

Falstaff

Study Guide



2016/17 Season

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Contents

VERDI

Falstaff

Resources for Educators	4
Fast Facts	6
Production Information	7
Synopsis	8
The Principal Characters	10
The Principal Artists	11
The Composer	12
The Librettist	14
Musical Highlights	15
The Popularity of Sir John Falstaff	16
Shakespeare in Opera	17
Student Activities	19
Winnipeg Public Library Resources	27

4 Great Resources for Engaging Your Students with the Art of Opera

1. Student Night at the Opera

In order to expose student audiences to the glory of opera, Manitoba Opera created Student Night. It's an affordable opportunity for students to watch the dress rehearsal of our mainstage productions, providing an exciting look at the art and magic of opera before the curtain goes up on Opening Night. Please note:

- *Falstaff* is an opera in three acts, with a running time of approximately 2.5 hours, including one intermission.
- The dress rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some choose not to sing in full voice during the dress rehearsal in order to avoid unnecessary strain.
- Tickets to Student Night are \$12.50 each and are available to students from schools, postsecondary institutions, private and conservatory music programs, and youth organizations.

2. Study Guide

This study guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera at the Centennial Concert Hall. Materials in the study guide may be copied and distributed to students. Manitoba Curriculum Connections are provided with links to Grade 9 - 12 Music, Drama and English Language Arts.

3. CDs Available for Purchase or Loan

Purchase a *Falstaff* CD from our office, or borrow one for a two-week period.

4. Opera in a Trunk

Bring the magic of opera right into the classroom with our Opera in a Trunk program. Each trunk includes costumes, props, books, a CD and DVD of the opera, instruments, activities, and a guide for putting it all together. Trunks are free, and can be borrowed for a three-week period.

Available trunks: *La Bohème*
Aida
The Daughter of the Regiment
The Magic Flute
Carmen
 NEW THIS SEASON *Hansel and Gretel*

For More Information/ To Purchase Tickets/ To Book a Trunk:

Contact Livia Dymond at 204-942-7470 or education@manitobaopera.mb.ca

Manitoba Opera

Manitoba Opera was founded in 1969 by a group of individuals dedicated to presenting the great works of opera to Manitoban audiences. Manitoba Opera is the province's only full-time professional opera company. The company attracts internationally renowned artists, highlights the best local talent, and also contracts the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra for performances.

Chorus

The Manitoba Opera Chorus, under the direction of Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, is hailed for their excellent singing and acting abilities. The chorus boasts a core of skilled singers who give generously of their time and talents. Some are voice majors at university, a few are singing teachers, but most work in jobs that aren't music related.



Carmen, Manitoba Opera, April 2010. Photo: R.Tinker

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Fast Facts

- *Falstaff* is an Italian opera in three acts, composed by Giuseppe Verdi with a libretto by Arrigo Boito. The libretto is adapted from the play *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by William Shakespeare, and parts of *Henry IV Part 1* and *Part 2*.
- *Falstaff* was the last opera composed by Verdi before his death in 1901. The music of this opera was very different from his past compositions - it focused on a more continuous sound. *Falstaff* is through composed, meaning the music is not repetitive, it is constantly changing and evolving.
- The world premiere of *Falstaff* took place on February 9, 1893, at La Scala in Milan, Italy.
- The story takes place in Windsor, England, at the end of the 14th century. It centres around the lazy knight, Sir John Falstaff, who devises a wild plan to court two wealthy, married women. The women catch on to Falstaff's plan and decide to teach the portly knight a lesson.
- This popular phrase is sung by Falstaff at the end of the opera: *"Everything in the world is a jest. . . . Every mortal laughs at all the others. But he who laughs last laughs best."*
- *Falstaff* is the third opera Verdi wrote that is based on a play by William Shakespeare - Verdi wrote *Macbeth* in 1847 and *Otello* in 1887.
- This is the first time in the company's 44-year history that Manitoba Opera has staged *Falstaff*.



