

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

LANGUAGE ARTS: What a Novel Idea

Students will

- Read *The Turn of the Screw* Synopsis and “The Characters”
- Read Chapter 3 of *The Turn of the Screw* (the novel) and Act 1 Scene 4 of *The Turn of the Screw* (the opera)
- Compare and contrast the same scene in the novel and the opera and write a summary. Discuss observations with the class.

Copies for Each Student: *The Turn of the Screw* Synopsis, “The Characters”, *The Turn of the Screw* Chapter 3, *The Turn of the Screw* libretto excerpt, Compare and Contrast Worksheet and Summary Page

Copies for the Teacher: *The Turn of the Screw* Synopsis “The Characters”, *The Turn of the Screw* Chapter 3, *The Turn of the Screw* libretto excerpt, Compare and Contrast Worksheet and Summary Page

Getting Ready

Makes copies of reading selections and worksheets for each student.

Prepare internet access for *The Turn of the Screw* online listening selections.

Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your group.

Introduction

Read *The Turn of the Screw* Synopsis and “The Characters” with your students. Have your students read Chapter 3 from *The Turn of the Screw*. Then have students listen to and watch Act 1, scene 4 from the opera and read the libretto. Have students complete the Compare and Contrast Worksheet and write a summary of their findings.

Guided/Independent Practice

Depending on your grade level, the ability of your students, and time constraints, you may choose to have students work as a whole class, in small groups, with a partner, or individually. Provide instruction and model the activity as needed. *Depending on the reading level of your students, you may want to review key words or unfamiliar phrases in the *The Turn of the Screw* chapter selection.

Evaluation

Have students share their observations with the class and guide class discussion.

*It is important to note that the major difference between the two reading selections is the inner voice of the Governess. In the novel, her thoughts are written out plainly. In the opera, her thoughts are not spelled out in the same way, but are present in the music and the visual aspects of the performance (staging, costumes, sets, movements, etc.).

TEKS

English Language Arts and Reading:

6th Grade

110.18.B.5 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

110.18.B.6 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

7th Grade

110.19.B.5 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

110.19.B.6 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

8th Grade

110.20.B.5 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

110.20.B.6 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

English I

110.31.B.4 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

110.31.B.5 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

English II

110.32.B.4 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

110.32.B.5 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

English III

110.33.B.4 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

110.33.B.5 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

English IV

110.34.B.4 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

110.34.B.5 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

Correlates: Music, Drama

Gardner's Intelligences: Verbal-Linguistic, Musical, Interpersonal

Bloom's Taxonomy: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Evaluation, Synthesis

Sources:

The Turn of the Screw Libretto

James, Henry, and David Bromwich. *The Turn of the Screw*. London: Penguin Books, 2011.

Online Resources:

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

www.aria-database.com

<http://sites.gsu.edu/mzhang10/files/2014/02/Britten-The-Turn-of-the-Screw-u192qe.pdf>

The Characters

Prologue: (tenor) Sets the stage for the story at the beginning of the opera. The same singer often plays Peter Quint later in the opera.

Governess: (soprano) Travels to Bly house to care for two children, Miles and Flora. She is hired by their uncle with strict instructions not to contact him or to abandon the children. After getting to know the children, she senses something is amiss in the house. She sees the figures of a man and a woman who turn out to be the ghosts of former Bly house employees lurking around the property. The Governess vows to do all she can to protect the children.

Miles: (treble) A young boy who lives at Bly house. He has been expelled from school for reasons unknown, though he appears at first to be a well-mannered, kind child. Miles is haunted by the ghost of Peter Quint, his Uncle's former valet who had a close relationship with the boy.

Flora: (soprano) Mile's sister, a young girl who lives at Bly house. She too, appears to be a sweet child at first, but begins acting out as the Governess suspects that like Miles, Flora is also haunted by the ghost of her former governess, Miss Jessel.

Mrs. Grose: (soprano) The housekeeper at Bly house. She works with the Governess to care for the children, though she remains unsure of the Governess' theory that the children are haunted by the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel.

Miss Jessel: (soprano) The children's former governess who had a close relationship with Peter Quint. Her ghost haunts Bly house.

Peter Quint: (tenor) The former valet of Bly house. His ghost haunts Bly house, and in particular, the child Miles, with whom he had a close relationship before his death.

Links to Musical Excerpts:

Act 1 Scene 4: The Tower – Stephanie Varnerin, Arnel Opera Festival Szeged, 2013.

