a jester can represent wisdom, isolation, and political awareness.

ACTIVITY:

Examining the court jester as both an entertainer and critic of authority through historical reading, visual analysis, and discussion, then connecting these ideas to Rigoletto and modern forms of satire.

LESSON STEPS:

1. ***Read about the complicated position of the court jester.***

As a class, read the passage below.

Court jesters occupied an unusual place in European royal society. Because they were entertainers, some jesters were given greater freedom than other members of the court to joke about rulers, criticize decisions, or speak about uncomfortable subjects. However, this freedom was not the same as immunity. The jester still depended upon the ruler. What was considered funny or acceptable could change depending on the situation, the subject of the joke, or the ruler's mood. Jestors could have considerable freedom to speak, but that freedom also carried risk.

There was also a darker side to the history of court entertainment. Historical records distinguish between professional or “artificial” fools, who deliberately performed comedy, and people historically labeled “natural fools”—an outdated term that could refer to individuals with intellectual or developmental differences. Some people with physical differences were also employed or kept in royal courts as entertainers. Their experiences remind us that court entertainment could include exploitation as well as performance.

The jester therefore occupied a contradiction: close enough to power to criticize it, but not powerful enough to control the consequences.

Discuss:

- What is the difference between freedom to speak and immunity from consequences?
- Why might a ruler allow a jester to criticize them?
- Does being able to speak directly to a powerful person make the jester powerful?
- What risks might come with criticizing the person who controls your position?

2. Examine humor, power, and hidden emotions.

Explain that humor could serve several purposes at the same time.

For a court jester, comedy could:

- Entertain the court.
- Make difficult information easier to hear.
- Criticize a decision without confronting the ruler directly.
- Hide fear, anger, or frustration.
- Protect the performer by disguising criticism as a joke.

Discuss:

- Why can comedy sometimes communicate an idea more effectively than a direct statement?
- How can satire allow someone to criticize authority?
- Can humor be both a form of courage and a form of self-protection?
- What emotional pressure might come from constantly turning serious problems into entertainment?

Consider the following question:

If your ability to criticize someone depends upon that person continuing to find you funny, how free are you really?

3. *Analyze Jan Matejko's Stańczyk.*

Look closely at Jan Matejko's 1862 painting *Stańczyk*.

Matejko presents the jester sitting alone and deep in thought while a celebration continues in another room. The painting is held by the National Museum in Warsaw.



As a class or in small groups, discuss:

- What do you notice first about the jester?
- What does his posture suggest about his emotional state?
- How does the jester contrast with the celebration happening behind him?
- Why might Matejko show the person whose job is to make others laugh as the most serious person in the painting?
- What might the painting suggest about the difference between public role and private thought?
- Why do you think the figure of the “sad jester” can become a symbol of wisdom or awareness?

Consider:

Who appears more aware of what is happening—the people celebrating or the person traditionally called the “fool”?

4. *Connect satire and power to Rigoletto.*

Rigoletto occupies a similar contradiction at the Duke of Mantua's court.

He is permitted to insult and ridicule powerful members of the court because doing so entertains the Duke. This gives Rigoletto unusual access and apparent freedom.

But his position ultimately depends upon the Duke.

Discuss:

- Is Rigoletto powerful, or does he only appear powerful because the Duke protects him?
- How might Rigoletto's humor function as both a professional tool and a defense mechanism?
- Why do the other courtiers resent him?

- How does his public identity as a cruel jester contrast with his private identity as Gilda's protective father?
- How does understanding the history of court jesters complicate our judgment of Rigoletto?

Connect to the present:

Consider modern comedians, political cartoonists, satirists, television hosts, and social-media creators who use humor to criticize political leaders, institutions, or social problems.

Discuss:

- Why is comedy still used to communicate uncomfortable truths?
- What personal or professional risks can come from criticizing powerful people or institutions?
- Does satire create real power, or does it primarily create influence?
- Where should the line exist between satire, criticism, and cruelty?

ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL LESSON #5:

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A JESTER OR A KING

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Speaking and Listening

Elementary School (Grades 4–5) SL.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly.

Middle School (Grades 6–8) SL.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly.

High School (Grades 9–12) SL.1: Initiate and participate effectively in collaborative discussions, using ideas and evidence to respond thoughtfully to others.

National Core Standards for Theatre

Elementary School (Grades 4–5) TH:Pr4.1: Use physical and vocal choices to develop character and communicate meaning in a drama/theatre work.

Middle School (Grades 6–8) TH:Pr4.1: Use physical choices, staging, character objectives, and tactics to communicate character and advance a drama/theatre work.

