

## **Building Bridges with Opera**

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Overview  
Rationale  
Objectives  
Strategies  
Classroom Activities  
Annotated Bibliography/Resources  
Appendices-Standards

### **Overview**

How does the teacher connect school, community and local artist? This has been a question I've been asking myself for several years. Living in a city that has many cultural venues should make it an easy task to complete. There are several factors that hinder this process; money and time seem to be the two biggest obstacles to overcome followed by insufficient parental involvement. In my search for ways to connect these three areas I have found several arts people to work with along with some grant money. I give my time in school and sometimes after to see that these work. There is a need to build bridges between the school, the community, and willing artists. In my paper I would like to address each of these areas separately and give an example of a partnership with the Pittsburgh Opera that has had great success in the two schools where I teach.

### **Rationale**

#### School

“The research is pretty clear that those students who are involved in arts education and music perform better on standardized tests. So here’s a little secret: If you want to improve your standardized tests performance provide more arts and music education,” said US Secretary of Education, Rod Paige. This sounds wonderful to any arts related teacher. Finally someone is listening to us: we have been trying to relay this information to our principals, school boards, and superintendents for years. Arts education will not only help our students who are having difficulty in their regular education classes but also those who are doing well. The arts teach from a creative standpoint where there are several approaches to many things in the arts with more than one correct answer. “Brain research is showing that the stimuli provided by arts- pictures, songs, movement, play acting- are essential for young child to develop to the fullest potential.” (Young Children and the Arts:

Making Creative Connections: [http:// www.wolf-trap.org](http://www.wolf-trap.org)) I find that many things that I do in my general music classes can help reinforce things happening in the social studies, math, and language arts classes. For instance when I am reviewing note values with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students, I do it before the classroom teachers introduce fractions. The flipbooks that the students use in my room really help them with fractions. After doing this exercise students start comparing it with fractions. The beat or measure gets divided into beats or sub beats.

Everyone learns differently. We now have Gardner's research on multiple intelligences that help us to understand how people or students can learn differently. The arts are unique in that we can offer many different examples of concepts by using these intelligences. Gardner says:

*I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place. Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions. An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do... Ultimately, we must synthesize our understandings for ourselves. The performance of understanding that try matters are the ones we carry out as human beings in an imperfect world, which we can affect for good or for ill. (Howard Gardner 1999:180-181)*

Gardner's multiple intelligences were not readily accepted within academic psychology; however, teachers have had a very positive response to them. Gardner also says "It merely helps one to understand the conditions within which education takes place" ([http://www. Multi-intell.com](http://www.Multi-intell.com)). One of the advantages of using the multiple intelligences in a classroom is that there are several different ways to approach a new topic or review. Also when giving an assignment the teacher can offer a variety of choices so the students can pick which one fits best with them. There are eight Intelligences.

1. **Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence ("word smart" or "book smart")** – this involves the knowing which comes through the language: reading, writing, and speaking.
2. **Intrapersonal Intelligence ("self smart" or "introspection smart")** – this intelligence involves a person wanting to know the meaning, purpose and significance of things.
3. **Interpersonal Intelligence ("people smart" or "group smart")** – This person would like to work as part of a team. They would relate to other people. Person to person learning.

4. **Naturalist Intelligence (“nature smart” or “environment smart”)** – This person learns through our encounters in and through the natural world including our recognition, appreciation, and understanding of the natural environment.
5. **Musical-Rhythmic Intelligence (“music smart” or “sound smart”)** – This person would learn through sound and vibration. This intelligence is not limited to music and rhythm it’s more of an auditory-vibrational it deals with the whole realm of sound tones, beats, and vibrational patterns as well.
6. **Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence (“body smart” or “movement smart”)** - This person would learn through physical movement and through the knowing of our physical body.
7. **Visual- Spatial Intelligences (“art smart” or “picture smart”)** – This person would learning through shapes, images, patterns, designs, and textures we see with our external eyes, but also includes all of the images we are able to conjure in our heads.
8. **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence (“number smart” or “logic smart”)** - This person would learn through understanding various patterns that occur in our lives: thought patterns, number patterns, visual patterns, color patterns. It begins with the concrete patterns in the real world and gets abstract.