The Governess goes for a walk around the grounds of Bly house and spots the figure of a man on top of a tower.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYFfaW7lq4U>

“Malo” – Thomas Parfitt & Miah Persson, Glyndebourne, 2011.

Miles sings the Malo Malo song to the Governess.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VRB8lklo3c>

Excerpts – LA Opera, 2011.

Excerpts from the opera.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsZo399LIuw>

The Turn of the Screw Synopsis

Setting: Bly, an English country-house

PROLOGUE

The Prologue introduces ‘a curious story, written in faded ink’, the personal account of a young governess, sent to instruct a boy and a girl in the country, long ago...

ACT ONE

On her journey to Bly, the Governess ponders her position’s uncertainties: the orphaned children, the old housekeeper, and her instructions not to contact her charges’ only relative.

The children – Miles and Flora – together with the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, welcome the Governess; Mrs. Grose assures her they are clever and good. The Governess feels at home. When she receives a letter from Miles’s school dismissing him as ‘an injury to his friends’, Mrs. Grose’s protestations and the sight of the children playing reassure her; she decides to ignore it.

Enjoying a warm summer evening in the grounds, the Governess sees a figure on the tower whom she at first imagines to be the children’s relative. But it is not. She suspects it may be a madman or intruder.

As the children are playing indoors, the Governess sees the man again, gazing in at the window. Mrs. Grose identifies him as Quint, the master’s former valet and Miles’s companion, who ‘made free’ with the Governess’s predecessor, Miss Jessel. Both are now dead. Horror-struck, the Governess fears that he has come back for Miles, and swears to protect the children. Mrs. Grose offers her support.

During the children’s lesson, Miles sings a strange song; he asks the Governess if she likes it.

Sitting by the lake with Flora, the Governess sees her staring at Miss Jessel, who has appeared on the other side. Sending Flora away, the Governess believes that both children are lost.

At night in the garden, Quint calls to Miles, and Miss Jessel to Flora. The Governess comes upon them as the ghosts disappear, and asks Miles what he is doing. ‘You see, I am bad,’ he answers.

ACT TWO

Quint and Jessel converse, she accusing him of betrayal, he speaking of the friend he seeks. The Governess admits that she is lost in a labyrinth.

In the churchyard, the children emulate choirboys. The Governess tells Mrs. Grose that they are complicit with Quint and Jessel. She has a disconcerting conversation with Miles and thinks he is challenging her to act.

In the schoolroom, the Governess finds Miss Jessel, who says to her that she cannot rest. She writes a letter to her employer telling him what has occurred.

In Miles’s bedroom, she tells him that she has written to his guardian. Quint calls to him. The candle goes out; Miles says that it was he who extinguished it.

Quint’s voice is heard encouraging Miles to retrieve the letter. He complies.

During Miles’s piano practice, the Governess realizes that Flora has slipped away – to meet, she suspects, Miss Jessel. She and Mrs. Grose go in search of her.

At the lake, the Governess accuses Flora of seeing Miss Jessel, who remains invisible to Mrs. Grose. Flora denies it, and Mrs. Grose leads her away. The Governess fears she has lost the housekeeper’s support.

After a horrendous night with Flora, Mrs. Grose prepares to remove her; she also informs the Governess that Miles has stolen the letter.

The Governess confronts Miles. Quint – at first unseen, then visible – warns him to remain silent. She forces Miles to name who made him take the letter. Miles blurts out ‘Peter Quint, you devil!’ collapsing in the Governess’s arms. Realizing he is dead, she sings the strange song he once sang to her.

The Turn of the Screw

Benjamin Britten
Opus 54

An Opera in a Prologue and Two Acts
Libretto by Myfanwy Piper
After the story by Henry James

Scene 4: The Tower.

Libretto

(the Governess, Quint)

The lights fade in again on the house. The tower is now visible. It is evening. Sweet summer. Enter the Governess, strolling.

Governess: How beautiful it is.
Each day it seems more beautiful to me
And my darling children enchant me more and more.
My first foolish fears are all vanish'd now, are all banish'd now...
Those fluttering fears when I could not forget the letter
When I heard a far off cry in the night
And once a faint footstep pass'd my door.
Only one thing I wish, that I could see him
And that he could see how well I do his bidding.
The birds fly home to these great trees,
I too am at home.
Alone, tranquil, serene.

Quint becomes visible on the tower.

Ha! 'Tis he!

Quint looks steadily at her...then turns...and vanishes.

