



Muse Machine
Lesson Plan Inspired by Summer Institute 2022

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Inspiration: Tableau is an actor's tool that can reveal complex textual content with only bodies in space. An aria expresses something profound about a character's inner emotional state. I want to use the operatic skills of tableau and aria to help my English students demonstrate understanding of the traits of Gothic arts and literature.		
Title: A Gothic Aria		
Subject Area & Grade Level: ELA Senior AP/IB students		

I. OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

Summary: In this lesson, students will learn the traits of Gothic art and literature by creating definitions in tableau. They will then use those traits to write an aria featuring at least three traits of Gothic literature.

Standards: Ohio English Language Arts Learning Standards 2012

- RO.11-12.4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings
- W.11-12.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Objectives/Outcomes: Students will be able to express an understanding of Gothic traits by staging tableaux of traits and by applying them to a clip of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Students will produce an aria that applies the traits of Gothic literature.

Teaching Approach(es): Freewriting while watching a video clip, reviewing a nonfiction article about Gothic literature, creating a small group tableau of two traits, and brainstorming in small groups so students can create their arias.

Assessment Tool(s): Successful participation in creating and discussing tableaux as well as writing homework arias.

II. LESSON PREPARATION

Teacher Needs

- ❖ Teacher Context & Research: sites with definition of Gothic elements. Video clip of the Funeral March from the Ring (see links below)
- ❖ Helpful Hints: Explain that tableau is a “frozen picture” or students may be tempted to create a fully dramatized scene. If students need help focusing, consider letting them use individual whiteboards to guess traits during the tableau presentations.

Student Needs

- ❖ Prior Knowledge: basic terminology of poetry and how to analyze nonfiction for keywords
- ❖ Student Voice: Present in their tableaux and in their arias
- ❖ Vocabulary: aria, tableau

III. EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES

Student tableaux will effectively demonstrate key traits of Gothic literature. Student arias will contain at least three traits of Gothic literature and art.

IV. ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Art is fluid, including literary movements. Not every trait will be evident in all literature of a given movement. Art forms influence each other and are influenced by the times in which they were written.

V. LEARNING PLAN

Teaching Inquiry Question: How can tableaux help students remember and understand key traits of a literary movement? How can libretto/aria writing help students show understanding of a literary movement?

Essential Question: How can tableau and the physical portrayal of genre elements help students understand, recognize, remember, and utilize traits from specific literary and art movements to better understand the culture of the time period?

Resources/Materials:

- [Slideshow presentation](#)
- Clip from a Gothic opera (Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* on [YouTube](#))
- Student notebooks (LPs)
- [Print article](#) about Gothic traits

- Highlighters, pencils

Hook: Students will watch the Funeral March from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Students will write responses to the video in their notebooks (setting, movement, musicality, lighting) and share them in a whole class discussion. This discussion should elicit ideas that are essentially Gothic, such as "mysterious," "ominous," "gloomy," "highly emotional," etc.

Main Lesson Narrative/Sequence:

Use the slideshow, slides 1-4 to watch the scene from Wagner and explain the goal of today's lesson.

Explain that a tableau is like a frozen picture and that it is possible to communicate quite a lot of information without movement or talking. The tableau will help everyone to define and remember the traits of Gothic literature. The teacher will demonstrate a tableau using a common word like "victory."

Distribute the article about Gothic traits. Students read and highlight important words in the definitions. Students choose three important traits.

Students form small groups and determine two traits to tableau for the class. Groups take turns presenting while classmates guess which traits are being portrayed. Groups confirm and explain the why.

Following the tableaus, show slides 7-8 of the slideshow, discuss the linked grade sheet, and address any questions regarding the aria homework assignment. If time allows, students should work in groups to brainstorm ideas about how each trait could best be portrayed in their writing.

Demonstration of Learning: Student tableau and arias

Final Review: I will know students understand the elements of the Gothic genre by how well students were able to identify the traits in the tableau activity and by how effectively students' original arias demonstrate Gothic traits.

ARTIFACTS OF LEARNING

[Lesson photo](#)

Student sample arias ([one](#), [two](#))

Elements of the Gothic Novel

Robert Harris

The gothic novel was invented almost single-handedly by Horace Walpole, whose *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) contains essentially all the elements that constitute the genre. Walpole's novel was imitated not only in the eighteenth century and not only in the novel form, but it has influenced the novel, the short story, poetry, and even film making up to the present day.

