

**A curriculum guide for**

# **The Tails of Cats and Mice**

**by**

**Matt Cooksey and the Indianapolis Opera Resident Artists**

**Intended for use in classrooms of children, Grades K-5  
with instructor guidance**



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## Message from the author

Hi there! My name is Matt Cooksey, and I'm the writer of *The Tails of Cats and Mice*, a show that's coming to your school very soon. *The Tails of Cats and Mice* is inspired by "Aesop's Fables," a collection of stories written by a storyteller named Aesop from Ancient Greece. A lot of people would call what I've written a mash-up – or combination of things that don't normally go together in one piece of art. You might be familiar with mash-ups in music, art, or even pieces of theater.

The coolest part of this show, in my opinion, is how you will have the ability to choose how the story ends. Not only is there different dialogue based on what you pick, but there's different music, too. I've performed in many shows as a singer and led many as a director, but I've never had that kind of freedom to take a show in a completely new direction like you all can. Will you follow a helpful path, or choose another route to the end? I look forward to finding out what you end up seeing in the end.

But before you see the show, there are some things that I want to tell you about opera, in case you didn't know what it's all about. Opera wasn't something that I really learned about until I was in high school, so you guys are going to be ahead of the curve!

I hope that watching this show will inspire you to learn more about music, theater, writing, or the arts in general. Sometimes all it takes to find something you love doing is to learn more about it. There's lots of information here about our art form, and hopefully your teachers can share ways that you can start your new hobby soon! I look forward to seeing what you can do one day!

Matt Cooksey

Writer/Adapter/Director of *The Tails of Cats and Mice*

## Meet the Characters from *The Three Sillies*

A **Country Mouse** (soprano): The Country Mouse is the main character in the story. She lives alone in the country, happy with the simple life she has. She doesn't really seek out excitement, and is often afraid of something she's not familiar with.

A **Mountain Lion** (baritone): The Mountain Lion finds himself ailing from an injured paw. It seems a thorn has gotten stuck, and he finds it hard to walk on. When he's not hurt, it seems he has a very silly attitude, and he dreams of a life bigger than the one he already has.

A **City Mouse** (tenor): The City Mouse is the Country Mouse's cousin who lives in... the city. He enjoys his time in the big city and feels unafraid by what his cousin might deem as dangerous. Sometimes his confidence can lead him into trouble, though.

A **Cat** (mezzo-soprano): The Cat also lives in the city, where she stalks her prey. Sometimes she can't make up her mind between wanting to be the center of attention and wanting to be the greatest hunter in the world. Still, she imagines greatness in her future either way.

## Synopsis: *The Tails of Cats and Mice*

*The Tails of Cats and Mice* is based on four stories from *Aesop's Fables*. If you want to read them for yourself, you can! Try reading "Belling the Cat," "The City Mouse and the Country Mouse," "The Lion and the Mouse," and "The Slave and the Lion" and see how their stories compare to our show.

A Country Mouse writes to her cousin, asking to come and see him in the big city. She makes some necessary preparations, thanks to reading a suggested packing list from *Big Cheese Magazine*. However, as soon as she is ready, a Mountain Lion comes across her home. The Lion tells her that he is suffering from a thorn in his paw. The Country Mouse must make a decision whether or not to help the Lion.

In the city, the Country Mouse's cousin – the City Mouse – waits for her to arrive. He thinks that she must have gotten lost, since she can't possibly be used to the busy and energetic city. The Country Mouse arrives and the two make plans to go out and eat.



However, the City Mouse informs his cousin that there is a Cat on the way to where they want to go. This scares the Country Mouse, but the City Mouse has a plan to get the Cat off his back. He proposes putting a bell on the Cat, so that when the Cat approaches, they'll be able to hear it coming and hide. The only problem is that one of them would have to figure out how to put the bell on the cat in the first

place. The plan is very risky, and the Country Mouse will have to choose whether or not to go with his dangerous first idea.

The mice return to the country after an evening in the city. Ultimately, the choices of the Country Mouse to either help the Lion (or not) and to bell the cat (or not) will determine the ending of the show. Only you will have a say in how the story finishes, so you'll just have to find out for yourself.

## What is opera?

**Opera** is a musical art form that tells a dramatic story primarily through instrumental and vocal music. However, many operas also use spoken text. The instrumental music in opera is often referred to as **accompaniment**, because it accompanies the voice. Accompaniment can vary from a solo instrument – like a **piano** – to a larger group of instruments like a **chamber orchestra** or **full orchestra**.

It's important to remember that opera is a dramatic or theatrical art form as well as a musical one. While actors in theater have **scripts** that give them their text for a **play**, an opera singer's text comes from a **libretto** (Italian for "little book"). Even though "libretto" is an Italian word, like many other terms in opera, that does not mean that a libretto has to be written in Italian. In fact, there are operas written in French, German, Russian, English, Spanish, and many more languages! A **librettist** is the person who writes the text for an opera. When the libretto is finished, it is then given to a **composer** to set to music.