Falstaff, Teatro alla Scala, 2013.
Photo: R. Amisano

Production Information

Falstaff

November 19, 22, & 25
Dress Rehearsal / Student Night: November 17
 Centennial Concert Hall

Music by Giuseppe Verdi
 Libretto by Arrigo Boito after William Shakespeare's plays *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV*
 Premiered at La Scala, Milan on February 9, 1893
 Sung in Italian with projected English translations
 Running Time: Approximately 2.5 hours in three acts

PRINCIPAL CAST (In order of vocal appearance)

Dr. Caius	Tenor	CHRISTOPHER MAYELL
Sir John Falstaff	Baritone	TODD THOMAS
Bardolph	Tenor	JAMES McLENNAN
Pistol	Bass	TYLER PUTNAM
Meg Page	Mezzo-Soprano	LAUREN SEGAL
Alice Ford	Soprano	MONICA HUISMAN
Mistress Quickly	Mezzo-Soprano	LYNNE McMURTRY
Nannetta	Soprano	SASHA DJIHANIAN
Fenton	Tenor	KEVIN MYERS
Ford	Baritone	GREGORY DAHL

Manitoba Opera Chorus
 Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Conductor	TYRONE PATERSON
Director	MICHAEL CAVANAGH
Sets	OPÉRA DE MONTRÉAL
Costumes	OPÉRA DE MONTRÉAL
Lighting designer	BILL WILLIAMS
Stage manager	ROBERT PEL
Assistant stage managers	KATHRYN BALL MATTHEW LAGACÉ
Projected titles	SHELDON JOHNSON

Synopsis

Synopsis courtesy of Canadian Opera Company.

Act I

Scene I: The Garter Inn

Dr. Caius bursts into Sir John Falstaff's room in the Garter Inn, accusing him of unseemly behaviour the previous night. He further accuses Falstaff's two henchmen, Bardolph and Pistol, of having robbed him while he was drunk. Unable to obtain reparations, Dr. Caius leaves in a fury.

Falstaff contemplates the large bill he has run up at the inn. He informs Bardolph and Pistol that in order to repair his finances he plans to seduce Alice Ford and Meg Page, both wives of prosperous Windsor citizens. When Bardolph and Pistol refuse to deliver the letters Falstaff has written to the two ladies, Falstaff instructs a page to do so instead. He then ridicules Bardolph and Pistol's newly discovered sense of honour, before throwing them out of his room.

Scene II: Ford's house

Alice Ford and Meg Page laugh over the identical love letters they have received from Sir John Falstaff. They share their amusement with Alice's daughter Nannetta, and with their friend Mistress Quickly.

Ford arrives, followed by four men all offering advice: Dr. Caius, whom Ford favours as Nannetta's future husband; Bardolph and Pistol, who are now seeking advantageous employment from Ford; and Fenton, who is in love with Ford's daughter Nannetta. When Ford learns of Falstaff's plan to seduce his wife, he immediately becomes jealous. While Alice and Meg plan how to take revenge on their importunate suitor, Ford decides to disguise himself in order to pay a visit to Falstaff. Unnoticed in the midst of all the commotion, Nannetta and Fenton manage to steal a few precious moments together.

Act II

Scene I: The Garter Inn

Feigning penitence, Bardolph and Pistol rejoin Falstaff's service. They show in Mistress Quickly, who informs Falstaff that both Alice and Meg are madly in love with him. She explains that it will be easier to seduce Alice, since her husband is out of the house every afternoon, between two and three. Falstaff joyously anticipates his seduction of Alice.

Bardolph now announces that a 'Mister Brook' (Ford in disguise) wishes to speak to Falstaff. To Falstaff's surprise, 'Brook' offers him wine and money if he will seduce Alice Ford, explaining that he has long been in love with the lady, but to no avail. If she were to be seduced by the more experienced Falstaff, she might then be more likely to fall a second time and accept 'Brook'. Falstaff agrees to the plan, telling his surprised new friend that he already has a rendezvous with Alice that very afternoon.

As Falstaff leaves to prepare himself, Ford gives way to jealous rage. When Falstaff returns, dressed in his best clothes, the two men exchange compliments before leaving together.

Scene II: Ford's house

Mistress Quickly, Alice, and Meg are preparing for Falstaff's visit. Nannetta tearfully tells her mother that her father insists on her marrying Dr. Caius, but Alice tells her daughter not to worry.

Falstaff arrives and begins his seduction of Alice, nostalgically boasting of his aristocratic youth as page to the Duke of Norfolk. As Falstaff becomes more amorous, Meg Page interrupts the tête-à-tête, as planned, to announce (in jest) that Ford is approaching. But just at that point Mistress Quickly suddenly returns in a panic to inform Alice that Ford really is on his way, and in a jealous temper.

As Ford rushes in with a group of townsfolk, the terrified Falstaff seeks a hiding place, eventually ending up in a large laundry basket. Fenton and Nannetta also hide. Ford and the other men ransack the house. Hearing the sound of kissing, Ford is convinced that he has found his wife and her lover Falstaff together, but is furious to discover Nannetta and Fenton instead. While Ford argues with Fenton, Alice instructs her servants to empty the laundry basket out of the window. To general hilarity, Falstaff is thrown into the River Thames.

