

***Porgy and Bess* and African American Culture**

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INTRODUCTION

Growing up in the small bedroom community of Galena Park, Texas, our house was filled with all kinds of music seven days a week. On any given day the household would awake to the sounds of Bessie Smith, Dinah Washington, Billie Holiday, Clara Ward, Mahalia Jackson, Otis Redding, Charlie Pride, Glenn Campbell, or the Sloan Family Singers. The last group being my very own musically talented family, the Sloan family for the past four generations has produced several well-known musicians in and around the Houston area. My mother would sing Rossini and the music of other Italian masters. Her soaring and beautifully controlled light lyric soprano voice instantly inspired in me a love for classical music.

I remember when *Porgy and Bess* aired for the first time on television; my mother insisted that all of us watch it together as a family. Weeks later the entire family was singing “Summertime,” “I Got Plenty o’ Nothing,” and “Lawd, I’m On My Way.” Some of the best performances were on Saturday evenings as my family would gather in the freshly cut backyard of my childhood home for evening barbeques. Little did I know then that I eventually would play the lead role of Bess with the Houston Ebony Opera Guild for an audience of over 2,000 people at Houston’s own Miller Outdoor Theatre.

My elementary schoolteacher, Mrs. Laird, later reinforced my love for opera when she took me to see my very first live performance of *La Traviata*. Mrs. Laird was diligent in her duties to make sure that her classes attended two or more productions at Jones Hall every year. I along with my fellow elementary school classmates over the years saw the Houston Grand Opera productions of *Carmen*, *La Boheme*, *The Magic Flute*, and *The Elixir of Love*. I often wondered if Mrs. Laird ever knew what an impact those elementary school field trips had on my life musically.

Through the years, I have witnessed a decline in the number of African American singers pursuing careers in opera. I am of the opinion that the decline may possibly be attributed to the severe cutbacks in public school music programs. Aiding the decline to some degree is a state driven test that now consumes a vast percentage of the budgets in public school funding. Throughout the course of my participation in the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), and more recently as an adjudicator in district choral and vocal competitions, I have seen fewer participants of African American descent competing. I have also had the privilege of working with the Houston Ebony Opera Guild’s Young Apprentice program for the past six years, where we seek young African American singers from around the country to participate in our summer apprentice program by offering a supporting role in a major operatic production. During

the course of the program, I have always made it a point to pick the brains of these students to get the personal stories behind their interest in the world of opera and of their other colleagues regardless of ethnicity. Many of their introductions into the world of opera began with their parents' love of classical music or with a music instructor who made a huge impact on their lives.

Unit Background

My original goal was to design a unit for high school students just for my music history classes. As I began to develop and plan an outline for the class, the question in my mind was, "What would I want the students to actually know about music history?" The second question that came to mind was, "What would *they* want to know about music history?" I immediately began to construct an outline to teach the different periods of music – such as the baroque, classical, and Renaissance periods – including the great works of the masters of each period. It wasn't very long before one of my students asked, "Mrs. Hubert, where are the black people and what do they have to do with these other people?" After this question was posed, several of the other students chimed in antiphonally, "Yeah! Where are the black musicians?"

What my students were asking for was something that they could relate to and understand, and in some way take ownership of the knowledge that had eluded them in their earlier public school education. The leading rule in education is for all teachers to adapt and then modify. This golden rule is referred to by many public school instructors simply as "A and M," which is required whenever any significant percentage of the students in your class are perceived as having difficulty in mastering a concept or lesson. I had to go back to the drawing board and re-create lessons that would still teach the same concepts but using a different approach. Hence, the idea of teaching students about classical music using the opera *Porgy and Bess* was born.

Once again the original intent was to create a curriculum for music history students, but the interest in the opera began to spread like wildfire among all my classes. The amazing levels of interest and enthusiasm were enough for me to extend the curriculum to my choral music classes. It is an awesome experience to pass students in the hallways who are singing or humming Gershwin's magnificent melodies.

This six-week unit will involve a study of music history, geography, cultural values, cultural characteristics, vocal skills, vocal styles, great African American opera singers, and the Gershwin's, as well as the creation of a campus opera workshop. Many of the activities found in the lesson plans can also be incorporated into additional curricular areas related to the T.A.K.S., such as reading, creative writing, and social studies. It is also my desire that this unit lead to the discovery of future opera singers, opera patrons, and choir directors. "*Porgy and Bess* and African American Culture" is an attempt to develop a sincere love and appreciation for a great art form.