There are several different surveys you can take to find out which intelligence you are. Everyone is different and can have multiple intelligences. Everyone will have a stronger pull towards one but might have two that are close second. Being a music teacher I love being able to give students a choice of assignments to choose from. I find that students put in a lot more creative thinking when they find something that interests them. In the curriculum I will have an example of this.

Unfortunately, the trend in schools has been to decrease the funding and teaching of the arts. In some school districts they have eliminated some of the arts and drastically cut the others back. The arts are a very important part of our students’ learning. We offer a whole different area and structure for students to express themselves. “The schools are a conduit for inducting youth into the established civilization, and the arts are a distinctive, profound, and pervasive part of that civilization” (Strong Arts, Strong Schools pg. 3). We pass on much of our heritage through the arts; what would happen if we were to completely cut the arts as part of our educational system? Kindergarten students would show up to school without knowing how to sing the alphabet song or nursery rhymes and folk songs would be lost to a whole generation.

“No single art can fully escape its relationship to the other arts, nor should it try. The arts provide multiple ways to experience, understand, and express the world and our relationship to it.” (Strong arts, strong schools pg. 4)

A way for educators, especially fine art teachers, to ensure that our programs stay in our buildings is making the community and parents aware of all the things we do in our classrooms. It could be as simple as having a bulletin board in the main hallway that has upcoming events like concerts or artwork of featured students each month. It is possible to hold an instrumental concert and art show, having students perform at PTO meetings. These ideas are not new but they do work.

### Community

What is community and why does it need to be included in our schools? To me community means a sense of belonging through knowing what my boundaries are and being accepted by others. Unfortunately, today's sense of community is completely different from what I grew up with. Today children do not go out and play at the local park or ride their bikes and explore as they used to. Children have to stay close to home for fear of something happening to them. Both parents are working during the day so children are left in daycare or are at home by themselves and not allowed out. It's no one's fault that these things are happening in today's world; it's the way society is changing.

Irwin Blumer, superintendent in Newton, Massachusetts, captures the complexities involved in creating real change: “Much of what passes for school reform is superficial and ultimately fails because the difficulty of the task- institutional change- is underestimated. Real change can only come as a result of the commitments of both the minds and hearts of the total school community- teachers, parents, students, administrators and school boards. Reform should be based on careful identification of deeply and commonly held values. Change can only be achieved through people's acceptance of responsibility to further their goals through their words and their actions.” (“Building Community in Schools”, Sergiiovanni pg.1)

However, it does form a problem when you are trying to reintroduce the community feeling to children and parents who can't remember what it was like or are unwilling to participate. In the schools, I feel that the children can feel whether a school has a great community feeling or not. It all starts at the top; if the administration and teachers enjoy working together the students will pick up on those feelings. If the children sense contention and unease it becomes harder to instill this sense of community. I teach in two inner city schools located in two different neighborhoods both schools have about the same number of students

coming from the same type of background. In school A there is a great sense of community from the staff and students. I find that the students are willing to help other students and encourage each other. In school B there are pockets of community usually between the teachers who are friends and their classes. In school A we are starting to see a lot more parent involvement and volunteering. In school B there is minimal parent involvement. School B is the school that concerns me the most. How can we start building a better community for the students and their parents? I believe that we can change this by starting to build a community among the teachers and once the children see this they will soon change also. I realize this is not an overnight project or one that is going to be readily accepted by my colleagues, but I am going to try and see if this theory works. I am hoping to build up parental involvement within the school by using the Opera Connections program outlined below. My goal for 2005-2006 is to have at least 10 parents involved with the music program either by attending the opera connections programs or helping out during one of our concerts.