No! No! Who is it? Who?
Who can it be?
Some servant – no! I know them all.
Who is it? Who?
Who can it be?
Some curious stranger? But how could he get in?
Who is it? Who?
Some fearful madman lock'd away there?
Adventurer? Intruder? Who is it? Who can it be?

The Turn of the Screw: Chapter 3

By Henry James

Her thus turning her back on me was fortunately not, for my just preoccupations, a snub that could check the growth of our mutual esteem. We met, after I had brought home little Miles, more intimately than ever on the ground of my stupefaction, my general emotion: so monstrous was I then ready to pronounce it that such a child as had now been revealed to me should be under an interdict. I was a little late on the scene, and I felt, as he stood wistfully looking out for me before the door of the inn at which the coach had put him down, that I had seen him, on the instant, without and within, in the great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity, in which I had, from the first moment, seen his little sister. He was incredibly beautiful, and Mrs. Grose had put her finger on it: everything but a sort of passion of tenderness for him was swept away by his presence. What I then and there took him to my heart for was something divine that I have never found to the same degree in any child--his indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love. It would have been impossible to carry a bad name with a greater sweetness of innocence, and by the time I had got back to Bly with him I remained merely bewildered--so far, that is, as I was not outraged--by the sense of the horrible letter locked up in my room, in a drawer. As soon as I could compass a private word with Mrs. Grose I declared to her that it was grotesque.

She promptly understood me. "You mean the cruel charge--?"

"It doesn't live an instant. My dear woman, look at him!"

She smiled at my pretention to have discovered his charm. "I assure you, miss, I do nothing else! What will you say, then?" she immediately added.

"In answer to the letter?" I had made up my mind. "Nothing."

"And to his uncle?"

I was incisive. "Nothing."

"And to the boy himself?"

I was wonderful. "Nothing."

She gave with her apron a great wipe to her mouth. "Then I'll stand by you. We'll see it out."

"We'll see it out!" I ardently echoed, giving her my hand to make it a vow.

She held me there a moment, then whisked up her apron again with her detached hand. "Would you mind, miss, if I used the freedom--"

"To kiss me? No!" I took the good creature in my arms and, after we had embraced like sisters, felt still more fortified and indignant.

This, at all events, was for the time: a time so full that, as I recall the way it went, it reminds me of all the art I now need to make it a little distinct. What I look back at with amazement is the situation I accepted. I had undertaken, with my companion, to see it out, and I was under a charm, apparently, that

could smooth away the extent and the far and difficult connections of such an effort. I was lifted aloft on a great wave of infatuation and pity. I found it simple, in my ignorance, my confusion, and perhaps my conceit, to assume that I could deal with a boy whose education for the world was all on the point of beginning. I am unable even to remember at this day what proposal I framed for the end of his holidays and the resumption of his studies. Lessons with me, indeed, that charming summer, we all had a theory that he was to have; but I now feel that, for weeks, the lessons must have been rather my own. I learned something--at first, certainly--that had not been one of the teachings of my small, smothered life; learned to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature. And then there was consideration--and consideration was sweet. Oh, it was a trap--not designed, but deep--to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever, in me, was most excitable. The best way to picture it all is to say that I was off my guard. They gave me so little trouble--they were of a gentleness so extraordinary. I used to speculate--but even this with a dim disconnectedness--as to how the rough future (for all futures are rough!) would handle them and might bruise them. They had the bloom of health and happiness; and yet, as if I had been in charge of a pair of little grandees, of princes of the blood, for whom everything, to be right, would have to be enclosed and protected, the only form that, in my fancy, the after years could take for them was that of a romantic, a really royal extension of the garden and the park. It may be, of course, above all, that what suddenly broke into this gives the previous time a charm of stillness--that hush in which something gathers or crouches. The change was actually like the spring of a beast.

In the first weeks the days were long; they often, at their finest, gave me what I used to call my own hour, the hour when, for my pupils, teatime and bedtime having come and gone, I had, before my final retirement, a small interval alone. Much as I liked my companions, this hour was the thing in the day I liked most; and I liked it best of all when, as the light faded--or rather, I should say, the day lingered and the last calls of the last birds sounded, in a flushed sky, from the old trees--I could take a turn into the grounds and enjoy, almost with a sense of property that amused and flattered me, the beauty and dignity of the place. It was a pleasure at these moments to feel myself tranquil and justified; doubtless, perhaps, also to reflect that by my discretion, my quiet good sense and general high propriety, I was giving pleasure--if he ever thought of it!--to the person to whose pressure I had responded. What I was doing was what he had earnestly hoped and directly asked of me, and that I COULD, after all, do it proved even a greater joy than I had expected. I daresay I fancied myself, in short, a remarkable young woman and took comfort in the faith that this would more publicly appear. Well, I needed to be remarkable to offer a front to the remarkable things that presently gave their first sign.