High School (Proficient) TH:Cr3.1 / TH:Pr4.1 / TH:Pr5.1: Apply physical and vocal choices, character relationships, given circumstances, and acting techniques to develop a believable theatrical performance.

OUTCOMES:

Students will physically contrast high-status and low-status characters through posture, movement, facial expression, and gesture.

Students will use theatrical techniques such as physical comedy, audience interaction, and character objectives to create an Over-Dramatic King and Quick-Thinking Jester.

Students will practice active listening, cue-taking, collaboration, and improvisation while rehearsing and performing with a partner.

ACTIVITY:

Exploring character, status, and physical comedy by creating and performing a short scene between an Over-Dramatic King and a Quick-Thinking Jester.

LESSON STEPS:

1. Review the Four Rules of Jester Acting.

Introduce four theatrical techniques students will use during the activity.

- **High Status vs. Low Status**
 - The **King** commands the space, moves slowly, and uses a strong, powerful posture.

- The **Jester** is energetic, flexible, and constantly changes levels by crouching, leaping, bowing, or moving quickly around the King.
- **Break the “Fourth Wall”**
 - The Jester may look directly at the audience, wink, roll their eyes, or react behind the King’s back.
 - The audience becomes part of the joke.
- **Intellectual Wit**
 - The Jester uses clever language such as:
 - Puns
 - Double meanings
 - Riddles
 - Exaggerated compliments
 - Sarcasm disguised as praise
 - The Jester survives by thinking quickly.
- **Physical Comedy**
 - Students can use exaggerated physical choices such as:
 - Dramatic stumbles
 - Sudden frozen poses
 - Giant bows
 - Funny walks
 - Invisible props
 - Exaggerated facial expressions

Discuss:

- How can an actor show who has more power without saying a word?
- How does physical comedy help tell the story?
- Why might the Jester use both clever words and physical comedy?

2. Explore the King and Jester characters.

Divide students into pairs. One student begins as the **King** and the other as the **Jester**.

The Over-Dramatic King (characteristics)

- **Character:** You are the absolute ruler of the kingdom and believe every idea you have is brilliant. You are dramatic, easily bored, and hate being corrected.
- **How to Move:**
 - **The Royal Slouch:** When bored, sink dramatically into your throne.
 - **The Dramatic Gasp:** When you hear bad news, clutch your chest and react as though the world is ending.
 - **The Crown Slip:** Imagine your crown is too large and falls over your eyes whenever you become angry.
 - **Your Goal:** Remain in control and stay angry with the Jester—but your ego makes you very easy to flatter.

The Quick-Thinking Jester (Characteristics)

- **Character:** You are clever and funny, but you have the difficult job of telling the King things he does not want to hear.
- **How to Move:**
 - **The Cartoon Walk:** Enter using a tiptoe, high-knee walk, slide, or other exaggerated movement.
 - **The Invisible Prop:** Mime an imaginary scroll, bag of gold, musical instrument, or other object.
 - **The Audience Look:** React directly to the audience after making a joke or clever comment.
- **Your Goal:** Tell the King the truth while keeping the King entertained. If the King becomes angry, quickly change tactics. Try a joke, compliment, bow, riddle, or physical gag.

3. Warm up through movement.

Whole-Class Warm-Up

Teacher will call out either “**King**” or “**Jester**” and students will embody the following physical characteristics.

For **King**, students will move like this:

- Heavy, slow steps
- Broad posture
- Controlled gestures
- Serious facial expressions

For **Jester**, students will move like this:

- Quick, energetic movement
- Changing levels
- Expressive faces
- Playful gestures

Continue switching between the two characters so students practice changing their physicality quickly.

4. Create and perform a King and Jester scene.

Give each pair the following situation:

The kingdom has run out of money, and the Jester must tell the King.

The King does not want to hear the bad news.

The Jester must find a way to tell the truth without making the King so angry that the conversation ends.

Students create and rehearse a short scene using at least three of the following:

- High-status and low-status movement
- A dramatic King reaction
- A joke or pun
- A riddle
- An exaggerated compliment
- A fourth-wall break
- An imaginary prop
- A physical comedy moment

Pairs perform their scenes for the class.

After each performance, discuss:

- How did the actors show who had higher status?
- What physical choices helped create the King and Jester?
- How did the Jester try to change the King's mood?
- Did the Jester successfully communicate the bad news?
- Which theatrical choice was most effective?

5. *Connect to Rigoletto*

Remind students that Rigoletto works as the Duke of Mantua's court jester.

Discuss:

- What acting choices could a performer use to show that the Duke has higher status than Rigoletto?
- Why might Rigoletto use humor, exaggeration, or insults when performing at court?
- How does acting out the King and Jester relationship help you better understand Rigoletto's position at the Duke's court?