OVERVIEW OF THE OPERA AND ITS INFLUENCES

Porgy and Bess by George Gershwin is regarded by many as his greatest accomplishment. George, along with his brother Ira and Dubose and Dorothy Heyward, who jointly wrote the lyrics and the libretto, uniquely captured and defined American opera. This great American art form would not have been possible without the original novel by Heyward. Heyward's *Porgy* was inspired by a newspaper article about a maimed black man in Charleston who committed murder in the heat of passion.

The Gullah people, with their unique language and culture, made a great impact Gershwin and Heyward. Throughout the entire opera, the Gullah traditions and dialogue give one a sense of the period and the people. The Gullah dialect spoken by the residents of Catfish Row is a mixture of English and a number of West African languages from the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba tribes. The African influence on Gullah can be seen in American English. Gullah words that are familiar to many Americans include *goober* ("peanut"), *gumbo* ("okra"), and *voodoo* ("witchcraft").

I am intrigued by the fine line separating present-day Ebonics, the Gullah dialect, the Creole language spoken in Louisiana by people of African descent, the Creole spoken in Haiti by Haitians of African descent, and the broken dialect of the Negro spirituals. Leontyne Price, in an interview a several years ago, was asked why she enjoyed singing the role of Bess, and her response was that she could use a very colorful chest voice along with other guttural vocal inflections and colors that she could not use in European opera. The Gullah dialect of *Porgy and Bess* combined with the melodies of Gershwin elevates and transports each singer when performing this masterpiece.

THE GULLAH PEOPLE

Heyward's novel was based on a real-life, well-known local citizen, Samuel Smalls, called "Goat Cart Sammy," who could not physically stand up correctly and was as a result forced to travel about in a goat drawn cart. In the novel by Heyward, Goat Cart Sammy became the main character called Porgy. Goat Cart Sammy was a descendent of the Gullah people, who settled in the Sea Islands. The original televised production of *Porgy and Bess* featured Porgy in a cart drawn by a goat on stage. Some more modern productions depict Porgy on crutches with a maimed, twisted leg.

Dubose Heyward's novel is not just about Goat Cart Sammy, but about the Gullah people, who are the residents of Catfish Row. The Sea Islands are a small cluster of islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. The term Gullah is used to define and identify the native islanders and the language they speak. Gullah is a culture different from most other cultures. Gullah is a way of life, way of storytelling, and an array of centuries-old beliefs. The Gullahs have been here for generations, arriving in the low country of South Carolina in the 17th century with a large part of their transplanted

culture remaining intact. These Africans came with their own traditions, beliefs, and skills which are still maintained today because of the isolation of the Sea Islands.

Originally, these islands were populated with African slaves from Senegal, Sierra Leone, and the coast of West Africa. The traditions of the Gullah people are still widespread and present today in most southern parts of predominately African American communities in the United States. *Porgy and Bess* is a good vehicle for introducing middle- and high-school students to the world of opera. Dubose and Gershwin could not have been more right in their attempts to capture the essence of a people along with their gloriously rich and unique culture. The three-act opera takes place in Catfish Row, which was formerly an aristocratic mansion that became a rundown, low-income tenement.

CASTING *PORGY AND BESS*

Gershwin involved himself with the casting and production of his opera. He took a very hands-on approach in selecting Todd Duncan, a university professor, as Porgy, and Anne Brown as his first Bess. Todd Duncan recalled that Gershwin was “going around the country looking for his Porgy.” Music critic Olin Downes recommended that Gershwin hear Duncan, who was teaching at Howard University as well as performing. For his part, Duncan was not interested because Gershwin was Tin Pan Alley and something “beneath him.” Finally, the two arranged a meeting in which Gershwin played and Duncan sang, and Gershwin asked Duncan to take the part of Porgy. Gershwin arranged an evening for Duncan with Ira Gershwin and his wife, the Theatre Guild board and prospective backers. Duncan was to sing three or four songs, but sang an hour and a half. Then Ira and George got out the score *Porgy and Bess* and Duncan sang the entire opera.