Act III

Scene I: Outside the Garter Inn

A wet and bruised Falstaff laments the wickedness of the world, but soon cheers up with a glass of mulled wine. Mistress Quickly persuades him that Alice was innocent of the unfortunate incident at Ford's house. To prove that Alice still loves him, she proposes a new rendezvous that night in Windsor Great Park. In a letter which Quickly gives to Falstaff, Alice asks the knight to appear at midnight, disguised as the Black Huntsman.

Ford, Nannetta, Meg, and Alice prepare the second part of their plot: Nannetta will be Queen of the Fairies and the others, also in disguise, will help to continue Falstaff's punishment. Ford secretly promises Caius that he will marry Nannetta that evening. Mistress Quickly overhears them...

Act III

Scene II: Windsor Great Park

As Fenton and Nannetta are reunited, Alice explains her plan to trick Ford into marrying them. They all hide as Falstaff approaches. On the stroke of midnight, Alice appears. She declares her love for Falstaff, but suddenly runs away, saying that she hears spirits approaching.

Nannetta, disguised as the Queen of the Fairies, summons her followers who attack the terrified Falstaff, pinching and poking him until he promises to give up his dissolute ways. In the midst of the assault Falstaff suddenly recognizes Bardolph, and realizes that he has been tricked. While Ford explains that he was 'Brook', Mistress Quickly scolds Falstaff for his attempts at seducing two younger, virtuous women. Falstaff accepts that he has been made a figure of fun, but points out that he remains the real source of wit in others.

Dr. Caius now comes forward with a figure in white. They are to be married by Ford. Alice brings forward another couple, who also receive Ford's blessing. When the brides remove their veils it is revealed that Ford has just married Fenton to Nannetta, and Dr. Caius to Bardolph! With everyone now laughing at his expense, Ford has no choice but to forgive the lovers, and bless their marriage. Before sitting down to a wedding supper with Sir John Falstaff, the entire company agrees that the whole world may be nothing but a jest filled with jesters, but he who laughs last, laughs best!

Falstaff

Principal Characters

Name	Description
Dr. Caius	A physician
Sir John Falstaff	A well-aged, witty, overweight knight
Bardolph	One of Falstaff's followers
Pistol	Another of Falstaff's followers
Meg Page	A neighbour, friend of Alice Ford
Alice Ford	Wife of Ford
Mistress Quickly	A neighbour, friend of Alice Ford and Meg Page
Nannetta	The daughter of Alice and Ford
Fenton	A young man in love with Nannetta
Ford	A wealthy man, husband of Alice



Falstaff, 2013, Opéra de Montréal.
Photo: Y. Renaud

The Principal Artists



Todd Thomas
Sir John Falstaff



Monica Huisman
Alice Ford



Gregory Dahl
Ford



Lauren Segal
Meg Page



Sasha Djihanian
Nannetta



Lynne McMurtry
Mistress Quickly



Tyler Putnam
Pistol



James McLennan
Bardolph



Kevin Myers
Fenton

The Composer

Giuseppe Verdi

Born: October 10, 1813

Died: January 27, 1901

Giuseppe Verdi dominated Italian opera for half a century with 28 operas that include some of the best known in the repertoire. He was not only a very popular and successful composer, but an astute businessman and producer, an active and committed farmer, a hero of the Italian nationalist movement, a member of the first nationalist movement, a member of the first Italian Parliament, and a generous philanthropist.

Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born in 1813, near Busseto, a small commune in Northern Italy. He was born the same year as the German composer Richard Wagner, to whom he loathed to be compared.



Giuseppe Verdi, 1886.

Young Verdi showed an early interest in music, and was encouraged by his father, who bought an old spinet piano and sent him to the church organist for lessons. When Verdi was 10, his father sent him to the nearby city of Busseto for further musical training. He stayed in the home of Antonio Barezzi, a local merchant and music enthusiast and gave singing and piano lessons to Barezzi's daughter, Margherita, whom he would later marry. At age 20, he left Busseto to further his studies in Milan.

In 1836, having returned to Busseto, Verdi accepted the position of town music master and married Margherita Barezzi. It was during this period that he composed his first opera, *Roccester*, which he later renamed *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio*. The opera was successful enough to persuade the impresario at La Scala to offer Verdi a contract to write more operas.

The Verdis' daughter Virginia was born in 1837, but died the following year. In 1839, Giuseppe and Margherita moved back to Milan with their little son, Icilio Romano, who died shortly after. While Verdi was working on his next opera, a comedy called *Un Giorno di Regno*, his wife died. The deaths of his entire young family within such a short time left him devastated. Although he completed *Un Giorno di Regno*, it was a failure, and Verdi resolved never to compose again.

