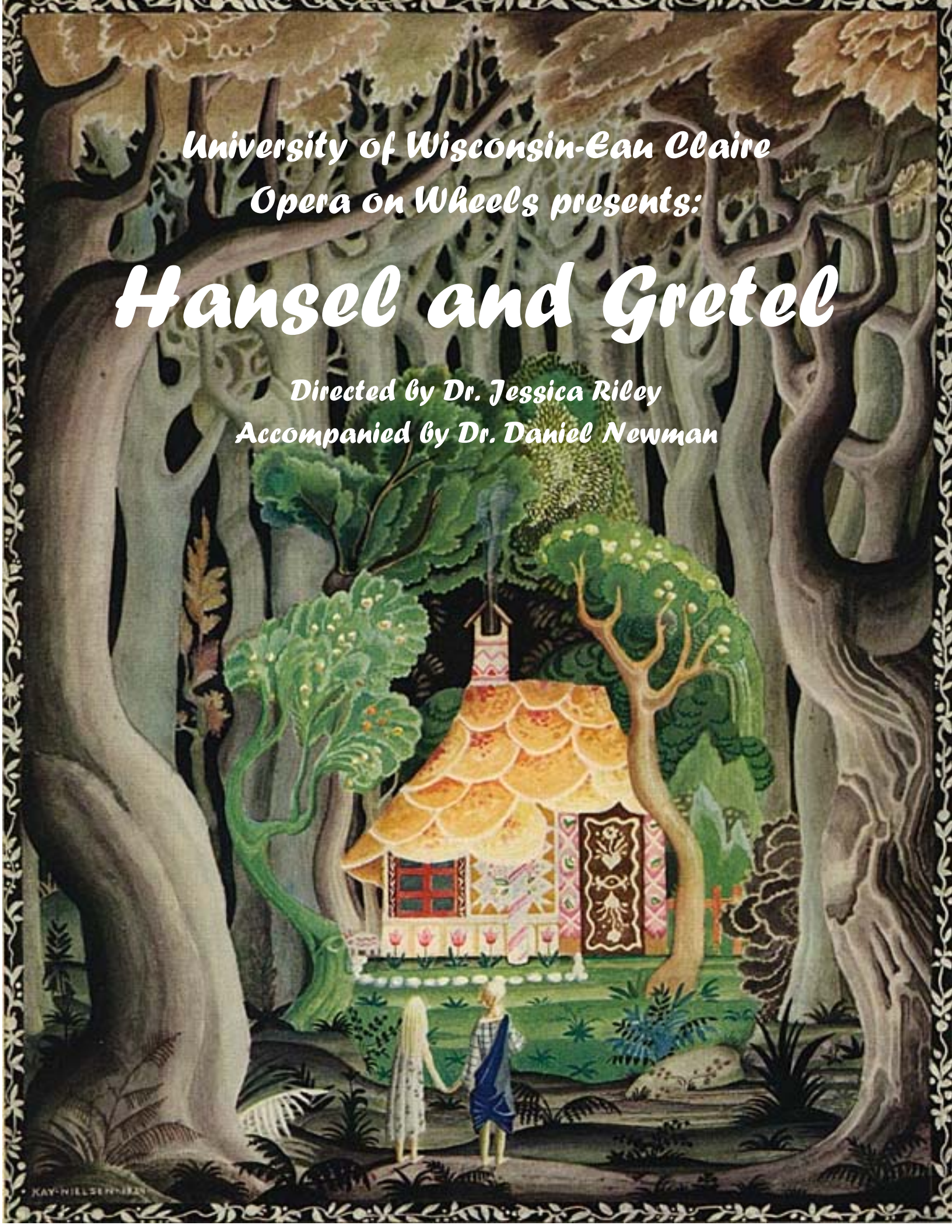


*University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Opera on Wheels presents:*