### Opera Connections

Opera Connections involves the schools, a community partner, and parents. This program was designed about three years ago. At first it was going to partner with the United Way but developed into working with three social services partners in the city selected schools, in the social services areas, and the community. The Pittsburgh Opera offers each school a number of free tickets for a Friday night performance of an opera. These tickets allow for eligible students and parents to attend the opera. Transportation is also provided for them. There are four things that make this program work. First is the pre-performance workshop offered one to two weeks before the opera. Students and parents who are planning to attend the evening performance are encouraged to attend this workshop so they can learn about the opera and expected behaviors. Secondly, before the opera begins students and parents are allowed to take a back stage tour. This is a very popular part of the program. Third is experiencing the performance itself. Finally there is a teacher planned post performance activity. Contact teachers are prepared for this program by attending a Saturday workshop offered at least a month before the performance. Information, materials, and teaching ideas are presented at the workshop and can be used to prepare the students for their opera experience.

I have been fortunate to be a part of this program from the beginning. Over the last three years the program has evolved; we are now part of the Opera Academy program, which offers four Saturday classes during the year along with the opportunity for the Opera Connections schools to attend two Friday evening performances, generally one in the fall and one in the spring.

The original objectives for the program are:

- Involve child plus parent
- Prepare participants for opera exposure and performance
- Enrich participants with involvement in the arts
- Provide information about career possibilities in the arts
- Engage and connect communities and the opera.

I sent out an eight-question survey to other city teachers who have participated in the program to see if they have reached any of the Opera Connections main objectives. Here are the questions I asked.

1. How many years have you participated in the opera Connections program?
2. Has your program grown over time or has it declined?
3. About how many students and parents do you average an opera?
4. Do parents participate in the program? If so do you do anything extra to get parents to participate?
5. Do your students enjoy going?
6. What do you like best about the program?
7. If other groups (i.e. the symphony, ballet, dance alloy, etc) offered this type of program would you consider participating?
8. Does your community partner help you? If so how?

The answers I got back were surprisingly very mixed.

Question #	College A 2 schools participate	College B 2 schools Participate	ME 2 schools Participate
1	3 years one school 2 years both schools	3 years	3years one school 1 year 2 schools
2	Declined in one school grown in another	Growth in both schools	Declined in one school grown in another
3	About 12	50 to 75	About 12 in one school And 30 in the other
4	yes	Yes	Yes – parents participate but not many.
5	yes	Yes	YES!
6	Dialogue sharing of ideas		I love the teacher workshops I find those to be very useful.
7	Yes	Yes	Yes, I think I would
8	N/a	They are a great	Sort of. They could help

		help. They organize the docent visits and keep track of parent participation.	more.
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The biggest concern among us is the role of the community social service group. Someone from the social service group attends the teacher workshops and the evening performance but the classroom teachers are the ones who end up organizing everything and preparing things. The social service agency I work with and I have talked over this flaw and we are both planning to try to work more closely together. There is no guaranteed way for this to work but you do need people who are willing to work with others and to see what would work best with the group of families and children. Ideas have to be adapted for each school.

Since the start of the program the opera has set aside 500 tickets per show for our use.

La Cenerentola – 303 tickets

La Boheme – 218

Carmen – 220

Marriage of Figaro – 267-student matinee (due to content of evening performance we choose to go to the matinee)

Faust – around 300 tickets

Fidelio- around 250 tickets

This is still a young program and in the next couple of years we hope we will reach the goal of 500 tickets per opera. That would be 250 students and 250 parents enjoying an evening at the opera.

### **Objectives**

I want my students to have an opportunity to explore opera, jobs in the theater, and other opportunities for them to enjoy and participate in the arts in our city. One of my main challenges is for my students to overcome popular misconceptions, such as understanding that you don't have to be rich to enjoy the opera.

During the upcoming year I am going to plan at least ten classes about opera to use with my 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade students and four lessons with K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade. I am also planning to work more closely with my social service agency to bring more parents and community members to go with my students to the opera. I am looking for ways to improve my parent involvement. My students get very

excited and would love to participate in the program but often do not have a willing adult to go with them. Each student in 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade will make an opera portfolio through out the year.

