Writing a Modern Opera

Class: Bilingual Music

Summary: Throughout the course, while talking about famous music composers and music history in general, we also discuss operas. In general, the students find operas to be very boring. This lesson was designed to create interest in operas and ultimately have them write their own.

Objective: Discuss and compare operas with their modern-day counterparts. Stimulate creative writing while incorporating musical elements. Encourage students to work together as a team.

Part 1

1. Tell the students that you are going to show them two clips. One is from a very old opera, and the other is from a modern musical. Ask them to look for similarities between the two.

2. Show students a short clip from *La Bohème* by Giacomo Puccini. It is the scene where the characters, Rudolfo and Mimi, meet for the first time.

3. Show students a short clip from *RENT* by Jonathan Larson. It is the scene where the characters, Roger and Mimi, meet for the first time.

4. Discuss with the students the similarities between the two scenes. For example: In both scenes, a man and woman meet for the first time and fall instantly in love. A candle symbolizes their love for one another in both scenes. The character Mimi is dying in both.

5. Now show the students a presentation (see attachment 1), explaining the similarities and differences between *La Bohème* and *RENT*. Tell them that *RENT* is a modern version of *La Bohème*.

Part 2

1. Now tell the students that together, you will rewrite a very famous opera. At this point, do not tell the students what the opera is.

2. Using a synopsis of Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, ask students to name a thing, a location and time period, an animal, a girl’s name, a boy’s name, etc. Using the words the students provide you, replace key words in the original *The Magic Flute* (see attachment 2).

3. Read the original synopsis for the students, so that they know which opera they have rewritten. Now read the new synopsis for them. Usually the new synopsis is comical. For example, *The Magic Pencil* (see attachment 3). At this point the students should be prepared for Part 3.
Part 3

1. Now tell the students that in groups they will write their own opera. Tell them the funnier and the more creative their operas are, the better. Ask them for a title, setting, character’s names and a short synopsis.

2. When the students finish, ask them to read their opera synopsis for the entire class. (see attachment 4)

In conclusion: The students enjoyed seeing a modern, relatable version of an old opera (La Bohème and RENT). They found their new version of The Magic Flute—The Magic Pencil—very funny. And finally, they enjoyed using their creativity and wit to write their own opera.

Attachments:
Attachment 1: Comparing La Bohème and RENT
Attachment 2: The Magic Flute
Attachment 3: The Magic Pencil
Attachment 4: scans of students’ operas
Comparing La Bohème and RENT
Giacomo Puccini

- 1858 – 1924
- Italian composer
- Composed La Bohème, which premiered in 1896.
Jonathan Larson

- 1960 – 1996
- American composer and playwright
- Wrote RENT, which premiered in 1994.
Comparing storylines

La Bohème was set in 1830, in Paris

RENT was set in 1995, in New York City
Both take place on Christmas Eve

La Bohème

RENT
Both are about poor struggling artists

La Bohème (in Paris)  RENT (in New York)
Characters are...

Rudolfo (Poet/Writer)  

Roger (Musician)
Characters are...

Marcello (Artist/Painter)  Mark (Film Maker)
Characters are...

Musetta (Singer)  
Maureen (Performance Artist)
Characters are...

Shaunard (Musician)

Angel Shaunard (Performer/Cross Dresser)
Characters are...

Colline (Philosopher)  Tom Collins (Philosophy Teacher)
Characters are...

Mimi (seamstress)  Mimi (exotic dancer)
Now let’s compare the music

**La Bohème**
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kyfcce-bmy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kyfcce-bmy4)

**RENT**
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urfB_iX-gE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urfB_iX-gE)
The Magic Flute
By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Once upon a time, in Ancient Egypt, there was a handsome prince named Tamino, who was chased by a vicious snake. Three ladies save him. They ask him for a favor in return: Please save the Queen of the Night’s daughter, Pamina, from the evil Sarastro.