Hansel and Gretel

Directed by Dr. Jessica Riley

Accompanied by Dr. Daniel Newman



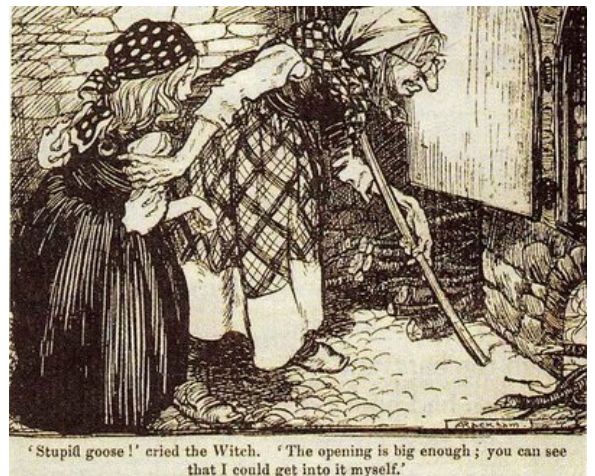
Synopsis of Hansel and Gretel



Once upon a time, near an enchanted forest there dwelt a family consisting of a mother and her children Hansel and Gretel. The family didn't have much money and the mother was always out looking for work. Whenever the mother was away, Hansel and Gretel were left at home to do the chores. Lately, the family hadn't had a lot to eat and the children were distraught from their hunger. To get their minds off of their empty stomachs, they decided to sing and dance, forgetting about their chores.

Mother came home to see nothing done and sent the children off to the woods to collect strawberries for their dinner. While the children were out collecting berries, Mother prayed for help because the family had nothing to eat and was starving.

Nightfall approached and Hansel and Gretel lost their way in the woods. They found a place to sleep and sang their bedtime prayers. In the morning, as Hansel and Gretel walked and played they stumbled upon a candy house. They started to break off pieces and hungrily nibbled away. Suddenly, a witch appeared and captured the children. The witch shut Hansel up in a stable and fattened him up so he would be plump and tasty when she was ready to eat him. Then the witch forced Gretel to look in the oven to check on her cakes. Slyly, Gretel feigned stupidity and begged the witch to show her how it was done. As the witch bent over, Gretel forcefully pushed her into the oven, slammed the door, and watched the witch roast in her own oven. Hansel and Gretel rejoiced at their happy fate and were reunited with their mother.



Character Information

Hansel: Hansel is the 7 year old son of the family, and he's the hero of the story. He loves to play but is very downcast about having no food. He wants attention and responsibility and asserts that at the end of the opera.

Role sung by Danielle Lahr and Amelia Lumsden

Gretel: Gretel is the 9 year old daughter of the family, and she's the heroine of the story. Gretel always want to make everybody happy especially Hansel. In the story, Gretel has power, especially because she's the older sibling, but she uses that power responsibly and for good at the end of the opera.

Role sung by Stephanie Dietz, Meagan Seubert and Leisa Sunier

Mother: The Mother is the head of the family. She is constantly worried about being able to provide for her family. After losing her children however she learns to be grateful for what she has and what a blessing it is to have Hansel and Gretel.

Role sung by Rebecca Kidnie and Julia Flanagan

Witch: The witch is the villain in the opera. She is self-centered and impatient. She loves to eat children. Her impatience causes her ultimate doom.

Role sung by Rebecca Kidnie and Julia Flanagan



Composer: Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921)

Definition of Composer: Someone who creates music; the writer of the music in an opera.



Engelbert Humperdinck composed 6 operas, 4 of which were children's operas. He was born in Sieburg, Germany. Humperdinck had an interest in music all his life. He played piano, cello, organ and composed. In 1890, Humperdinck started writing his most famous opera: *Hansel und Gretel*. He wrote this for his niece and nephew at the urging of his sister Adelheid Wette. It premiered in 1893 under the direction of Richard Strauss, a famous conductor. Strauss was also a German composer, like Humperdinck.

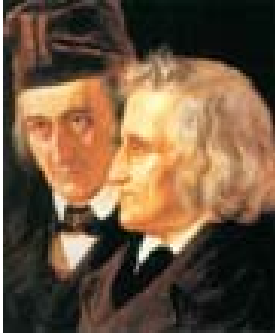
Librettist: Adelheid Wette (1858-1916)

Definition of Librettist: The author of the words that are set to music in an opera.



