

AUSTIN
OPERA

INTERACTIVE
RESOURCE
GUIDE



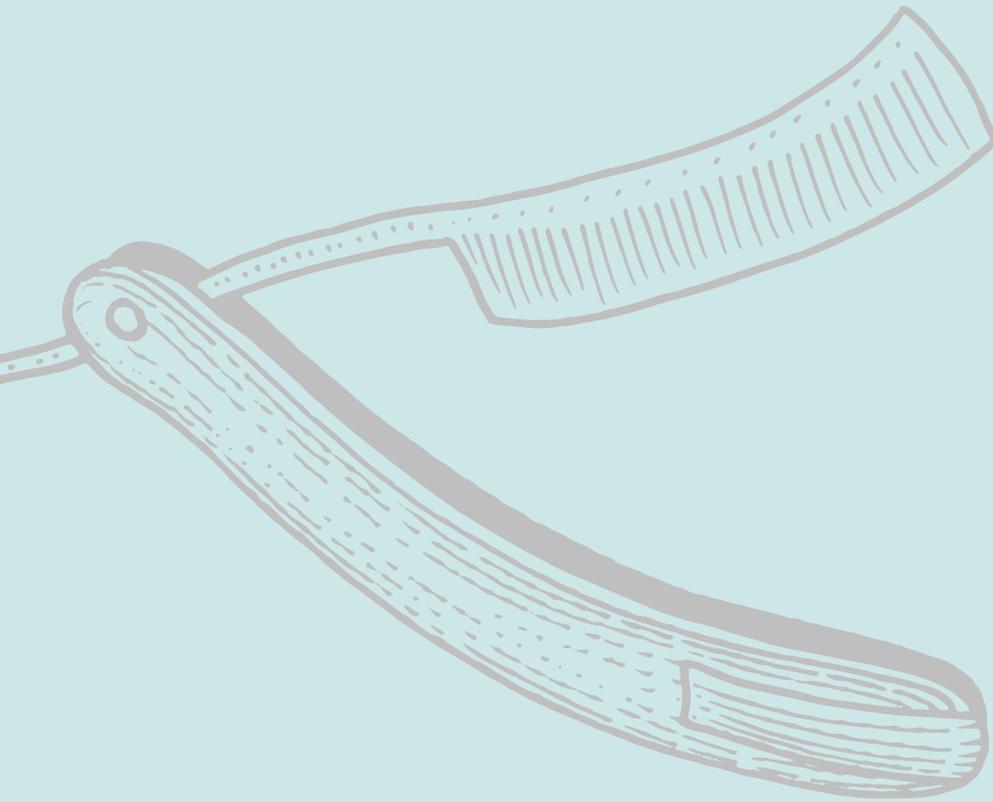
SONDHEIM'S

SWEENEY
TODD

THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

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WELCOME TO AUSTIN OPERA'S PRODUCTION OF SWEENEY TODD

I am thrilled for you to experience *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* by Stephen Sondheim. Before you arrive at the theater, we want you to dive into this musical and get a taste of all the work that goes into making the magic happen on stage. In this TEKS aligned Interactive Resource Guide, you will find a wealth of topics to further explore this piece and discuss with your students.

We invite you to dig deep into the making of this production and learn about the creation of *Sweeney Todd*, our principal cast members, artistic career paths that exist in the performing arts, and of course, the beautiful music and lyrics that Stephen Sondheim masterfully wrote to tell this story.

Whether this is your first time experiencing a musical or you're an avid music fan, this guide is designed to teach you something new, and I know it will enhance your full Access Opera experience.

Enjoy, and we'll see you at the show!



Andréa Ochoa

Director of Education & Community Impact
Austin Opera

*The staged performance will be sung in English
with Closed Captions.*

*All production photos are courtesy of Des Moines Metro Opera,
2021.*

Left: Zachary Nelson as Sweeney Todd



TEKS: TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

Overall Expectations: Knowledge and Skills

117.208. Music, Middle School 1, Adopted 2013.

FOUNDATIONS: The student describes and analyzes music and musical sound. The student explores fundamental skills appropriate for a developing young musician.

Specific:

(A) experience and explore exemplary musical examples using technology and available live performances

(E) explore health and wellness concepts related to musical practice such as body mechanics, hearing protection, vocal health, hydration, and appropriate hygienic practice

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE: The student relates music to history, culture and the world.

Specific:

(C) identify relationships of music concepts to other academic disciplines such as the relationship between music and mathematics, literature, history, and the sciences

(D) describe music-related vocations and avocations

CRITICAL EVALUATION & RESPONSE: The student listens to, responds to, and evaluates music and musical performance in both formal and informal settings.