### **Strategies**

I am planning to offer a variety of assignments for the opera unit using Gardner's multiple intelligences. Students will be able to work in small groups and I will give them several weeks to complete an assignment.

Students will keep a portfolio through out the year and will make a five to ten slide PowerPoint presentation at the end of the year as a group project. I am also planning to use the pre-performance workshops, going to the opera itself, and the jobs in the theater for career development. Students will listen to one complete opera during the year. I always pick Amahl and the Night Visitors. This opera is only fifty minutes in length and is sung in English. I find this is an opera that students can easily understand. Since the unit takes five to six weeks it works well to schedule it through February and March when there are fewer breaks in the school calendar.

### **Classroom Activities**

The activities in this section as based on lessons I do with my students and can be adapted for any opera. The first three lessons are basic things I do with my students every year. The next few after that are lesson stems that I can adjust for whatever opera I am introducing.

### **Opera 101 Power point**

Lesson Outline for grades 3-5

Materials: Opera PowerPoint, file folders, crayons, pencils, worksheets, listening selections, projector, and laptop.

Objectives:

Students will have a general understanding of basic Opera terms.

Students will create at an Opera folder.

Students will be able to identify the following listening types: Aria, resistive, duet, trio, and chorus.

Standards:

Process

1. Pass out file folders along with crayons, markers, and pencils.
2. Tell students these will be our Opera folders for the year. Have students decorate the front of the folder with pictures that they think represents opera to them. They must also include their name, room number and grade on the front.
3. Pass out Opera worksheets and start power point
4. As we go through the power point students fill in the blanks on their sheets.
5. When we get to Aria we fill in the definition and we listen to part of an Aria. (I change my listening examples from year to year I try to pick Operas we will see during the year.) We also listen to an Overture, recitative, a duet, trio and chorus as they come up in the power point.
6. This will take a class pd. to complete.

Evaluation:

Student responses to questions asked during the PowerPoint presentation.

The next class period, I would play a small sample of a song or chorus and see if students can identify it as a Overture, recitative, a duet, trio and chorus. See appendix A for student worksheet and power point slides.

### **Amahl and the Night Visitors.**

Lesson outline grades 3-5

Materials- Copies of the libretto, CD of Opera, pencils, journals, book Amahl and the Night Visitors.

Objectives

SWBAT : Follow the opera using the Libretto

SWBAT: be able to identify voice parts and song types

Standards:

Process

1. Each student will be given a copy of the libretto
2. We will go over how the libretto is set up and how to follow it.
3. We will take three class periods to listen and follow the Opera.
4. Ten minutes at the end of each class students will journal about what they listened to during that class.

5. At the end of the Opera students will complete the study guide in small groups with the libretto. See Appendix B for study guide.

## **Carmen Overture grades K-2**

Lesson outline

Materials: CD of overture

Objectives:

SWBAT: identify ABA form by correctly demonstrating different motions.

SWBAT: sing and identify the Toreador themes

Standards

Process:

1. Teacher will sing the Toreador theme and ask students if they have heard this song before.
2. Teacher will hum theme again. Teacher will explain what a Toreador is and what he does. Teacher will sing theme again singing the word Toreador.
3. Teacher will play overture and ask students to stand up when they hear the Toreadors theme. (End of 1<sup>st</sup> class)
4. Repeat # three and see if students retained the information. Whose theme is that? How does it go?
5. Have students listen to the first part of overture. Have them listen for the cymbal part.
6. Play the A part again and the teacher clap on the cymbal part. Ask students with what instrument did I clap?
7. Then have students clap on the cymbal part.
8. Explain ABA form. Have students tell you what we do for the A part and what we do for the B part.
9. Practice together.
10. Have students perform by themselves.