Adelheid Wette was a librettist who had an interest in folktales. She is the younger sister of Engelbert Humperdinck. She was later married to Herman Wette and had children. She enjoyed collaborating with brother Engelbert and did so often. She would write the text and he would write the music. She had a particular interest in writing children's opera so that her children would have something to enjoy.

Based on the Fairytale by Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859)



Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, also known as the Grimm Brothers were born and lived in Hanau, Germany. They came from a family of nine children. The children grew up in the countryside and lead an ideal life until their father died abruptly in 1796. From that time on the family then moved to a small urban residence as their mother struggled to support the family with little money. In 1798 the two boys were sent to live with their aunt to prepare for school at a university.

The Grimm brothers had been collecting folktales from Hesse, the state in which they lived since the early 1800s. They were very fascinated in the oral tradition. This is when tales aren't written down but are passed down generation by generation through storytelling. A lot of the stories are thought to be made up of bits and pieces of ancient myth and religious beliefs. They also found that throughout different areas similar stories could be heard suggesting that the stories came from a common ancestor. After collecting many folktales the brothers published in two volumes in 1812 and 1814.

Throughout the rest of their lives, the brothers worked as librarians at different universities, and in 1838 began to work on thirty-two volumes of a German dictionary, focusing on history. They continued to work on this until their deaths. They were most famous for their fairytales and died with nationwide recognition.

Their fairytale *Hansel und Gretel* was first recorded by Wilhelm in 1810 as an oral tale told by Dortchen Wild and has since gone through many revisions. The final version was printed in 1857 and was twice as long as the original story. The opera *Hansel and Gretel* is also quite different from the story.* In the story the mother is a wicked step-mother. In both the story and the opera the family has no food, but in the story the children are not sent to pick strawberries. The parents abandon the children in the woods, as opposed to going hungry themselves. Also, the father is more present in the story than in the opera, and in this production the father isn't present at all.

*For fun you can read the story *Hansel and Gretel* by the Brothers Grimm and explore the differences between the opera's story and the original story in Activity 4.

Teaching Lesson:

Poverty: Then and Now

Today, poverty can be found everywhere. People have low-wage jobs, or are struggling to find work. Single mothers are working while trying to raise their children. Adults and children alike are suffering from malnutrition. Poverty is a very real issue that is an important topic for children to learn about.

In rural areas in the United States there are higher rates of unemployment, less resources, and underdevelopment compared to bigger cities. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) rural rates of poverty have been higher than metropolitan rates of poverty since the 1960s. In 2003, the overall metropolitan rate of poverty was at 12.1 % compared to the rural rate at 14.2%. The theme of poverty is very important for students since children are the largest group of poor Americans. Furthermore, children of nonmetropolitan areas have the highest rate of poverty. The childhood rate of poverty in metropolitan areas is 17.1 % compared to childhood poverty rate in rural areas at 20.1%. However, in rural areas, adults and elderly people (age 65 and older) had poverty rates of 10.8 % and 11% respectively.

Poverty is a major theme in *Hansel and Gretel*. Mother is constantly worrying about having enough to eat. Hunger is present throughout the opera. It begins with Hansel and Gretel being extremely hungry; it then leads to Mother praying for help so that her family will have enough to eat. Hansel and Gretel are sent to the woods in order to pick strawberries so that they won't go without dinner. The candy house embodies all that Hansel and Gretel have been denied. Even the witch's central preoccupation is food and feasting. This story is a folktale that comes from the oral traditions of poor, uneducated villages; villages where scarcity of resources was common and

malnutrition was present. Extreme poverty, such that one's physical and mental well-being is affected was a major concern when this story was written and remains so today.