It took two years for Merelli to persuade Verdi to compose another opera, *Nabucco*. Verdi became a celebrity overnight. The opera's Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, "Va pensiero" was sung in the streets of Milan and became an unofficial Italian national anthem. During this period came his "big three," the three operas that are his most popular. *Rigoletto* premiered in 1851 in Venice; *Il trovatore* was launched in Rome in 1853; followed six weeks later by *La traviata* in Venice.

Another of his famous works, *Aida*, premiered in 1871, and completed what was meant to be his last composition, *Requiem*, in 1874. Verdi came out of retirement to collaborate with Arrigo Boito, a composer and novelist, to create *Otello* in 1886, based on the play *Othello* by William

Shakespeare. The two collaborated once again in 1890, writing Verdi's last opera, *Falstaff*, based on Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which opened to hugely positive reviews.

Verdi's biggest operas remain as popular today as when they first appeared, they form the core of the current standard repertoire.

Verdi suffered a stroke on January 21, 1901, and died six days later. He was buried in Milan at the Casa di Riposo. His funeral was a national event, and thousands lined the streets, singing "Va pensiero," the famous chorus from *Nabucco*. Among the mourners were such great composers as Rossini, Donizetti, and Puccini.

Operas Composed by Giuseppe Verdi

Oberto, 1839	Luisa Miller, 1849
Un giorno di regno, 1840	Stiffelio, 1850
Nabucodonosor, 1842	Rigoletto, 1851
I lombardi alla prima crociata, 1843	Il trovatore, 1853
Ernani, 1844	La traviata, 1853
I due Foscari, 1844	Les vepres siciliennes, 1855
Giovanna d'Arco, 1845	Simon Boccanegra, 1857
Alzira, 1845	Un ballo in maschera, 1859
Attila, 1846	La forza del destino, 1862
Macbeth, 1847	Don Carlos, 1867
I masnadieri, 1847	Aida, 1871
Jérusalem, 1847	Otello, 1887
Il corsaro, 1848	Falstaff, 1893
La battaglia di Legnano, 1849	

The Librettist

Arrigo Boito

Born: February 24, 1842

Died: June 10, 1918

Arrigo Boito was a journalist, poet, composer, and librettist, born in Italy in 1842. Boito attended the Milan Conservatory to study music under Alberto Mazzucato. He composed his own opera, *Miefistofele*, based on *Faust* by Goethe, which premiered in 1868 at La Scala. The opera had only two performances, and needed to be re-worked before premiering again in 1875 to more success. This was the only complete opera that Boito composed throughout his career. In the 1880s, Boito wrote the libretto for Verdi's last two operas - *Otello* and *Falstaff*, both based on plays by William Shakespeare.



Arrigo Boito

William Shakespeare

Born: April 23, 1564

Died: April 23, 1616

William Shakespeare was a poet and playwright, known as the greatest dramatist and writer in the English language. Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, he had a flourishing career with a player's company, Lord Chamberlain's Men. In his early period he wrote history plays (*Richard II*, *Henry IV*, etc.), and comedies (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, etc.). In his later period came his tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, etc.) followed by tragicomedies (*The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, etc.). His plays, poems, and sonnets are considered the most well-known works in the English language, and inspired other artists throughout history, and continue to be performed and studied around the world.



Chandos Portrait of William Shakespeare

What is a Libretto?

Libretto means "little book" in Italian. It refers to the written text of an opera set to music by the composer. Today, we commonly refer to an opera as being 'by' the composer of the music, but the text is a vital component and is normally written first. In earlier times it was often regarded as more important than the music, and it was common for audience members to purchase the libretto to read.

Early composers were usually contracted to set music to a pre-existing text. Only later did composers (such as Mozart and Verdi) work in close collaboration with their librettists. A few composers – notably Wagner – wrote their own texts.



Musical Highlights

What To Listen For:

- Typically an **overture** is the first piece of music you will hear and is most often played with the curtain down. This is the first operatic convention that Verdi strays from, removing an overture and immediately launching into the action of the piece.
- This opera offers almost no traditional arias, and instead flows from duets to ensembles, keeping up with the quick pace of a Shakespearean play. *Falstaff* is through composed, meaning the music is not repetitive, it is constantly changing and evolving.
- ACT I: Falstaff's "L'Onore! Ladri!" ("Honour! Thieves!") is directed at his followers, suggesting to them that honour is only a word. He sings "L'Onore" near the top of his range, and "Ladri" near the bottom of his range, to highlight his feelings of contempt.
- ACT I: "Alice. Meg. Nannetta" is the audience's first introduction to the female characters of the story. The quick, climbing notes at the beginning suggest excitement or anticipation building.
- ACT II: Ford sings "E sogno? o realta" ("Is it a dream or reality?") after Falstaff has arranged his rendezvous with Alice, and the dynamics of the strings convey his anger and jealousy.
- ACT II: In an attempt to seduce Alice, Falstaff sings "Quand' ero paggio" ("When I was page to the Duke of Norfolk") recalling the glory days of his youth.
- ACT III: Nannetta sings "Sul fil d'un soffio etesio" ("On the breath of a fragrant breeze, fly nimble spirits") while dressed as the Queen of the Fairies to haunt Falstaff in the forest.
- ACT III: Falstaff begins his final fugue "Tutto nel mondo e burla" ("Everything in the world is a jest...") and all the characters join in for this ensemble ending. This piece is known as "the most joyous piece of music Verdi ever wrote."



Falstaff, Teatro alla Scala, 2013.

Photo: R. Amisano

The Popularity of Sir John Falstaff

The loud, aging knight, Sir John Falstaff, has four different operas based on his character, created in the imagination of William Shakespeare. It is rumored that Falstaff may be based on a real soldier named Sir John Oldscastle, whose heirs were not pleased that Shakespeare had initially created a cowardly character of the same name.

In the works of William Shakespeare, Falstaff appears in *Henry IV Part 1* and *Part 2*, as the companion of Prince Hal in Part 1, but falls in rank in Part 2. Shakespeare then reintroduces Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, his boisterous character is highlighted in this comedy as opposed to the historical storyline of the *Henry IV* story.

Verdi's opera, *Falstaff*, is based on the plot of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but aspects of the character of Sir John Falstaff from *Henry IV* are incorporated to flesh him out. Speculations have been made that Shakespeare wrote *The Merry Wives of Windsor* because Queen Elizabeth I wanted to see Sir John Falstaff in love.

So, why is this vain, boisterous, immoral knight such a popular literary figure?

Despite his flaws, Sir John Falstaff is a decent, witty, and humorous character to which audiences are drawn towards rooting. Falstaff never had his own Shakespearean play, but was such a popular character that Verdi and Boito focused their opera on the character himself, not just on the plot of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Otherwise this opera would be titled *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, rather than *Falstaff*! This is why Boito incorporated pieces of *Henry IV* into the libretto, with the intention of showing the wit and cleverness of Sir John Falstaff.

Throughout the opera, Sir John Falstaff's plan is continually dismantled, and at the end he gets what was coming to him for trying to seduce Alice Ford and Meg Page. This large, self-centred, thieving character teaches us all a good lesson at the end, by learning to laugh at oneself, with the famous line: "*Everything in the world is a jest. . . . Every mortal laughs at all the others. But he who laughs last laughs best.*" The lovable knight wins over the audience by showing humility, proving how this classic character continues to charm readers and audiences in various adaptations of Shakespeare's works.



LEFT: An illustration of Falstaff from the 1800s.

CENTRE: A drawing of Roger Allam as Falstaff in the 2009 productions of *Henry IV* at the Globe Theatre. Drawn by Rachel Stewart.

RIGHT: Beerbohm Tree as Falstaff in 1856.

Shakespeare in Opera

The work of William Shakespeare has inspired artists from a variety of disciplines throughout history, and continues to do so at present day. His direct text is not often set to music, as he wrote in **iambic pentameter**, which would be difficult to set to music. Iambic pentameter is a line of writing with five metrical feet, each one made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Writing the libretto of an entire opera in this form would restrict the librettist from following the rhythms created by the composer. Although the direct text may not always be used, the stories and characters imagined by Shakespeare can be found in operatic works throughout history.

Plots of opera move at a much slower pace than plays, as the action is often interjected with long arias; this requires librettists to fill in the gaps of the story. The strength of opera, however, is that the music has the ability to express the emotions of the characters on stage. This power connects the audience to the emotions without having to explicitly state them.

How does this connect to Giuseppe Verdi?

Giuseppe Verdi was praised as being faithful to the Shakespearean play, his operas were thought of as “a play written by Shakespeare in the style of Italian opera” (G.B. Shaw). When he created *Otello* in 1887, he was challenging the Rossini opera from 1816 based on the same play. When he created *Falstaff* in 1893, he focused the story on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but added in parts from *Henry IV* to round out the character of Sir John Falstaff. Both *Falstaff* and *Otello* flow smoothly from aria to ensemble to duet, not impeded by recitative. This style of composition was bold at the time of Verdi, and perhaps he was inspired by the work of Shakespeare to break free of operatic conventions.