The students really love this activity. They ask to do this all through out the year. Sometimes we make up new movements for the A part and B part; we also divide the class into A's and B's and they work as a group during their part. This lesson turns into lots of fun.

What is a Supernumerary?

Lesson Outline for grades 4-5

Materials – pencils, lined paper, Steel Valley Documentary: Super Men 2000-2001, TV and VCR.

Objectives:

Students will have a general understanding of what a supernumerary is.

Students will write a short response to the following question: If you had the opportunity to be a supernumerary would you? Why or why not?

Standards: 9.2, 9.3, 9.4

Process

1. Ask students if they know what supernumeraries are? Write students' responses on the chalkboard.
2. Read over list and then have students watch supernumerary video. (Video takes 10-15 min) to view.
3. After video ask students again what a supernumerary is? Look at the responses on the chalkboard. Did anyone get the correct answer?
4. Have the students think about if they would like to be a supernumerary why or why not and discuss the answers as a whole group.
5. Then pass out paper and pencils and have students write their answers down. Paragraphs must have at least 5 to 6 sentences.
6. Let students work until end of period on their writing.
7. Collect papers for next time we are in the computer lab to type them.

Evaluation:

Read the responses students have written. Make sure they have an understanding what a supernumerary is and are using it correctly in their writing. See appendix C for rubric.

### **Lesson Stems**

1. Make a character puzzle as a study guide.
2. Write an alternate ending for the opera.
3. Design updated costumes for the characters in the opera.
4. Write a synopsis that will appear in the program.
5. Create a new set Design using a cardboard box showing the staging of the characters.
6. Form a small group no more that four people and reenact a scene from the opera.

7. Create a poster for the opening night performance
8. See the opera and write a review for the school paper.
9. Figure out the cost of putting on this show for two weeks.

When I first started using this idea of giving students a choice for their project everyone did the same thing. It was almost as if they were afraid to be different or to choose something else. Over the years they have really branched out and will usually come up with an idea or two on their own that I will let them turn in. I give 5<sup>th</sup> grade the most to choose from. Third grade never gets more than three choices. Students are generally given three weeks to complete the assignment. Some class time will be given but they have to do some of this as homework. I try to talk to the homeroom teachers before I give them this assignment so they are not overloaded. I also try to assign this at the end of the year after testing is over. Some of the projects have exceeded anything I thought they would be.

A few favorite games we play: *Opera Jeopardy*, I divide the class into three teams the first round is general information about opera. Double Jeopardy is about the operas we have seen or learned about this past year and includes sound clips. This takes time to prepare but the students love it.

We also play *Who's Opera Is It Anyway?* Based on *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* I give every student a number and then pull three or four numbers for each segment. This is a hoot!! Props are fun. I started going to stores and buying things to put in these boxes. We do a recitative game when students have to describe a day at school using recitative. There are so many things to do. The students have seen the show on TV and love it.

Other resources that I am looking forward to using is the composer movie about Bizet called *Bizet's Dream*. This movie is about 50 minutes long and deals with him writing the opera *Carmen*. There are also books called *Opera Fun* and there are several different books that focus on different operas these books seem to be child friendly and have a lot of different activities that are useful on different grade levels. There are also 2 videos that I am planning to use next year with the younger students. They are "*Willie the Opera Singing Whale*" by Disney and "*Bug's Bunny Overture to Disaster*" which includes the famous Barber of Seville Overture. There is also a great lesson using Bug's Bunny Overture to Disaster on the VH1 music studio website. If you have older students this is worth looking at.