Talk about these ideas with your students and discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

1. Hansel and Gretel's family is poor and this leaves them very hungry and without food. How would you feel and what would you do if you didn't know when your next meal would be?
2. Hansel and Gretel's family has a difficult time finding work and earning money. Is your family or anyone you know affected by unemployment?
3. What are some things that you can do to help those less fortunate than you in your community?
4. Throughout the opera there is a theme of fear and helplessness. The mother is afraid of not being able to get enough food for her and her family; Hansel and Gretel are afraid when they are lost in the woods and then when they are captured by the witch. Are there any times in life when you have been afraid or felt helpless? What did you do or what could you have done in that situation?
5. In the opera the witch is the wealthiest. She has lots of things and a wonderful candy house, but she still isn't happy. Hansel, Gretel and Mother are very poor, yet at the end of the opera they are the happiest. Think about the most important things in your life? Are they material things? Think about your friends and family? How would you feel if you had everything in the world but there were no people?

Teaching Lesson: Household Responsibility

Responsibility is essential to surviving in the world today. Responsibility is an important theme in *Hansel and Gretel*, and like children today, Hansel and Gretel have responsibilities at home. In the beginning of the opera, Hansel and Gretel are supposed to be doing chores, but decide to ignore their mother's wishes. This results in discipline. Discipline can be a very effective tool in teaching responsibility, as long as children understand why they are being disciplined and how that discipline can be beneficial. Since Hansel and Gretel weren't doing what they were supposed to be doing they were given something constructive to do: get food for their dinner. Instead of being silly and slacking off the mother chose a task that requires responsibility.

Also, the family wasn't able to make enough money to buy food. If Hansel and Gretel didn't go to pick strawberries, their family would starve. In this story, Hansel and Gretel had a very important responsibility that affected their family. Even though they were just children, their contributions could make a difference, and that is an important lesson for students to learn.

Talk about these ideas with your students and discuss the questions on the following page.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the story, Hansel and Gretel had to go to the woods to get food. What are some chores that you have to do at home?
2. Hansel and Gretel are naughty in the beginning of the opera and then get scolded. Have you ever done anything you shouldn't have been doing to get in trouble? How did you feel after? How did your parents feel?
3. In the story, Hansel and Gretel are given responsibility. What is responsibility? What responsibilities do you have at home? What do you think you are learning by doing those things? How can the responsibilities you have at home help you with other things like school, playing with your friends or interacting with your siblings?
4. Is there anything that you do that makes a difference in others' lives? How does that make you feel?

Activities

1. Word Find

Words go horizontal, vertical, upside down, backwards, diagonal



CANDY
GRETEL
MOTHER
WOODS

CHILDREN
HANSEL
POVERTY

GINGERBREAD
HUNGER
WITCH



V Y Y L M N Y T P D N W
F T W E M O R D N E I O
J R N T C N T E N T G R
L E H E J F R H C A E E
S V G R E D M H E L C G
D O Y G L M O C Z R Y N
O P O I P P I U Q A J U
O V H X C E Y L X J S H
W C H A N S E L F U U S
F B T H F G H I V H B R
D A E R B R E G N I G A
Q H T H C W K P B V G J

Activities Cont'd

2. Candy House.

Option 1: Make the candy house that will be used for the actual performance! Some students can make the candy pieces that will go on the walls. You can choose your favorite candy! Others can make the doors or windows that will be part of the house. Some students can help work on the construction of the actual house. Others can make gingerbread men.

If you are interested in building the house, contact Dr. Riley for specific instructions: rileyj@uwec.edu

Suggested Construction:

Materials: PVC pipes, Muslin cloth, candy, Velcro

Option 2: If you decide not to make the candy house for the actual performance you can make a house of any size. Another option is to simply draw or paint pictures of the gingerbread house. You can include a picture of the ugly witch or the frightened Hansel and Gretel!

3. Priorities. Get in groups and come up with a list of things you think you need to survive. Challenge the lists and cross out anything that is not essential in order to live. What would life be like if you had only the things on your list?

Activities Cont'd

4. Past and Present. *Hansel and Gretel* is a folktale written a long time ago. If this story took place nowadays what would the story be like? Where would the story take place instead of woods? What would the witch be like?