Specific:

(B) identify criteria for listening to and evaluating musical performances

(E) demonstrate appropriate cognitive and kinesthetic responses to music and musical performances

Overall Expectations: Knowledge and Skills

117.203. Art, Middle School 2, Adopted 2013.

FOUNDATIONS: The student develops and expands visual literacy skills using critical thinking, imagination, and the senses to observe and explore the world by learning about, understanding, and applying the elements of art, principles of design, and expressive qualities. The student uses what the student sees, knows, and has experienced as sources for examining, understanding, and creating original artworks.

Specific:

(A) identify and illustrate ideas from direct observation, original sources, imagination, personal experiences, and communities such as family, school, cultural, local, regional, national, and international.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OPERAS, MUSICALS AND PLAYS?

Traditionally operas are through-sung, meaning they are sung from beginning to end with no dialogue in between. Singers must have powerful voices in order to be heard over the orchestra (the ensemble of instrumental musicians that accompanies the dramatic action on stage during an opera). Remember: opera singers don't use microphones!

Musicals are a combination of dialogue and sung pieces and often include choreographed numbers. This musical in particular is approximately 80% sung and 20% dialogue. Singers often use microphones and are accompanied by a pit band which includes more modern instruments like a drum kit, guitar and electronic instruments.

Plays are primarily spoken works of theatre with minimal singing or music.

There are always exceptions to the rule: though *Les Misérables* is through-sung it is still classified as a piece of musical theatre because of its style of music. By the same token, some operas, like Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, have spoken dialogue in addition to singing.

A scene from *Sweeney Todd*



MAIN CHARACTERS

Sweeney Toddbass
Mrs. Lovett..... soprano
Anthony baritone
Johanna..... soprano
Tobias Ragg..... tenor
Judge Turpin..... bass-baritone
Beggar woman mezzo-soprano
Pirelli tenor
Beadle tenor



Grace Kahl (left) as Johanna

SYNOPSIS

Prologue

Lights up on London in the nineteenth century. A shrill factory whistle is heard. The lights come up on the company in place. A man steps forward and invites the audience to attend the tale of Sweeney Todd. The company begins to outline Sweeney's dark tale.

Act I

Anthony Hope, a young sailor, and Sweeney Todd, a saturnine man, enter. They both express their feelings about being back in London. While Todd thanks Anthony for saving his life at sea, a ragged, crazed Beggar Woman appears and begs for money. She thinks that she recognizes Sweeney, but he fends her off.

Sweeney finds Mrs. Lovett's Pie Shop and stands outside of the building, gazing at it. He enters and sees Mrs. Lovett chopping suet and flicking flies off of the trays of pies with a dirty rag. Excited to have a customer, she offers him a pie but recognizes that they are disgusting.

Mrs. Lovett then recounts the fate of Benjamin Barker, a foolish young barber who was shipped to Australia by an evil judge. The Judge coveted the Barber's pretty young wife, Lucy. Once the Judge and his Beadle had Barker removed, Lucy was left alone to care for her one-year-old daughter, Johanna. Todd swears to take revenge on the Judge and the Beadle.

Act II

Thanks to her newfound prosperity, Mrs. Lovett has expanded her shop to include an outdoor eating garden. She now wears a fancy gown, and her shop is mobbed with customers who crave the new pies. The Beggar Woman lurks around. An elaborate new barber chair is moved into Todd's quarters. Todd and Mrs. Lovett set up a complicated system by which Todd sends his victims down a chute... directly into the bake house, where there is a grinding machine waiting. Mrs. Lovett runs out of pies. She puts up a "Sold Out" sign. A barbershop customer appears. She takes the sign down.

Mrs. Lovett sits in the parlor playing the harmonium. She fantasizes a married life with Todd on the seashore, but he is too fixated on his revenge plot to notice her. Mrs. Lovett sits with Tobias. As she knits him a muffler, they exchange words about their warm feelings for each other. He is devoted to her and promises that no one will harm her ("Not While I'm Around"). He suggests that something about Sweeney Todd is suspicious.

Once there, she allows him to grind the meat for pies, and he forgets his concerns. She leaves him grinding and locks the door to the bake house. Todd arrives. In the bake house, Tobias begins to suspect that the remains of humans are used for the pies... just as the Beadle's body comes down the chute. He realizes that he is locked in and disappears down the cellar steps, whimpering.