## **Annotated Bibliography/Resources**

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[www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.htm](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.htm)

[www.multi-intell.com](http://www.multi-intell.com)

[www.vh1musicstudio.com](http://www.vh1musicstudio.com)

Young Children and the Arts: Making Creative Connections: [http:// www.wolf-trap.org](http://www.wolf-trap.org)

## Appendix A

### Student worksheets to go with PowerPoint show.

#### Opera

A story that is \_\_\_\_\_ out and \_\_\_\_\_ on stage. There is usually no \_\_\_\_\_ and completely sung in one of these 4 languages:

- French
- \_\_\_\_\_
- Italian
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### Libretto

- Means \_\_\_\_\_, or the script of the opera. The person who writes it is called the \_\_\_\_\_



#### Types of Opera

- \_\_\_\_\_ – Literally, “buffoon opera”. Funny opera, especially of the 18th century. (1701-1800)
- \_\_\_\_\_ – Formal, serious opera. Especially from the 18th century.
- \_\_\_\_\_ – A light hearted opera with spoken dialogue; a musical



### **Aria**

A song for a \_\_\_\_\_ voice. A main song; big number where the singer reveals \_\_\_\_\_ feelings and shows off their \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Overture**

In most operas, an \_\_\_\_\_ overture (usually musical \_\_\_\_\_ you will hear in the opera itself) sets the production in motion.

### **Types of Songs**

- Solo – \_\_\_\_\_ person singing
- Duet – \_\_\_\_\_ people singing together
- Trio – \_\_\_\_\_ people singing together
- Quartet – \_\_\_\_\_ people singing together
- Chorus – a group of \_\_\_\_\_ on stage, playing a happy band of villagers or victorious warriors.

### **Recitative**

Speech singing, in which the singer \_\_\_\_\_ the words. This is usually used for \_\_\_\_\_ dialogue.



## Voice Types

### Child

- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_
- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_

### Women

- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_
- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_
- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_

### Men

- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_
- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_
- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_
- ❖ \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Study Guide for Amahl and the Night Visitors

1. What is Amahl's handicap? **His Leg**
2. Why didn't Amahl's mother believe him? **He lies a lot.**
3. Are Amahl and his mother rich or poor? **Poor**
4. What will they have to do for money? **Go begging**
5. What are the names of the 3 kings? **Kasper, Melchoir, Balthazar**
6. Who are they trying to find? **The holy child**
7. What is in Kasper's box? **1. Magic stones, 2. Beads. 3. Licorice**
8. Where does Balthazar live? **In a black marble palace with white doves and black panthers.**
9. Who does Amahl's mother think they are looking for? **Amahl**
10. Who does she send Amahl to get? **Shepherds**
11. Which King is deaf? **Kasper**
12. What do the shepherds bring? **Food**
13. What do the shepherds do for the kings? **Dance**
14. What musical instrument does Amahl play? **Shepherds pipe, Oboe**
15. What kind of animal does Kasper have as a pet? **A Parrot**
16. What does the mother try to steal? **The gold**
17. Who catches her? **The page**
18. What miracle happens to Amahl? **He is healed**
19. Who does he want to give his crutch to? **The holy child**
20. List all the characters and their voice parts  
**Amahl – soprano**  
**The Mother – mezzo-soprano**  
**Kasper – tenor**  
**Melchior – baritone**  
**Balthazar – baritone**  
**Page- Baritone**
21. List the female voice ranges from highest to lowest?  
**Soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto**
22. List the male voice ranges from highest to lowest?  
**Tenor, baritone, bass**

**4. Excellent**

Student completed paragraph using the term supernumerary correctly  
Student exceeded written guidelines.  
Student's work made sense and was well written.

**3. Good**

Student completed paragraph using the term supernumerary correctly  
Student met written guidelines.  
Student's work made sense and was well written.

**2 OK**

Student completed paragraph using the term supernumerary correctly or incorrectly.  
Student did not meet written guidelines.  
Student's work was acceptable but could be better written.

**1 Fair**

Student completed paragraph using the term supernumerary incorrectly.  
Student did not meet written guidelines.

**0 Poor**

Student refused to do assignment.

**Standards**

Arts and Humanities Standards

1. All students describe the meanings they find in various works from the visual and performing arts and literature on the basis of aesthetic understanding of the art form.
2. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand important features of the works.

3. All students relate various works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural context with in which they were created.
4. All students produce, perform or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance, theater, and describe the meanings their work has for them.