Operas Based on Shakespearean Works

List Provided by No Sweat Shakespeare

The Tempest

- The Enchanted Isle by Thomas Shadwell (1674)
- The Tempest by Felice Lattuada (1922)
- The Knot Garden by Michael Tippett (1970)
- Un Re In Ascolto by Luciano Berio (1984)
- The Tempest by John C. Eaton (1985)

Romeo and Juliet

- Giulietta e Romeo by Nicola Vaccai (1825)
- I Capuleti e i Montecchi by Vincenzo Bellini (1830)
- Romeo et Juliette by Charles Gounod (1867)
- A Village Romeo and Juliet by Frederick Delius (1901)
- West Side Story by Leonard Bernstein (1957)

A Midsummer Night's Dream

- The Fairy Queen by Henry Purcell (1692)
- A Midsummer Night's Dream by Benjamin Britten (1960)

Macbeth

- Macbeth by Giuseppe Verdi (1847)
- Macbeth by Ernest Bloch (1910)

Hamlet

- Hamlet by Ambroise Thomas (1868)

Othello

- Otello by Giulio Rossini (1816)
- Otello by Giuseppe Verdi (1887)

Much Ado About Nothing

- Beatrice et Benedict by Hector Berlioz (1862)

Timon of Athens

- Timon of Athens by Stephen Oliver (1991)

The Taming of the Shrew

- Kiss Me Kate by Cole Porter (1953)

Operas based on the character of Falstaff

- Der Kustigen Weiber von Windsor by Otto Nicolai (1849)
- Falstaff by Giuseppe Verdi (1893)
- At the Boar's Head by Gustav Holst (1925)
- Sir John in Love by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1929)



Otello, Manitoba Opera, 2007.

Photo: R. Tinker

Student Activities

Curriculum Connections to the Manitoba Curriculum Frameworks for Grade 9 - 12 are provided below each activity. For a more in-depth look at the connections, view our Manitoba Curriculum Connections documents on the Manitoba Opera website. www.manitobaopera.mb.ca

Activity #1: Using the Five C's, Have your Students Analyze the Opera as Drama

CHARACTERS: Are they interesting? Believable? Are their actions, words, thoughts consistent?

CONFLICT: What conflicts are established? How are they resolved?

CLIMAX: To what climax does the conflict lead?

CONCLUSION: How well does the conclusion work? Is it consistent? Satisfying? Believable?

CONTEXT: What are the historical, physical, and emotional settings? Sets and costumes?

- Give students the synopsis to read and have them re-tell the story after they have read it.
- Ask comprehensive questions.
- Present and discuss the composer and librettist.
- Listen to excerpts from the opera. Watch a DVD of the opera. Have students identify and recognize recurring themes.
- Discuss the historical background, emphasizing the visual and performing arts and history-social science frameworks. Discuss the results of certain events. Whom did they affect? How? Why? Did any changes occur as a result?
- Review the glossary of terms.
- Have the students watch for references to themes in the opera in their everyday lives. The internet, radio, TV, magazines, and movies often refer back to classics.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.2.1; 2.1.2; 2.1.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M2; DR-C1; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-M2; M-C2; M-R1

Activity #2: Create a Poster, Set, Costume, Press Release, or Ad

- Choose a time and place to set your production.
- Have the students design a poster for *Falstaff*, including such details as the date, the time, and the people involved.
- Have them draw a set for a production of the opera.
- They might also sketch a costume, wig, and makeup for a character in *Falstaff*.
- Have the students write a press release about *Falstaff*, including the date, the time, the people involved, and why it would be exciting or fun to attend.
- Have the students create an ad for the opera. Include whatever you feel is the biggest “selling point” of the opera - what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 4.1.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2; DR-C3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2; M-C3

Activity #3: A Review

Step 1 – Think-Group-Share

Individually, students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props, and costumes?
3. If you were the stage director, would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

Step 2 – Class Discussion

Have the whole class examine the poster papers and discuss the different ideas from each group.

Step 3 – Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including a clearly stated purpose, a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern, a summary paragraph capturing the interest of the reader, precise nouns, and revision for consistency of ideas. You might give your students a few samples of reviews for arts events – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the review outline, then complete a rough draft.

1. Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)
2. Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)
3. Paragraph 1 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
4. Paragraph 2 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
5. Paragraph 3 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
6. Summary/Closing Paragraph

Step 4 - Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Step 5 - Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.2.2; 3.1.3; 3.3.1; 4.1.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.4.1; 4.2.2; 5.2.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1; DR-R2; DR-R3; DR-R4

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R1; M-R2; M-R3; M-R4

Activity #4: Have your students act out the story

Have students consider the characters and the role they play in the story. Choose one of the following:

FALSTAFF | ALICE FORD | FORD | MEG PAGE | NANNETTA

If you were going to play this character, you would have to discover, create, and imagine background, personality, and physical qualities. Some clues are provided in the story and the music and some you need to make up yourself.