Anne Wiggins Brown was born in 1915 to an upper class Baltimore, Maryland family. Brown attended the Peabody and Juilliard Schools of Music. She auditioned for Gershwin and he requested her to sing unaccompanied the Negro spiritual, “A City Called Heaven,” and decided to employ her for the opera. Brown and Gershwin worked closely on the opera. She helped persuade George Gershwin to rewrite the third act so that she could sing “Summertime.” Anne Brown became the very first Bess in 1935 and sang the role again in 1942. In 1945, Brown also appeared in the film biography of Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The original principal cast members of the first *Porgy and Bess* were:

- **Porgy** (bass-baritone) - Todd Duncan
- **Bess** (soprano) – Anne Brown
- **Sportin’ Life** (tenor) – John W. Bubbles
- **Crown** (bass-baritone) – Warren Coleman
- **The Eva Jessye Choir** – tenants of Catfish Row

The story of *Porgy and Bess* is a really simple one, but one that has gained Gershwin fame thanks to the larger-than-life talents of Todd Duncan and Anne Brown, and to Leontyne Price, William Warfield, Grace Bumbry, Etta Mottin, Cab Calloway, Maya Angelou, Brock Peters, Robert Guillaume, and many others. In later years, there was much controversy in the African American community that *Porgy and Bess* was insulting to people of color. However, many naysayers would have a change of heart upon hearing the melodious sounds of the aforementioned singers. On the other hand, many African American opera singers were worried that they would become typecast as one or another character from the opera. Many singers of color felt they would never sing *Tosca*, *Mimi*, *Leonora*, *Butterfly*, or *Carmen*, roles that they had trained many years and were prepared to sing.

The *Porgy and Bess* characters are:

- **Porgy** (bass-baritone) – a crippled beggar
- **Bess** (soprano) – a woman of loose morals
- **Crown** (baritone) – the neighborhood bully
- **Sportin' Life** (tenor) – the neighborhood drug dealer
- **Serena** (soprano) – wife of Robbins
- **Robbins** (tenor) – husband of Serena
- **Jake** (baritone) – a fisherman married to Clara
- **Clara** (soprano) – wife of Jake
- **Mariah** (contralto) – pillar of the community
- **Undertaker** (baritone) – the mortician of Catfish Row
- **Peter** (tenor) – street vendor
- **Mingo** (tenor) – Catfish Row resident
- **Frazier** (baritone) – the neighborhood lawyer
- **The Crab Man** (tenor) – street vendor
- **The Strawberry Lady** (mezzo soprano) – street vendor
- **Annie** (mezzo-soprano) – Catfish Row resident
- **Lily** (mezzo-soprano) – wife of Peter
- **Mr. Archdale** – actor
- **Detective** – actor
- **Policeman** – actor
- **Scipio** – young boy/actor
- **Jasbo Brown** – juke-joint pianist

***PORGY AND BESS* PLOT SUMMARY**

The following is a breakdown of the three acts of the opera. Each scene describes the setting, musical highlights, and soloists featured.

Act I, Scene 1 – Catfish Row

“Summertime”	Clara
“A Woman Is a Sometime Thing”	Jake and Company
“They Pass by Singin’”	Porgy
“Crap Game Fugue”	Orchestra and Company

The vocal highlights of Act I begin with the aria, “Summertime,” sung by Clara the wife of Jake, and a new mother. Clara’s role is for a soprano with a vocal range of Gb4 to B6. Clara should be a lyric soprano. In this act, Clara sings the lullaby to her young infant in an attempt to get the child to go to sleep. The students will also note the musical differences between the first and second time “Summertime” is sung.

The next vocal highlight belongs to Jake the fisherman, owner of the Seagull. Jake’s role is for a baritone with a range of D3 to F4. After a hard day’s work, Jake notices that Clara is having a little trouble putting their infant to sleep. Jake then decides to assist her by singing his own lullaby, “A Woman Is a Sometime Thing.” In his lullaby, he warns the child about the complexities of the opposite sex. Just when Jake thinks he’s mastered the art of putting the baby to sleep the child cries, and Jake decides that maybe he should stick to fishing.