Mrs. Lovett tells Todd that Tobias suspects them. She wants Todd to dispense with Tobias at once, but Todd is focused on extracting his revenge from the Judge. The Judge enters. Todd convinces the Judge to have a shave to prepare for his meeting with Johanna. Sweeney reveals himself as Benjamin Barker and slits the Judge's throat. Mrs. Lovett tries to kill the Judge, who is still clinging to life. She then notices the Beggar Woman. She frantically tries to drag the Beggar Woman to the oven. Todd sees the woman in the light and realizes that she is his wife, Lucy.

He accuses Mrs. Lovett of deceiving him. She tries to stem his anger, and he feigns forgiveness by waltzing with her. He waltzes her to the oven and shoves her in, then cradling the Beggar Woman in his arms.

Tobias appears, his hair now completely white from shock. He kills Sweeney with the razor, which has fallen on the floor.

WHO ARE THE KEY PLAYERS?



DOUG SCHOLZ-CARLSON

Director

DIRECTOR'S CUT FEATURING DOUG SCHOLZ-CARLSON

- ~ What are the responsibilities of a director?
- ~ Collaborative process: how do you tie all of the musical/literary perspectives together?
- ~ The Conductor is known for creating the musical world of an opera or a creative work. Could you tell us a little bit about how you went about creating and envisioning the physical world for these performances?
- ~ Adaptation: As a director, how do you adapt your vision when something doesn't work for the singer/conductor/etc?

CLICK
TO
WATCH!

STAGE DIRECTOR: A person who is responsible for bringing the opera to life on stage. The stage director creates a vision for the production, works with a team of designers to decide how the opera will look with costumes, props, sets, and lighting. The director leads the performers in rehearsals, helping them to discover the behaviours and emotions of their characters, and to figure out what they will do physically on stage to tell the story.



Zachary Nelson as Sweeney Todd
and Lucy Schaufer as Mrs. Lovett

Peter Scott Drackley (center) as Pirelli



TIMOTHY MYERS

Conductor

CONDUCTOR'S SPOTLIGHT FEATURING TIMOTHY MYERS

- ~ If you had to write a job description for yourself, how would you best describe what you do to someone who isn't a musician?
- ~ The words in Sondheim's music are equally as important as the music itself. What new layers of meaning emerge when the text interacts with other elements in the show (such as the music, staging, or even the singers' interpretations) and how do you handle that?
- ~ What is the most unexpected thing that has ever happened to you while conducting?
- ~ How important is your relationship with the Director? How important is your relationship with the principal roles?
- ~ Adaptation - As a conductor, how do you adapt your vision when something doesn't work for the singer/director/etc?

CLICK
TO
WATCH!

CONDUCTOR: You will find a conductor at the front of any orchestra, chorus, or any musical group in the performance and interpretation of ensemble works. The conductor is the heartbeat of any musical performance and the role of a conductor is to be a guide to the music. A conductor is responsible for knowing everything about the musical score including the tempo, interpretation, understanding of all the instrumental/vocal lines, as well as stylistic articulations.



MELA DAILEY

Mrs. Lovett

MRS. LOVETT FEATURING MELA DAILEY

- ~ When reading the libretto in *Sweeney Todd*, what will people relate to most about your character in this story?
- ~ What is your favourite musical part/moment of the story, and who is involved in the creative process when bringing this moment to life?

CLICK
TO
WATCH!

Below: Zachary Nelson as Sweeney
Todd and Lucy Schauer as Mrs. Lovett



*Christian Sanders as Tobias Ragg and
Lucy Schauer as Mrs. Lovett*





Stephen Sondheim in a photograph by an unknown photographer, RR Auctions, [Public Domain](#)

THE GENESIS OF SWEENEY TODD: HOW DID THIS SHOW COME TO BE?

To understand the story of *Sweeney Todd*, you must first take a deeper look at the Victorian Era (1837–1901), defined by the reign of Queen Victoria, who took hold of the British throne and ruled during the Industrial Age in England. This was a period in British history where there was not a clearly defined middle-class, only the extreme rich and the extreme poverty of the poor. These social constructs were extremely important in British society. One of the main subjects in this story centers around the socio-economic struggles that both Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett face in their lives, due to the abuse of aristocratic power.

The character of Sweeney Todd has been one of the most iconic and long-lasting characters of the Victorian Period. He was first introduced to society in 1847 in the short story *The String of Pearls*, which solidified his place in English literature. In preparation for creating the musical version of this character, scholar Craig M. McGill states that Stephen Sondheim “felt compelled to write (the music) as if it were the score for a horror film. Sondheim was particularly inspired by the music of film composer Bernard Herrmann, whose principal success was scoring the Hitchcock films *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959) and most importantly, *Psycho* (1960). But the score that captivated Sondheim and later heavily influenced his score for *Sweeney Todd* was *Hangover Square* (1945).”