5. Lights, Camera, Action! Read the story *Hansel and Gretel*. You can also read the opera synopsis. Then get in groups and act out the story, costumes included if you want! Think about how the characters are feeling and what they're going through. If you are Hansel or Gretel think about how hungry you are, and how scared you are being lost in the woods. If you're the mother think about how worried you are that you can't provide food for your family, or how angry you are to have children who don't listen. If you're the witch, think about how excited you are to catch two tasty children! If you decide to read both the story and the synopsis you can explore the differences between the story and the opera. Why do you think some changes were made? What do you like better about the story? The opera?

6. Craft Time! Round up some popsicle sticks, construction paper, beads, cloth, feathers etc. and make a puppet for each of the characters in the story. You can then enjoy acting out your own renditions of *Hansel and Gretel* with your new characters! You might also make props for the puppets, a broomstick for the witch, a basket for picking strawberries etc.

Activities Cont'd

7. Brothers and Sisters. Hansel and Gretel are very close in age and have a strong relationship. Discuss the relationships you have with your siblings. Are you the oldest? Youngest? Middle? What kind of things do you do together? Do you fight a lot? How do you resolve your issues? If you're the oldest child do you ever help out your younger siblings or take care of them? If you're the youngest do you look up to your older sibling?

8. Write to an Opera Singer! The cast of *Hansel and Gretel* would love to hear from you! You can write a letter to anyone in the cast. Here are some ideas to go in your letter: Questions about the music they performed. Questions about their lives. Your opinion about the performance. Your own musical interests and abilities. Drawings or paintings about the show.

Mail to: c/o Dr. Jessica Riley, rileyj@uwec.edu
257 Haas Fine Arts Center
Music and Theater Arts Department
University of Wisconsin Eau Claire
Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004

9. Get Involved! You can make a difference today! As a class, collect non-perishable items to bring to a local food pantry. You can make it a contest within the class or even better against other classes. You might decide that the winning class can have a party or get a prize!

Opera as a Tool for Teaching Social Issues

While it is important for children to learn about opera through watching live performances, opera can also be an educational tool through which to teach lessons. According to Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*, emotional education can be integrated into standard courses, including music education and performance (pp. 271). This opera is used as a platform for student discussion and exploration into poverty and responsibility. Topics can be brought up about what it feels like to be poor, being aware of how your actions affect others, what it feels like to be lost and alone, what you can learn from your interactions with others, and how you can benefit from doing chores.

Why is Emotional Intelligence Important? According to Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*, students who have achieved emotional and social competence:

- are better able to understand their own emotions and differentiate between feelings and actions,
- are better at handling frustration, anger, stress, anxiety and have less fights, disruptions, self-destructive behavior, suspension and expulsions
- are more responsible, controlled and have **improved academic achievement!**
- are more empathetic and better at listening
- are better at handling relationships, more cooperative, helpful and pro-social (pp. 283-4)

Using opera as a medium through which to teach emotional intelligence is especially beneficial because it encompasses several art forms. It includes aural stimulation through music, and the overall presentation is visually appealing as it includes sets, costumes and props. Also, the acting and dancing in opera capture emotion through movement. It is also a very collaborative art form. An opera production isn't limited to just singing but also includes: acting, scenery, costumes, orchestra, advertisement, hair and makeup, choreography/staging, lighting, props, chorus and fundraising. Everyone involved in each of these components needs to work together to make the opera successful.



Resources

Can't get enough? You might want to check out the video *Hansel and Gretel* (1982) by Metropolitan Opera

Record Label: Pioneer Artists Laserdisc, Catalog PA-85-136

OR

Listen to the CD with the New London Children's Choir

Record Label: Chandos, Catalog 3143-44



Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Music

Not only does Opera-on-Wheels expose children to opera and teach social issues, it also meets two Model Academic Standards for music! Through the activities in this packet and the performance, students meet Standard H. The Arts (Relate music to other arts and disciplines outside the arts) and Standard I. History and Culture (Relate music to history and culture).



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