The most important highlight of Scene 1 occurs when Porgy comes home from begging on the street all day. This is the first time that the audience sees Porgy. Porgy hobbles into the courtyard of Catfish Row, ready to join the neighborhood dice game. Porgy’s role is for bass-baritone, with lyric and dramatic tendencies. Porgy’s range is from B3 to D4. Porgy is then teased by Jake about having feelings for Bess and begins his lament, “They Pass by Singing.” Porgy takes a minute to feel sorry for himself. Porgy sings, “[T]hey pass by singing; they pass by looking and keep on moving. When God made cripple he meant for him to be lonely.” At this moment, Porgy has the sympathy of all of Catfish Row.

“The Crap Game Fugue” is with full company. After Crown and Bess arrive, the mood of Catfish Row turns violent. Crown is getting high on “happy dust” and alcohol. In a heightened drug-induced and alcohol-laced stupor, Crown begins to argue with Robbins. Crown and Robbins begin to fight, and Crown kills Robbins with a cotton hook. As Crown prepares to escape to Kittiwah Island to avoid being arrested, Bess offers him money.

Act I, Scene 2 – *Serena’s Room*

“Gone, Gone, Gone”	Company
“Overflow”	Company
“My Man’s Gone Now”	Serena and Company
“Leavin’ for the Promise’ Lan’”	Bess and Company

Scene 2 begins with the saucer burial service for the deceased Robbins. The saucer on the chest of the deceased is for money to help bury Robbins. The residents of Catfish Row slowly make their way to Serena's home to pay their respects and to comfort Serena. The neighbors sing about the loss of their friend Robbins. A member of the chorus asks, "Where is Brother Robbins'?" The chorus responds, "He's a gone, gone, gone, gone."

"Overflow" is a rousing chorus number led by Porgy to soften the hearts of the Catfish Row residents to dig a little deeper in their pockets to help with the funeral expenses. Robbins has died without insurance and must be buried soon or the board of health will give his body to the medical students to cut and scatter. Bess, who is now Porgy's girl, approaches the saucer to put in some money. Bess is immediately attacked by Serena and told she does not want money from her or the man who killed her husband. Bess informs her that Porgy supplies her money now and Serena accepts the offering.

The saucers still only contains \$14.50. The Undertaker cannot bury Robbins for less than \$25.00. Serena fears the worst if she can't bury her husband and later sings, "My Man's Gone Now." The role of Serena is for a spinto soprano with dramatic tendencies and a range of E4 to B6. This is Serena's finest moment in the opera, as she wails and moans about never again hearing the footsteps of her husband and about being all alone.

Even the Undertaker is moved by Serena's sorrow, and agrees to bury Robbins on a payment plan. The jubilation of Catfish Row is evident as they are led by Bess in the rhythmically moving, hand-clapping, and foot-stomping "Leavin' for the Promise' Lan'." This is Bess's first solo with the chorus. The role of Bess is definitely for a spinto soprano with dramatic tendencies. She should have a range of Eb4 to Ab5. There should always be a difference in vocal timbre between Bess and Clara especially since they both sing "Summertime."

Act I, Scene 3 – *Catfish Row* (A month later)

"It Takes a Long Pull"	Jake and Male Chorus
"I Got Plenty o' Nuttin"	Porgy and Company
"Struttin' Style"	Maria and Sportin' Life
"Bess, You Is My Woman Now"	Porgy and Bess
"Oh, I Can't Sit Down"	Full Company

Scene III begins with Jake and his crew of fisherman preparing to set sail for a day's catch. The men gather their nets, which is also a tradition of Gullah fishermen who make and mend their own nets. Clara is worried about the September storms and how dangerous the waters can be. Jake assures her that he and his men will be fine. Jake also asks her, "How you think dat boy gonna get dat college education?" So he must work to make sure his family is provided for.

Meanwhile the ladies are performing their daily duties. Porgy is at home singing “I Got Plenty o’ Nuttin’.” This is a very different Porgy from Scene 1. Porgy is happy, smiling, whistling, and just downright overjoyed about having nothing but his gal, his Lord, and his song. It is very obvious that Bess has made this cripple very happy. Bess is also changed as she begins to associate with the women of Catfish Row.