McGill, C. M. (2012), 'Sondheim's use of the 'Herrmann chord' in *Sweeney Todd*', *Studies in Musical Theatre* 6: 3, pp. 291-312, doi: 10.1386/smt.6.3.291_1



*Above: Zoie Reams
as the Beggar Woman
and Zachary Nelson as
Sweeney Todd.*



*Left: Corey Bix as the
Beadle*

*Right: Christian Sanders
as Tobias*



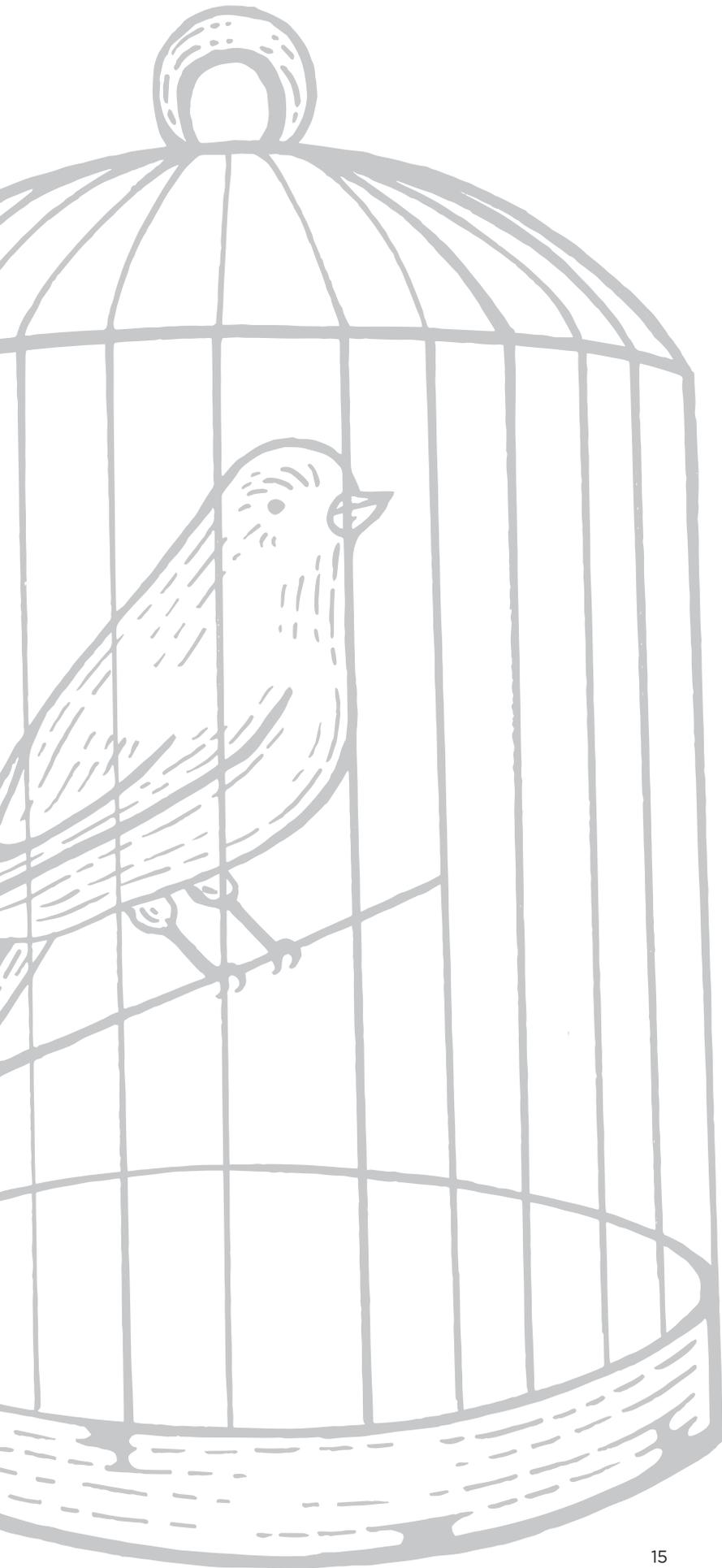
DISCOVER: “JOHANNA”

SET THE SCENE

This part of the story takes place where Anthony, a young sailor, has spotted a beautiful girl named Johanna who is imprisoned at Judge Turpin’s mansion. Johanna calls out to the caged birds of a passing bird seller, imploring them to share their secret for singing so sweetly when they, too, are kept captive. Anthony appears on the street, sees Johanna and instantly falls in love with her. Anthony buys a bird for Johanna and calls to her to present her gift. They stand, absorbed with one another, failing to notice the approach of Judge Turpin and the Beadle. The Judge orders Johanna into the house. The Beadle cautions Anthony to stay away and strangles the bird as a warning.