Pretend you are that character and answer the following questions:

1. What motivates you? How does this affect your actions? What obstacles stand in your way?
2. What steps in the opera do you take to achieve your objectives? What are the results?
3. What obstacles are beyond your control (laws, social status, others' actions)?
4. What are your (character's) greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
5. What is your relationship to the other characters?
6. How is the character's personality expressed through the music of the opera?
7. Can you think of a modern-day character who has similar characteristics and traits?
8. If this character were alive today, how would s/he be more or less successful?
9. What different steps would s/he take to achieve an objective?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 2.1.2; 2.1.3; 2.2.2; 2.3.2; 3.3.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-M2; DR-M3

Activity #5: Create a Sonnet from the Point of View of a Character

William Shakespeare, whose play *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was the inspiration for this opera, frequently wrote a specific style of poem called a sonnet. Have students choose one of the characters from *Falstaff*, and write a sonnet from their point of view, at a chosen time within the storyline. Below are the writing conventions of a sonnet:

A sonnet is a poem made up of 14 lines with a rhyming pattern of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

Sonnets are written in iambic pentameter in which each line is made up of 10 beats, following the pattern of an unstressed syllable then a stressed syllable.

Example from William Shakespeare's *Sonnet 18*: (stressed syllables are bolded)

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"

If your students are having difficulty with the iambic pentameter, clap the syllables with students to emphasize stressed and unstressed syllables.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.1.3; 2.3.1; 2.3.5; 4.2.4

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M2; DR-R1; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R1; M-R2; M-R3

Activity #6: Write a Letter from One Character to Another

Have the students choose a moment in the story and have one character write a letter to another. Explore how they would be feeling about the events of the day.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 2.3.5; 4.2.2; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R3

Activity #7: Cast *Falstaff*

Have the students cast modern-day singers or bands as the performers in *Falstaff*. Who did you choose? What are their costumes like? What did you base your decisions on?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.1; 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 4.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-C3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2; M-R4

Activity #8: Research and Report

Have the students study the history and politics of Verdi's time, particularly the year when *Falstaff* premiered (1893). What authors were popular? What scientific discoveries were being made? What was the social and political life in Europe at the time (as well as in Canada)?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 3.3.1; 3.3.2; 3.3.3; 3.2.2; 3.2.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.2.2; 4.2.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2

Activity #9: *Falstaff* Mood Board

Often before artists and designers create their work, they make a mood board to set the tone for the piece. This is usually a poster-sized piece of paper covered in images and words, usually from the pages of magazines and newspapers, that together communicates the complex mood of the piece in a way that words can't. It's the same as making a collage, except a mood board is for the purpose of communicating a focused concept.

Have your students go through a stack of old magazines and newspapers to create a mood board for *Falstaff*. They can create one each or work together on a large one for the class. Consider elements like colours, textures, phrases, faces, patterns, and images that represent the opera.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 2.2.3; 4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 4.4.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2

Activity #10: Musical Interpretation of Literature

Step 1 - Prepare a Musical Outline

Working in small groups, have your students choose a play, novel, or story that they've read and think about how they'd go about adapting it into an opera. Have them write out an outline and try to structure the beginnings of the opera. Which parts of the drama would be highlighted with which types of music? Would they have a large chorus to back up the principal singers or would the opera be more intimate? Which singing voices (soprano, baritone, tenor, etc.) would best suit each character?

Step 2 - Compose and Perform an Overture

How could the elements of music (ie., rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) be used to communicate the mood of the piece within the overture? Which instruments would be used? Allow them some time to work on composing their overture based on their answers to these questions. Students can then perform their overture for the class either as a composed and rehearsed piece, or improvised. Alternatively, they may choose to present their overture by describing the characteristics of the elements of the music within their piece.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 2.3.5; 2.2.1; 3.1.2; 3.1.3; 4.1.2; 4.4.3; 4.4.2; 4.2.5; 5.1.1; 5.1.2; 5.1.4

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-CR2; DR-M1; DR-M2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-CR2; M-CR3; M-M3

Activity #11: Active Listening

Play the first few minutes of the *Falstaff* CD. Ask your students to listen closely to the music and jot down their thoughts, feelings, and first impressions. Then have your students share their reactions with the classroom. Ask them to listen again and pay close attention to the elements of music (ie. rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) then explore questions such as the following:

- What are the instruments used to make the music?
- How does this music make me feel?
- What is the mood of the piece?
- What type of emotions do the singers bring forth?
- Does the music have a steady beat or pulse?
- What is the size of the ensemble?
- What do the singing voices tell us about those characters?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.12; 1.2.2; 2.3.1; 2.2.3; 4.4.3; 5.2.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2

Activity #14: Opera Comprehension Tests

The Opera

1. _____ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. _____ The lowest male vocal range.
3. _____ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. _____ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. _____ Considered the first opera.
6. _____ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. _____ The highest female vocal range.
8. _____ A song for two voices.
9. _____ The lowest female vocal range.
10. _____ The Italian word meaning "little book."
11. _____ The middle male vocal range.
12. _____ He/she is in charge of all the action on the stage.

Falstaff

1. Who is the composer? _____
2. The libretto was written by _____
3. In what year did the premiere performance take place? _____
4. What is the name of the daughter of Alice and Ford? _____
5. Falstaff is a _____ (name his profession).
6. Where does Sir John Falstaff go at the end of the opera? _____
7. Sir John Falstaff writes letters to _____ and _____.
8. *Falstaff* is based on a play written by _____
9. Name one of the two other operas Verdi wrote also based on Shakespeare plays: _____
10. The role of Falstaff is sung by a _____ (name the singing voice).
11. What language is the opera performed in? _____
12. To how many wives does the title *The Merry Wives of Windsor* refer? _____

Answer Key

General Opera

1. Opera
2. Bass
3. Overture
4. Orchestra pit or “the pit”
5. *Daphne*
6. Aria
7. Soprano
8. Duet
9. Contralto
10. Libretto
11. Baritone
12. Stage director

Falstaff

1. Giuseppe Verdi
2. Arrigo Boito
3. 1893
4. Nannetta
5. Knight
6. The feast at the home of Meg Page
7. Alice Ford; Meg Page
8. William Shakespeare
9. *Otello; Macbeth*
10. Tenor
11. Italian
12. Two

Manitoba Opera would be pleased to receive a copy of any work related to this opera produced by your students. Please forward to:

Livia Dymond, Education and Outreach Coordinator
Manitoba Opera, 1060 - 555 Main St., Winnipeg, MB R3B 1C3

or

education@manitobaopera.mb.ca

Winnipeg Public Library Resources

Books

Verdi [by Peter Southwell-Sander]
London: Omnibus Press c1978.
Call No.: 780.92 VERDI

William Shakespeare: his life and work
[by Anthony Holden]
London: Little, Brown, c1999.
Call No.: B SHAKESPEARE

The merry wives of Windsor
[by William Shakespeare]
Toronto: CBC Enterprises, c1984.
Call No.: 822.33 P5

Henry IV, part I, and part 2
[by Wililam Shakespeare]
New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, c2008
Call No.: 822.33 W2 HEN 2008

Sound Recordings

Falstaff
Myto Historical Line, p2010.
Call No.: CD OPERA VERDI FAL

Shakespeare in music and words
Lonfdon: Decca, p2016.
Call No.: CD CLASS SHAKESPEARE

DVD Recordings

Falstaff [Verdi]
Opus Arte, c2013.
Call No.: DVD 792.542 FAL

The Merry Wives of Windsor [Shakespeare]
Kultur, [2010]
Call No.: DVD FILM/TV MER

Henry IV, part 1 / Henry IV, part 2
Kultur, [2012]
Call No.: DVD FILM/TV HEN



Eduard von Grützner's Falstaff (1921)

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This study guide was compiled accumulatively and includes information from the following sources accessed since 2000:

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The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Opera
The Canadian Opera Company
Encyclopedia of Manitoba
Encyclopedia of the Opera by David Ewen
Fort Worth Opera Study Guide
GradeSaver.com
La Scena
Lyric Opera of Kansas City
Manitoba Archives
Metropolitan Opera
musicwithease.com
Music.MSN.com
New York City Opera
Opera America Learning Centre
operabuffa.com; Opera Columbus Study Guide
Opera News
Operas Every Child Should Know
Opera Lyra Ottawa Study Guide
Opera Today
Orchestra London Study Guide
Pacific Opera
San Diego Opera Study Guide
San Francisco Opera Guild Study Guide
schubincave.com
A Season of Opera
Skeletons from the Opera Closet
timelines.com
Tulsa Opera Study Guide
University of Chicago Press
University of Manitoba
University of Texas
University of Waterloo
Rimrock Study Guide
Virginia Opera Study Guide
Winnipeg Free Press
Wikipedia
The World's Great Operas

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