The real highlight of Scene III is the solo, “Struttin’ Style,” for Maria. The role of Maria is for a mezzo-soprano/contralto with a range of D5 to A4. Maria, the store owner, chases the drug dealing Sportin’ Life away from her shop when he attempts to sell his “happy dust” in front of her store. She threatens to cut him up and feed him to the snakes. My students like to refer to this duet as, “ooh wee! I hate your guts.” This half spoken and half sung dialogue, which resembles modern day rap, is a favorite of young audiences.

Lawyer Frazier comes to Catfish Row and sells Porgy a divorce for one dollar. When he finds out that Crown and Bess have never been married, he raises the fee to a dollar and a half. Now Bess officially belongs to Porgy. After Mr. Archdale catches Lawyer Frazier selling fake divorces again, Porgy gets his money back. In “Bess, You Is My Woman Now,” the two lovers confess their feelings for each other. The fake divorce provides this opportunity because it superficially takes Crown out of the love triangle. In a very moving and sincere duet, Porgy and Bess “marry” each other. They promise to never leave one another, pledge to keep their “wedding” vows, and seal it with a kiss.

All of the residents of Catfish Row leave for the church picnic except Porgy, who encourages Bess to go and have enough fun for both of them. They are dressed in their Sunday best, dancing and parading around jubilantly about going to Kittiwah Island for the “Repent Ye Thus Said the Lawd” picnic.

Act I, Scene 4 – *Kittiwah Island* (Later Evening)

“It Ain’t Necessarily So”
“What You Want wid Bess”

Sportin Life and Company
Bess & Crown

At the picnic, Sportin’ Life sings of his own style of religion. The role of Sportin’ Life is for a buffo tenor. A buffo tenor is one who possesses the very colorful personality needed in portraying the role of Sportin’ Life. The range required is D3 to G4. Sportin’ Life is the neighborhood drug dealer who goes on the church picnic with his “happy dust” and bootleg whisky. Out of Serena’s eyesight, Sportin’ Life sings several sermons to the residents Christians of Catfish Row, telling them that the verses in the Bible are not “necessarily so.”

Serena brings an abrupt end to the church picnic when she finds her fellow congregants dancing and drinking, and everyone heads toward the boat. As Bess walks toward the boat she encounters a very familiar presence, Crown. The role of Crown is for

a baritone with a range of D3 to F4. In “What You Want wid Bess,” she makes an attempt to tell Crown that she’s Porgy’s woman now. Bess tries to tell Crown that her looks are fading and that he should find someone younger, prettier, and finer than herself. She also tries to tell him she’s changed and is now living a decent life with Porgy. Bess attempts to restrain herself when Crown’s big arm and chest embrace her, but she loses herself in his kiss. Crown then orders her to stay, and the boat returns to Catfish Row without her.

Act II, Scene I – *Catfish Row* (One Month Later)

“O, Dr. Jesus (quintet) “The Street Vendors Call”	Serena Strawberry Lady, Crab Man, and the Honey Man
“I Wants to Stay Here”	Bess and Porgy

Act II opens with Peter being released from jail. As he is welcomed home, he hears the cries of Bess and is told by Maria that Porgy’s woman is very sick. Peter suggests that Porgy send Bess to the hospital. Serena, the religious healer of the community, overhears the conversation. Serena reminds Porgy, Maria, and Peter of the miraculous power of prayer. Porgy then asks Serena to pray for Bess. She sings, “Oh, Dr. Jesus.” Serena then tells Porgy, “By five o’clock dat woman goin’ be well.”

Porgy sits in the courtyard of Catfish Row waiting for time to pass. While he waits the street vendors come and peddle their wares. The Strawberry Woman is the first to appear, followed by Peter, the Honey Man, and then the Crab Man. Maria comes out to buy some crabs, when the crab vendor says, “Look like there’s goin’ to be a storm today.” A bell rings five times, indicating the hour for Bess to be healed. A weak Bess calls out for Porgy.

Porgy hurries to her side to see her coherent. Bess explains to Porgy what happened on the island between her and Crown. Bess then tells Porgy that she wants to stay with him but Crown has threatened to come for her, and she will have to leave. Porgy tells Bess that she doesn’t have to go and that she can stay with him. Again in the duet, “I Wants to Stay Here,” they reaffirm their love for each other.