It was plump, one afternoon, in the middle of my very hour: the children were tucked away, and I had come out for my stroll. One of the thoughts that, as I don't in the least shrink now from noting, used to be with me in these wanderings was that it would be as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet someone. Someone would appear there at the turn of a path and would stand before me and smile and approve. I didn't ask more than that--I only asked that he should know; and the only way to be sure he knew would be to see it, and the kind light of it, in his handsome face. That was exactly present to me--by which I mean the face was--when, on the first of these occasions, at the end of a long June day, I stopped short on emerging from one of the plantations and coming into view of the house. What arrested me on the spot--and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for--was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real. He did stand there!--but high up, beyond the lawn and at the very top of the tower to which, on that first morning, little Flora had conducted me. This tower was one of a pair--square, incongruous, crenelated structures--that were distinguished, for some reason, though I could see little difference, as the new and the old. They flanked opposite ends of the house and were probably architectural absurdities, redeemed in a measure indeed by not being wholly disengaged nor

of a height too pretentious, dating, in their gingerbread antiquity, from a romantic revival that was already a respectable past. I admired them, had fancies about them, for we could all profit in a degree, especially when they loomed through the dusk, by the grandeur of their actual battlements; yet it was not at such an elevation that the figure I had so often invoked seemed most in place.

It produced in me, this figure, in the clear twilight, I remember, two distinct gasps of emotion, which were, sharply, the shock of my first and that of my second surprise. My second was a violent perception of the mistake of my first: the man who met my eyes was not the person I had precipitately supposed. There came to me thus a bewilderment of vision of which, after these years, there is no living view that I can hope to give. An unknown man in a lonely place is a permitted object of fear to a young woman privately bred; and the figure that faced me was--a few more seconds assured me--as little anyone else I knew as it was the image that had been in my mind. I had not seen it in Harley Street--I had not seen it anywhere. The place, moreover, in the strangest way in the world, had, on the instant, and by the very fact of its appearance, become a solitude. To me at least, making my statement here with a deliberation with which I have never made it, the whole feeling of the moment returns. It was as if, while I took in--what I did take in--all the rest of the scene had been stricken with death. I can hear again, as I write, the intense hush in which the sounds of evening dropped. The rooks stopped cawing in the golden sky, and the friendly hour lost, for the minute, all its voice. But there was no other change in nature, unless indeed it were a change that I saw with a stranger sharpness. The gold was still in the sky, the clearness in the air, and the man who looked at me over the battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame. That's how I thought, with extraordinary quickness, of each person that he might have been and that he was not. We were confronted across our distance quite long enough for me to ask myself with intensity who then he was and to feel, as an effect of my inability to say, a wonder that in a few instants more became intense.

The great question, or one of these, is, afterward, I know, with regard to certain matters, the question of how long they have lasted. Well, this matter of mine, think what you will of it, lasted while I caught at a dozen possibilities, none of which made a difference for the better, that I could see, in there having been in the house--and for how long, above all?--a person of whom I was in ignorance. It lasted while I just bridled a little with the sense that my office demanded that there should be no such ignorance and no such person. It lasted while this visitant, at all events--and there was a touch of the strange freedom, as I remember, in the sign of familiarity of his wearing no hat--seemed to fix me, from his position, with just the question, just the scrutiny through the fading light, that his own presence provoked. We were too far apart to call to each other, but there was a moment at which, at shorter range, some challenge between us, breaking the hush, would have been the right result of our straight mutual stare. He was in one of the angles, the one away from the house, very erect, as it struck me, and with both hands on the ledge. So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page; then, exactly, after a minute, as if to add to the spectacle, he slowly changed his place--passed, looking at me hard all the while, to the opposite corner of the platform. Yes, I had the sharpest sense that during this transit he never took his eyes from me, and I can see at this moment the way his hand, as he went, passed from one of the crenelations to the next. He stopped at the other corner, but less long, and even as he turned away still markedly fixed me. He turned away; that was all I knew.

The Turn of the Screw the Opera
Act I Scene 4: The Tower

The Turn of the Screw the Novel
Chapter 3

How are they alike?

How are they different?