Opera **libretti** (the plural form of libretto) have a variety of inspirations, just like books, plays, movies, or other art forms. Books, for example, can be **fiction** (imaginary) or **non-fiction** (based on real events or facts). In the same way, operas draw inspiration from real and imaginary stories, too. Some operas focus on a single historical figure, and others have dragons, giants, and flaming swords!

Generally, an opera will also have an overall mood. In the 18th and 19th century, a serious opera might be called an **opera seria**, and would have characters and plots that resembled other operas in that genre. A comic opera, on the other hand, would be called an **opera buffa** by Italian composers or an **opéra comique** by French composers. There are many sub-genres of opera in earlier music periods, but composers have blended and borrowed styles so much in the 20th and 21st centuries that many of these sub-genre names are no longer used.

When the composer receives the libretto, it is their job to create the music for the opera. They will put their ideas into a **musical score**, which is a system of notation that tells a musician how to perform a piece of music. A **musical score** will include music for the accompaniment, the vocal **melody** for the singer, **expressive markings**, and in some cases **stage directions**. All of this information is interpreted by the musicians and directors to perform any given opera.

While operas share many features in common with **musical theatre**, the main difference between the two musical genres is that opera singers rarely use microphones. Since operas have existed for over 400 years, operas singers have been taught how to project their voice in a healthy manner for large spaces like a theater. This healthy manner of singing is often demonstrated with a good **vibrato**, or steady vibration of the voice.

## Elements in a Musical Production

When you see an opera or any big show, you might be able to point at one big thing why you enjoyed what you saw. However, there are lots of little things that go into every performance that make up the whole experience. Here are some of the elements in a production that make up a complete event.

**Singers/Actors:** People who may be playing a character in a play, musical, opera, movie, or other performing art. They learn the script or music for their character and act and sing their parts.

**Pianist/Orchestra:** The musicians that are responsible for accompanying the singers in performance. Sometimes an opera only requires a pianist; other times, there might be an orchestra or band, which is a group of many musicians playing together. Orchestras can be made up of string, woodwind, brass, and percussion players. You would call a group of musicians a band more commonly in musical theater than you would in opera.

**Director:** The director is the person who helps decide how a production will work on the stage. They tell an actor where to move, shape how the show will look, and make many other important decisions.

**Conductor/Music Director:** The Conductor or Music Director is the person that is in charge of how the music is performed. They might help a singer sing something in a beautiful way, or give notes when someone makes a mistake. In performance, they help keep everyone together.

**Scenery:** Scenery is a term for something that appears on stage that says where the action is taking place. An example of scenery might be a curtain with a forest, which tells us that we're outside in the woods. Scenery can also be a building or large piece on the stage, and usually isn't meant to be picked up or moved around. Sometimes scenery is referred to as **the set**.

**Props:** Props – short for properties – are objects which are handled by actors on stage. If a play had a **set** that looked like a kitchen, you might have a few chairs laying around, or silverware in a drawer, or cups in a cupboard. These handheld items are props, because they're meant to be used and moved around by an actor.

**Costumes:** Costumes are the clothing that actors wear in a stage production. The main difference between clothes and costumes is that one is worn everyday (clothes) and the other has some special purpose or

meaning (costumes). Costumes can also include accessories, like jewelry or hats.

**Lighting:** Lighting is very important in a theatre, because it helps us see the action on stage. Since theatres are usually very dark, lights are important to help see what is happening on stage. Lights also give us an idea of time of day, mood, or a relationship between two actors.

**Makeup:** Because lights on stage are much more powerful than most of the lights around your house, most actors need to wear makeup on stage. This makeup helps to make parts of the face look more natural, like the eyes, cheeks, and jaws of an actor. Makeup can also help an actor look less natural by using weird colors or styles to make someone look strange.

## How does a show get made?

When you see an opera, or any performance, you are seeing the end of a long journey. You may have waited a long time to see a show, but many people worked longer than you may have realized to participate in the action, and a smaller group of people may have worked even longer trying to imagine something to do.

First, someone has to have an idea of a story they want to tell. Maybe, like *The Tails of Cats and Mice*, someone wants to tell an existing story or stories in a different way. Or maybe someone wants to tell a completely original story. Either way, it takes someone with an idea and the time to write that idea down to make it fully real. For a play, you might just need to write the script, but for an opera or musical, you have to write the libretto, and then write the music. In either case, this is known as the **composition** or **writing process**.

Once something is composed or written, you have to find people to perform it for you. You might hold **auditions**, where people try to show why they are the best person to play the character. Auditions might also focus on how well a person sings or dances or acts because a director needs to be sure they have good people to work with.

Once all of the characters are chosen, they are called a **cast**, or a group of actors in a show. The cast is led by the director, who tells them how something will be performed. The director may work with **designers**, who help them make the stage look a certain way with scenery, costumes, lighting, and makeup.