Act II, Scene 2 – *Serena’s Room* (A Gathering Place)

“Oh, De Lawd Shake De Heavens” “A Red-Headed Woman”	Company Crown and Company
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The hurricane bell tolls and everyone gathers for shelter and to pray for safety from the storm. Clara is delirious because Jake and the other fisherman have not returned home. As the weather grows worse, the residents begin to sing “Oh, De Lawd Shake De Heavens.”

Porgy notices that Bess too is uneasy and tries to calm her fears. He assures her that no one, not even Crown, could survive on Kittiwah Island in the storm. There is a knock at the door; Crown enters and laughs at the frightened people singing and praying. Crown then defiantly begins to sing, “A Red-Headed Woman.” Clara goes to the window and sees half of the Seagull upside down in the water. She hands her baby to Bess and instructs her to take care of him until she returns. Clara goes out in the storm searching for Jake and is swept away by the high tides.

Act III, Scene I – *Catfish Row*

“Clara, Clara” Company

After the storm, the townspeople mourn for Clara, Jake, and others lost in the storm. Porgy kills Crown.

Act III, Scene 2 – *Catfish Row (Next Day)*

“There’s A Boat Dat’s Leavin’ Soon For New York” Sportin’ Life

After Porgy is taken to jail for contempt of court, Bess is alone again. Sportin’ Life again tries to convince Bess to go to New York with him. Her insecurity and low self-esteem allow her to be tricked with “happy dust.”

Act III, Scene 3 – *Catfish Row (One Week Later)*

“Oh, Bess, Oh Where’s My Bess” Porgy, Serena, & Maria

Porgy returns from jail a week later. His neighbors are glad to see him but are not glad about what he will soon discover. Porgy returns with gifts purchased with the money he earned from shooting dice in jail. His very last gift is for Bess. Porgy calls for Bess but learns that she is gone. Maria and Serena painfully but beautifully sing this stirring trio with Porgy: “Oh, Bess, Oh Where’s My Bess.”

“Oh Lawd, I’m On My Way” Porgy & Company

Porgy finds deep within him a strength he has never had, which allows him to leave for New York. He refuses to give up his love for Bess without a fight. The opera closes with Porgy making his way down the road.

In this curriculum unit, the students will explore:

- Opera
- African Americans and classical music
- Recordings of *Porgy and Bess*
- The Eva Jessye Choir

- Eva Jessye
- The history of the Gullah people
- The Gullah language
- The slave trade (Senegal, Sierra Leone, and West Africa)
- *Porgy and Bess* – The Houston Grand Opera production, 1976
- The Georgia Sea Islands
- Basket weaving of the Gullahs
- Anne Brown
- Todd Duncan
- Heyward Dubose
- “Goat Cart” Sammy
- Leontyne Price
- William Warfield
- Gordon Hawkins
- Marquita Lester
- Etta Moten
- Gregg Baker
- Cab Calloway
- Robert Guillaume
- Dorothy Dandridge
- Sidney Poitier
- Diahann Carroll
- Sammy Davis, Jr.
- Pearl Bailey
- Brock Peters
- Maya Angelou
- Charleston, S. C.
- Paul Roberson
- Ira Gershwin

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan One

Objective

To introduce students to the world of opera and its components.

Materials Needed

- Access to the Internet
- Books on the Baroque period
- Books on the history of opera
- Access to a computer

- Paper, pen, and pencil

Procedure

The students will begin with a roundtable discussion about the world of opera. Have the students make notes of the comments made, so that at the end of the lesson, they will have documentation about what they've learned.

The students will first learn that opera is simply storytelling through music. In telling the story, opera employs the use of acting, singing, dancing, music, and visual arts. All major operas require a producer to ensure that all the components work together smoothly, thereby creating the best possible performance and providing a memorable experience for the audience. The students will study how an opera is produced and learn the necessary staffing required for the finish product.

There are three major components of opera. The procedure requires a librettist who writes the story, the lyricist who writes the text and the composer who writes the music known as the score. This team must be totally well balanced to work closely together to produce what can become a masterpiece.

The students will study the librettist, lyricist, and composer of Porgy and Bess. The students will begin researching the novel Porgy by Dubose Heyward. They will create a timeline of events starting with the novel to the opera.