Left: Grace Kahl as Johanna and Ben Edquist as Anthony



CHARACTERIZATION:

How do you develop a character in a piece of music?

When looking at a new piece of music, always begin with following the five “W”s:

- 1 WHO** am I?
- 2 WHAT** is my relationship? What do I want?
- 3 WHERE** am I?
- 4 WHEN** is this taking place? Is it in the day/night? Is it in a specific time period?
- 5 WHY** am I in this situation?

Feel free to use **this Jamboard** to make further personal notes and critical thinking comments about your discovery of this aria.

PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES:

Preparing the voice to Sing

Remember: Warming the voice prepares the voice for performance and also provides specific tools for singers/actors to find success in the music they are learning.

Singing is PHYSICAL. The vocal cords are muscles that we have to stretch and train, just like if we were running in a race, or swimming in a pool.

WARM-UP EXERCISES

We are going to explore five different vocal exercises – feel free to use these on any tone or pitch.

1 VOWEL SHAPES:

ee (as in 'bee'/'sea')

oo (as in 'boot')

ee oo, ee oo

Vowels in singing are best understood, when they are 'tall' and long' versus how we speak, which can sometimes be 'wide' and 'spread'. [Click here](#) to hear the vocal guide.

2 SLIDES: Begin at the lowest end of your range and gradually slide to the highest end of your range. Repeat about four times. Always remember that the higher you sing, the faster the speed of your air should leave your body! [Listen to this audio clip](#) for reference.

3 PHONATION: This is an excellent way to warm up the vocal cords through vibration and production of sound. Gently press your lips together, but allow the air to flow freely from your mouth. If you feel a little 'tickle' at the tip of your nose, you are doing this right! [Click here](#) to listen to a vocal example.

4 TONGUE PUPPETS: Where the tongue is placed in our mouth allows the sound to move in a particular direction. Typically, we want the sound to 'resonate' or to sound 'full and deep'.

Imagine the four fingers of your hand as your tongue. Lift your hand beside your cheek and sing "NEE-NEY-NAH-NO-NOO.

For NEE (a closed vowel) the tips of your fingers should be as close to the bottom teeth as possible.

For NEY (another closed vowel) the tips of your fingers should be above the bottom teeth.

For NAH-NO-NOO (all open vowels) the top palm of your hand should be lifted, loose and free – similar to how you might feel after seeing the dentist and having to speak after getting a tooth filled!

[Listen to this](#) vocal example to follow along.

5 ARTICULATION: When you articulate your words clearly, the audience has an easier time understanding what you are saying and what you mean by the words you are singing. A great exercise to help our greatest articulator (the lips) is – PUH, TUH, KUH, FUH, SHOOO.

Attached is a [vocal guide](#), and don't forget to have some fun with this one!

LISTEN TO “JOHANNA”

Please **click on this link** to listen and watch this aria, performed at 32:30. Were there any parts of the melody that sound familiar to you? Are you able to spot any of the exercises we used from the warm-ups, in the melody of the piece? Which of the warm-up exercises would this performer have used to prepare to sing ‘Johanna’?



JAMBOARD: CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

SWEENEY TODD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Sweeney Todd is a period piece, written in the 19th century. Themes of violence, death, obsession, passion and love are clear topics in the storyline.

As a classroom, discuss how this story would differ if it was set in today's society and was created with all of the technological advances (cell phones, social media, CCTV) we have at our disposal.

Would Sweeney Todd have been able to get away with all of those murders?

What about the role that Mrs. Lovett played? In particular, regarding the decisions she made in regards to Tobias?

Don't forget to look at the ideas of social class of that period, the role of women, and the role that the Industrial Revolution would've played. How do those circumstances affect the story, versus the society we live in today?

Use **this Jamboard** to create a **SLOGAN** campaign or a **WORD COLLAGE** that highlights the themes of this story that your classroom feels most strongly about.

Share your designs with Austin Opera on social media, at **@austinopera** using the hashtags **#SweeneyATX** and **#AccessOperaSweeney**.



Zachary Nelson as Sweeney Todd and Wayne Tigges as Judge Turpin