The three ladies give Tamino a magic flute to protect him from danger on his journey. His assistant, Papageno, dressed like a bird, helps Tamino rescue Pamina from Sarastro, who is not actually evil, and happily sets her free. The Queen gives Pamina a dagger to kill Sarastro, but Pamina refuses. The Queen of the Night tries to destroy Sarastro’s castle, but instead she is defeated and banished forever. Prince Tamino and Pamina are together and live happily ever after.

The Magic (1. thing)
By Our Class

Once upon a time, in (2. location, time period), there was a handsome prince named (3. boy’s name), who was chased by a vicious (4. animal). Three ladies save him. They ask him for a favor in return: Please save the Queen of the (5. thing)’s daughter, (6. girl’s name), from the evil (7. a different boy’s name).

The three ladies give (#3) a magic (#1) to protect him from danger on his journey. His assistant, (8. another boy’s name), dressed like a (9. another animal), helps (#3) rescue (#6) from (#7), who is not actually evil, and happily sets her free. The Queen gives (#6) a (10. object) to kill (#7), but (#6) refuses. The Queen of the (#5) tries to destroy (#7)’s castle, but instead she is defeated and banished forever. Prince (#3) and (#6) are together and live happily ever after.
Once upon a time, in modern day Rome, there was a handsome prince named Luca, who was chased by a vicious platypus. Three ladies save him. They ask him for a favor in return: Please save the Queen of the Chair’s daughter, Angelina Jolie, from the evil Mitch.

The three ladies give Luca a magic pencil to protect him from danger on his journey. His assistant, Boris, dressed like a stingray, helps Luca rescue Angelina Jolie from Mitch, who is not actually evil, and happily sets her free. The Queen gives Angelina Jolie a boat to kill Mitch, but Angelina refuses. The Queen of the Chair tries to destroy Mitch’s castle, but instead she is defeated and banished forever. Prince Luca and Angelina are together and live happily ever after.
Paranoia

Written by: Jorge Sanpedro, Jorge Juan Victor, Arenio, Jaime

What is the setting? 300 BC, KFC (so good)
(for example: Modern day Spain, 1970s England, on the moon, etc.)

Who are the characters?
Willyrex, Charlie Sheen, Jesus Christ, a blonde exotic dancer, a chicken, PewDiePie, PewSenLao

What's the story?

Willyrex was recording a videoblog when he saw the KFC (so good!). It was the first time he left home since BC were invented. He went to the counter and he ordered a fried chicken. Jesus Christ (he was the immortal assistant of Jesus Christ) shouted: "Buy a Fried Chicken right now!" in the kitchen. PewDiePie was doing the cooking. PewSenLao was looking at him. PewDiePie said he was on fire, and he literally was on fire. Charlie Sheen was with a blonde exotic dancer in the kitchen. He opened a magic portal which made a chicken appeared in the head of Willyrex and he didn't want it so he lost five subscribers, because the chicken didn't have a YouTube account. He taught he will never go out of his house.
Title

Written by: Race Saraesa, Andrea Garcia, Natalia Moran, Paula Rodriguez

What is the setting? New York/Austin 2002.
(for example: Modern day Spain, 1970s England, on the moon, etc.)

Who are the characters?
The penguin: Raid
Raid the whale:
Andrea "Polar Bear":
Natalia "the Killer Whale":

What's the story?
Once upon a time, a penguin wanted to fly. Raid moved his flippers, tried to take off jumping from a big iceberg. He was unlucky and fell down on a whale, who was emigrating to America to get into cooler water and find a couple. The penguin got it and he woke up in the beach, then he was transported into the room. He still wants to fly but inside the cage, he can't fly, so he decides to escape.
Title: "Wild Mischief in Lanzarote"

Written by:
Carlos González Alvarez
Héctor García López
Manuel Feuga Fernández

What is the setting? Lanzarote
(for example: Modern day Spain, 1970s England, on the moon, etc.)

Who are the characters?
Hitcher, Boris, the headmaster (Saime), Fernandou

What's the story?
Once upon a time in Lanzarote, Boris was walking by the river. Boris met Fernandou, who was fishing. Suddenly, a thousand Hitcher appeared and they ate Fernandou. Boris started to run, but the headmaster, Saime, that controlled the Hitcher, gave a head butt to Boris, and he died.