Vocabulary for Lesson 1

Aria	Lyricist
Opera	Composer
Bel canto	Libretto
Musical	Operetta
Florence, Italy	Recitative
Librettist	Lully

The students, upon completion of this lesson, will learn that an opera that is well produced and performed will evoke emotions from the audience that may cause a standing ovation, goose bumps, and tears.

Lesson Plan Two

Objective

To introduce students to the Gullah people and their language. The Gullah culture is so rich and unique that it was the inspiration for *Porgy and Bess*.

Materials Needed

- World map
- Score of *Porgy & Bess*

- Full recording of *Porgy & Bess*
- Books on the Gullah language
- Biography of George Gershwin
- Books on Slavery, 1600-1750
- The Georgia Sea Island maps
- Books on the contributions of African Americans in classical music

Procedure

The lesson will begin with a roundtable discussion about the impact of slavery on American music. The students will locate Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Florida on a map and globe. The students will also locate the Sea Islands located off the coast of these states. The Gullah people originated from Angola, Senegal, and Sierra Leone, located off the coast of West Africa. The students will also locate the aforementioned places on a map and globe.

The students will research the history and language of the Gullah people. The students will discover the African heritage and traditions of the Gullah people found in *Porgy and Bess*. The students, with the use of a Gullah dictionary, will discover words in English that were borrowed from the Gullah language. The students will have a fun time learning to speak Gullah.

Vocabulary for Lesson 2

Gullah	Senegal
Yoruba	Folk Songs
Angola	Sierra Leone
Mandika	Spirituals
Marshlands	The Congo
Rice Plantation	Ibo
Sweet Grass Basket Weaving	West Africa
Georgia Sea Islands	

To grasp fully the uniqueness of *Porgy and Bess*, the students will also have to study the many music genres created by African Americans. Another great activity for the students will be to research the many African American dialects throughout the southern part of the United States.

Lesson Plan Three

Objective

To study great African American opera singers and actors from various casts of *Porgy and Bess*.

Procedure

The students will select two people from the list of cast members that have performed the same role. The students will make a comparison between the two performances. The students will research the background of each artist and make a comparison and contrast chart using photographs, recordings and videotapes.

The choral music students will start their own opera companies. They will hire the necessary artist and staff for its production. The advanced choir students will form a small opera workshop and perform selected pieces from the opera and stage them for their semester project. The students will use costumes and props and will create their own staging.

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Provides a history of Anne Wiggins Brown, the first Bess.

History Bits: Eva Jessye. Kansas Heritage Center. 1 May 2004.

<<http://www.ksheritage.org/hist02.html>>.

In 1929, Jessye directed the choir for the film *Hallelujah*, the first sound musical starring African Americans. When composer George Gershwin's folk opera *Porgy and Bess* first opened on Broadway in 1935, Jessye was the choral director.

Opera Synopses. 1996-2004. The Metropolitan Opera. 1 May 2004.

<<http://www.metopera.org/synopses>>.

Includes synopses of about 50 different operas.

Porgy and Bess: An American Voice. PBS Online/Thirteen Online. 1 May 2004.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/feature8/html/body_bio1.html>.

Includes information about cast members of *Porgy and Bess*.

Standifer, James. "The Complicated Life of Porgy and Bess." *Humanities* 18 no. 6 (Nov/Dec. 1997): 54 pars. 1 May 2004.
<<http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/1997-11/porgy.html>>.
A fascinating article that discusses, among other things, race and the role it plays in *Porgy*.

Resource Books

Alpert, Hollis. *The Life and Times of Porgy and Bess: The Story of an American Classic*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.
This book covers the success of the Broadway musical *Porgy and Bess*, describing the real-life settings in which the fictional scenes took place.<

Barber, David W. *When the Fat Lady Sings: Opera History as It Ought to be Taught*. Sound and Vision Publishing, Ltd., 2001
Historical facts; an outline for teaching opera.

Branch, Murial Miller. *The Water Brought Us: The Story of the Gullah-Speaking People*. New York: Cobblehill Books, 1995
The history of the Gullah people and their language, with stories of their voyage From West Africa to the Georgia Sea Islands.