Gothic elements include the following:

- 1. Setting in a castle.** The action takes place in and around an old castle, sometimes seemingly abandoned, sometimes occupied. The castle often contains secret passages, trap doors, secret rooms, dark or hidden staircases, and possibly ruined sections. The castle may be near or connected to caves, which lend their own haunting flavor with their branchings, claustrophobia, and mystery. (Translated into modern filmmaking, the setting might be in an old house or mansion--or even a new house--where unusual camera angles, sustained close ups during movement, and darkness or shadows create the same sense of claustrophobia and entrapment.)
- 2. An atmosphere of mystery and suspense.** The work is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown. Often the plot itself is built around a mystery, such as unknown parentage, a disappearance, or some other inexplicable event. Elements 3, 4, and 5 below contribute to this atmosphere. (Again, in modern filmmaking, the inexplicable events are often murders.)
- 3. An ancient prophecy** is connected with the castle or its inhabitants (either former or present). The prophecy is usually obscure, partial, or confusing. "What could it mean?" In more watered down modern examples, this may amount to merely a legend: "It's said that the ghost of old man Krebs still wanders these halls."
- 4. Omens, portents, visions.** A character may have a disturbing dream vision, or some phenomenon may be seen as a portent of coming events. For example, if the statue of the lord of the manor falls over, it may portend his death. In modern fiction, a character might see something (a shadowy figure stabbing another shadowy figure) and think that it was a dream. This might be thought of as an "imitation vision."
- 5. Supernatural or otherwise inexplicable events.** Dramatic, amazing events occur, such as ghosts or giants walking, or inanimate objects (such as a suit of armor or painting) coming to life. In some works, the events are ultimately given a natural explanation, while in others the events are truly supernatural.
- 6. High, even overwrought emotion.** The narration may be highly sentimental, and the characters are often overcome by anger, sorrow, surprise, and especially, terror. Characters suffer from raw nerves and a feeling of impending doom. Crying and emotional speeches are frequent. Breathlessness and panic are common. In the filmed gothic, screaming is common.
- 7. Women in distress.** As an appeal to the pathos and sympathy of the reader, the female characters often face events that leave them fainting, terrified, screaming, and/or sobbing. A lonely, pensive, and oppressed heroine is often the central figure of the novel, so her sufferings are even more pronounced and the focus of attention. The women suffer all the more because they are often abandoned, left alone (either on purpose or by accident), and have no protector at times.
- 8. Women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male.** One or more male characters has the power, as king, lord of the manor, father, or guardian, to demand that one or more of the female characters do something intolerable. The woman may be commanded to marry someone she does not love (it may even be the powerful male himself), or commit a crime.

9. The metonymy of gloom and horror. Metonymy is a subtype of metaphor, in which something (like rain) is used to stand for something else (like sorrow). For example, the film industry likes to use metonymy as a quick shorthand, so we often notice that it is raining in funeral scenes. Note that the following metonymies for "doom and gloom" all suggest some element of mystery, danger, or the supernatural.

wind, especially howling	rain, especially blowing
doors grating on rusty hinges	sighs, moans, howls, eerie sounds
footsteps approaching	clanking chains
lights in abandoned rooms	gusts of wind blowing out lights
characters trapped in a room	doors suddenly slamming shut
ruins of buildings	baying of distant dogs (or wolves?)
thunder and lightning	crazed laughter

10. The vocabulary of the gothic. The constant use of the appropriate vocabulary set creates the atmosphere of the gothic. Using the right words maintains the dark-and-stimulated feel that defines the gothic. Here as an example are some of the words (in several categories) that help make up the vocabulary of the gothic in *The Castle of Otranto*:

Mystery	diabolical, enchantment, ghost, goblins, haunted, infernal, magic, magician, miracle, necromancer, omens, ominous, portent, preternatural, prodigy, prophecy, secret, sorcerer, spectre, spirits, strangeness, talisman, vision
Fear, Terror, or Sorrow	afflicted, affliction, agony, anguish, apprehensions, apprehensive, commiseration, concern, despair, dismal, dismay, dread, dreaded, dreading, fearing, frantic, fright, frightened, grief, hopeless, horrid, horror, lamentable, melancholy, miserable, mournfully, panic, sadly, scared, shrieks, sorrow, sympathy, tears, terrible, terrified, terror, unhappy, wretched
Surprise	alarm, amazement, astonished, astonishment, shocking, staring, surprise, surprised, thunderstruck, wonder
Haste	anxious, breathless, flight, frantic, hastened, hastily, impatience, impatient, impatiently, impetuosity, precipitately, running, sudden, suddenly
Anger	anger, angrily, choler, enraged, furious, fury, incense, incensed, provoked, rage, raving, resentment, temper, wrath, wrathful, wrathfully
Largeness	enormous, gigantic, giant, large, tremendous, vast
Darkness	dark, darkness, dismal, shaded, black, night

