

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

MUSIC: The Characters

Students will

- Read The Turn of the Screw Synopsis
- Read the information sheet “The Characters” included with the lesson.
- Listen to audio selections from The Turn of the Screw online.
- Discuss and answer questions on the appropriate portion(s) of the Activity Worksheet.

Getting Ready

- Print copies for each student on the information sheet “The Characters” and the Activity Worksheet.
- Decide which section(s) of the worksheet you wish your group to complete.
- Print a copy for the teacher of the Sample Answers for the Activity Worksheet.
- Prepare internet access to the *The Turn of the Screw* online listening selections.
- Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your group.

Introduction

Have your students read *The Turn of the Screw* Synopsis. Give each student a copy of the information sheet “The Characters” or display it on the screen. Read through the information, discussing each character and listening to the online selections as you go.

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. Read the directions on the Activity Worksheet. Have students complete the portion(s) of the Activity Worksheet you have chosen with opportunity for questions. If students are working with a partner or in small groups, give them time to discuss their answers before writing them down. Have students share their answers individually or by groups and tell why they gave their answers.

Evaluation

Have students discuss and evaluate the answers of others. The teacher may want to guide the discussion with the samples answers provided. After individual or small group responses have been shared and/or turned in, the class can then formulate comprehensive answers for the class with the teacher asking leading questions to guide the discussion.

For Further Study

The teacher may want to have students further research *The Turn of the Screw*. Students may also want to do additional research on Benjamin Britten, Myfanwy Piper or Henry James, their lives and other works, or other related topics online or in their school library. Their findings can be shared with the class at the beginning of a later lesson.

TEKS

Music

6th Grade

117.208.C.4

Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B) describe written and aurally presented music representative of diverse styles, periods, and cultures; (C) identify relationships of music concepts to other academic disciplines such as the relationship between music and mathematics, literature, history.

7th Grade

117.209.C.4

Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B) examine written and aurally presented music representative of diverse genres, styles, periods, and cultures; (C) identify relationships of music content and processes to other academic disciplines such as the relationship between music and mathematics, literature, history, and the sciences.

8th Grade

117.210.C.4

Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B) compare and contrast written and aurally presented music representative of diverse genres, styles, periods, and cultures; (C) compare and contrast relationships of music content and processes to other academic disciplines such as the relationship between music and mathematics, literature, history, sciences, and language.

Music, Level I

117.310.C.5

Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A) compare and contrast music by genre, style, culture, and historical period; (C) identify and describe the uses of music in societies and cultures; (D) identify and explore the relationship between music and other academic disciplines; (E) identify and explore the impact of technologies, ethical issues, and economic factors on music, performers, and performances.

Music, Level II

117.311.C.5

Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A) compare and contrast music by genre, style, culture, and historical period; (B) define uses of music in societies and cultures; (C) identify and explore the relationships between music and other academic disciplines; (E) identify and explore the impact of technologies, ethical issues, and economic factors on music, musicians, and performances.

Music, Level III

117.312.C.5

Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A) classify representative examples of music by genre, style, culture, and historical period; (B) explore the relevance of music to societies and cultures; (C) define the relationships between music content and concepts and other academic disciplines; (E) analyze and evaluate the impact of technologies, ethical issues, and economic factors on music, performers, and performances.

Music, Level IV

117.313.C.5

Historical cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A) discriminate representative examples of music by genre, style, culture, and historical period; (B) evaluate the relevance of music to societies and cultures; (C) define the relationships between music content and concepts and other academic disciplines; (E) analyze and evaluate the impact of technologies, ethical issues, and economic factors on music, performers, and performances.

Correlates: Language Arts, Drama, Music

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.

Synopsis Courtesy of © Glyndebourne Productions Ltd

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 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 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, Armel 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=1VRB8lkl03c>

Excerpts – LA Opera, 2011.

Excerpts from the opera.

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

Name _____ Date _____

Activity Worksheet

Part I

1. Would you (like the Governess) take a job caring for two children without ever meeting them or their family? Why or why not?

2. What do you think Miles did to get expelled from school? Do you think he is a good kid or is he sinister?

3. What would you do if you saw a ghost? Have you ever been in a frightening situation? What happened and what did you do?