Carawan, Guy and Candie. *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life? : The People of Johns Island, South Carolina – Their Faces, Their Words, and Their Songs*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988.
Collection of photographs, songs and art work of the Gullahs.

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Geraty, Virginia Mixson. *Gullah Fuh Oonuh/Gullah for You: A Guide to the Gullah Language*. Sandlapper Publishing, 1998.
After spending time learning to read, write, and speak Gullah, Mixson wrote this book in response to numerous requests for information on that language.

- Gill, Glenda Eloise. *No Surrender! No retreat! : African American Pioneer Performers of 20th-century American Theater*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
- Goldovsky, Boris and Mary E. Peltz. *Accents on Opera: A Series of Brief Essays Stressing Known and Little Known Facts & Facets of a Familiar Art*. Ayer Co., 1977.
As the title explains, these essays discuss aspects of opera that are not yet part of common knowledge, even to an opera lover.
- Greenberg, Robert. *How to Listen to and Understand Opera*. Springfield, VA: The Teaching Company, 2000.
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Audio and video versions available.
- Hamilton, David. *The Metropolitan Opera Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Guide to the World of Opera*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.
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- Hollow, Joseph E. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.
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- Jackson, Patricia Jones. *When Roots Die: Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1987.
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- Jaquith, Priscilla. *Bo Rabbit Smart for True: Folktales from the Gullah*. New York: Philomel Books, 1981.
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- Johnson, Guion Griffis. *A Social History of the Sea Islands with Special Reference to St. Helena Island, South Carolina*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969.
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- Jackson, Paul. *Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met: The Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts 1931-1950*. Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1992.
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A volume dealing with issues of ethnicity and diversity among slaves, this book, according to the publisher's website (<http://www.press.uillinois.edu/pre95/0-252-06214-0.html>), shows how slaves' "diversity and capabilities inhibited the development of racial stereotypes."

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The history of Duke Ellington's career, including the account of Ellington's remarks on *Porgy and Bess*.

Turner, Lorenzo Dow. *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2002.

This volume has helped to uncover the truth behind Gullah and make clear its origins in West African linguistics

Video Resources

The Gershwin's Porgy & Bess. Dir. Trevor Nunn. Emd/Capitol, 1993. (174 minutes)
The story of Porgy & Bess in three acts, with the London Philharmonic conducted by Simon Rattle.

Voices of the Gullah Culture: The Hallelujah Singers. South Carolina ETV, 1993.
The Hallelujah singers are descendants of the Gullahs popular throughout the Sea Islands. Their annual festival and music compositions are of the melodies that remain in tact from their ancestors.

Discography

Gershwin, George. *Gershwin – Porgy and Bess*. Emi Classics 56220, 1997.
Another recording of Gershwin's classic work, with Willard White, Cynthia Haymon, Damon Evans, Harolyn Blackwell, Bruce Hubbard, Cynthia Clarey, Marietta Simpson, and Gregg Baker, vocal soloists; the Glyndebourne Chorus; the London Philharmonic; and Simon Rattle, conductor.

_____. *Porgy and Bess*. Cond. John DeMain. RCA Victor 7863521092, 1990.
Performers: Donnie Ray Albert, baritone; Clamma Dale, Wilma Shakesnider, Betty Lane, sopranos; Carol Brice, contralto; Larry Marshall, tenor; Andrew Smith and Alexander B. Smalls, baritones; supporting soloists, chorus, and orchestra of the Houston Grand Opera; John DeMain, conductor.

_____. *Porgy and Bess*. Cond. Lehman Engel. Compact Disc. Sony 63322, 1998.
A 1951 recording, re-mastered and re-released by Sony, with Camilla Williams as Bess; Inez Matthews as Serena; Lawrence Winters as Porgy; Warren Coleman as Crown; Avon Long as Sporting Life; the J. Rosammyond Johnson Chorus; and Lehman Engel conducting.

_____. *Porgy and Bess*. Perf. Leona Mitchell et al. Cond. Lorin Maazel. DECCA 414559, 1985.
Gershwin's famous opera, with Willard White, bass; Leona Mitchell, soprano; Florence Quivar and Barbara Conrad, mezzo-sopranos; Arthur Thompson, baritone; the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus; the Cleveland Orchestra; and Lorin Maazel, conductor.