Walpole himself lays on most of these elements pretty thick (although he's a lot lighter on darkness than many modern gothic works), so it might be said that another element of the classic gothic is its intensity created by profuse employment of the vocabulary of the gothic. Consider this from Chapter 1 of *The Castle of Otranto*: The servant "came running back breathless, in a frantic manner, his eyes staring, and foaming at the mouth. He said nothing but pointed to the court. The company were struck with terror and amazement." Gets your interest up on page two, doesn't he? Then, "In the meantime, some of the company had run into the court, from whence was heard a confused noise of shrieks, horror, and surprise." *The Castle of Otranto* is available at Amazon.com

An Example

The 1943 Sherlock Holmes film, *Sherlock Holmes Faces Death* (one of the classic Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce films), contains all the elements of the gothic. Here is a brief rundown of the items above:

1. Setting. It's not quite a castle, but it is a huge mansion with several levels, including a basement and a hidden sub-basement. Dark and drafty. Ominous.

2. Atmosphere of Mystery. It's a multiple murder mystery, with cryptic notes, hidden passageways, wind, lightning, and everyone a suspect.
3. Ancient Prophecy. There is the Musgrave Ritual. Obscure, compelling, ancient.
4. Omens and portents. The crow at the tavern, the intrusive lightning strike, the taunting notes from the butler.
5. Supernatural or inexplicable events. How the victims died. The lightning seems to strike at just the right time.
6. Overwrought emotion. The female lead screams and panics a bit.
7. Women in distress and 8. Women threatened by a male. Toned down here, but the murderer had designs on the heroine.
9. The wind blows, signs bang into the wall, lightning, a few characters are trapped in various ways.

ROMANTICISM

The Romantics broke away from the restrained ideas and styles of the eighteenth century. This movement marked a liberation of the artist's imagination and style.

Faust by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe = earliest most essential Romantic work. Faust sells soul to the devil for knowledge – pursuing idea that *all knowledge is significant*.

Essential Romantic Musician / Composer = **Beethoven** – “turned the highly structured classical sonata into an expansive form for the expression of powerful internal struggles.” (5th Symphony)

Romanticism refers to a movement in art, literature, and music during the 19th century.

❖ Romanticism is characterized by the 5 “I”s

Imagination

- Imagination emphasized over “reason”
- Backlash against the rationalism characterized by the Neoclassical period or “Age of Reason”
- Imagination considered necessary for creating all art
- British writer Samuel Taylor Coleridge called imagination “intellectual intuition.”

Intuition

- Romantics placed value on “intuition,” or feeling and instincts, over reason.
- Emotions were important in Romantic art.
- British Romantic William Wordsworth described poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”

Idealism

- Idealism refers to any theory that emphasizes the spirit, the mind, or language over matter – thought has a crucial role in making the world the way it is.
- Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, held that the mind forces the world we perceive to take the shape of space-and-time.

Inspiration

- The Romantic artist, musician, or writer, is an “inspired creator” rather than a “technical master.”

- Romanticism emphasized going with the moment, or being spontaneous, rather than being precise, controlled, or realistic.
- Individuality
- Romantics celebrated the individual.
 - During this time period, Women's Rights and Abolitionism were taking root as major movements.
 - Walt Whitman, a later Romantic writer, would write a poem entitled "Song of Myself." It begins, "I celebrate myself."

Adapted from: www.huffenglish.com/powerpoints/Romanticism.ppt

CHARACTERISTICS OF ROMANTICISM

- Interest in emotions and imagination
- Awareness of mystery and ecstasy
- Fondness for picturesque, exotic settings
- Belief in the goodness of simple, unspoiled humanity
- Humanitarian sympathy for the common man; poets wrote in the language of the common man and idealized those close to nature – farmers/shepherds
- Enthusiasm for external nature – the wilder, more primitive the better
- Fascination with remote times and places, legends and superstitions
- Not much regard for truth to life
- Emotion over reason – "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling." – William Wordsworth
- Individual or free expression valued over the social and artistic conformist
- Personal experience valued over set rules and traditions
- Romantic spirit sees real world as a reflection of an ideal world and life as constant striving toward that ideal