Once a show has finished **rehearsing** or practicing, the cast and crew – people who help put a show on backstage – move to a theatre or performance area and put on the show. In our case, we bring the scenery, props, and costumes to you to see and enjoy.

When you see a performance, you have seen the work of not just the actors on the stage, but of all the people that worked really hard to put a show together. Everyone from the writer to the crew wants to make sure that whatever you're seeing is as amazing as possible, so remember that many people's hard work goes into a show, not just the actors or the director.

## The composers behind *The Tails of Cats and Mice*

We've talked about how operas have librettos, which is the text that is either spoken or sung in an opera. Matt Cooksey wrote the libretto for *The Tails of Cats and Mice*, but he did not write the music for the opera. Instead, he set his words to music by other composers, which is known as **adaptation**. Here are the composers you'll hear in *The Tails of Cats and Mice*, and what they're most known for.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

- Period: Classical
- Famous Operas: *Don Flovanni*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *The Magic Flute*
- Fun fact: Mozart had a government job composing music for Emperor Joseph II. His main duty to the Emperor was to write new operas, including his most famous opera *The Marriage of Figaro* (*Le nozze di Figaro*). Mozart was very risky in choosing this story, because the Emperor had previously banned the original play in his country.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- Period: Late Classical/Early Romantic
- Famous Opera: *Fidelio*
- Fun fact: *Fidelio* was the only opera Beethoven ever wrote, and it was not met with the same success that Mozart experienced with his operas. Beethoven is more well-remembered for his symphonies, and even *Fidelio* has a few symphonies during the opera that hold up on their own.



Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921)

- Period: Late Romantic
- Famous Operas: *Hänsel und Gretel*
- Fun Fact: A British singer named Arnold George Dorsey used Humperdinck's name as a stage name to make him seem more refined in the 1960's.

Humperdinck's music followed in Beethoven and Wagner's traditions, and features a really large orchestra and lots of repeated melodies throughout the story.



Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

- Period: Late Classical/Early Romantic
- Famous Operas: *The Barber of Seville* (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), *Cinderella* (*La Cenerentola*), *William Tell* (*Guillaume Tell*)
- Fun fact: Rossini wrote nearly 40 operas in less than 20 years. He was wildly popular for his time and retired from composing new operas at the age of 38. He would live until he was 76.

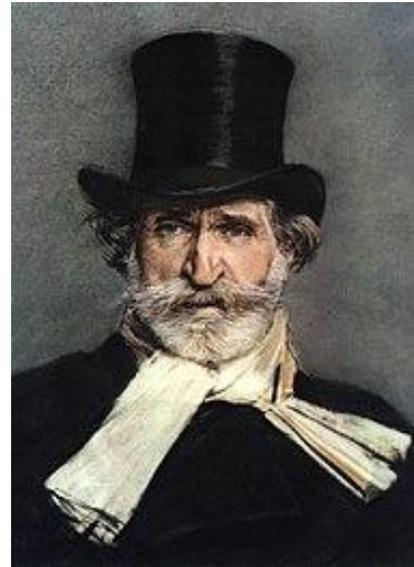
Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)

- Period: Romantic
- Famous Operas: *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La fille du régiment*, *L'elisir d'amore*,
- Fun Fact: Besides operas, Donizetti composed many other pieces in other genres. In total his works amount to 75 operas, 16 symphonies, 19 string quartets, 193 songs, 45 duets, 3 oratorios, and 28 cantatas.



### Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

- Period: Romantic
- Famous Operas: *The Fallen Woman (La traviata)*, *Rigoletto*, *Otello*, *Aïda*, *Falstaff*
- Fun fact: Throughout his career, Verdi kept working on operas based on Shakespeare's plays. Yet he composed one of his masterpieces and one of the world's most popular operas, *Otello* a decade after he officially retired. His final opera – written six years after *Otello* – was another Shakespearean opera called *Falstaff* and was extremely successful.



### Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924)

- Period: Late Romantic – 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Famous Operas: *The Bohemians (La bohème)*, *Tosca*, *Madame Butterfly (Madama Butterfly)*, *Turandot*.
- Fun fact: Puccini's final opera *Turandot* was left unfinished, and the last two scenes were completed thanks to Franco Alfano. Similar to how Mozart's *Requiem* was finished after his death, Alfano simply followed Puccini's sketches to ensure that everything was produced as the author had envisioned it.

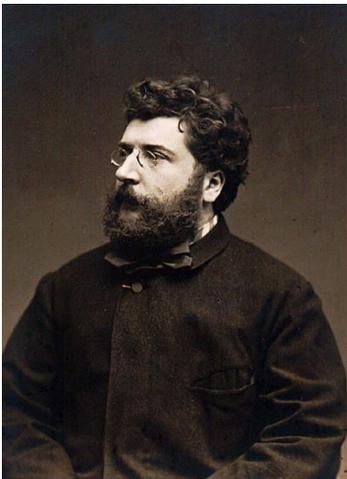
### Ruggero Leoncavallo (1857 -1919)

- Period: Late Romantic
- Famous Opera: *Clowns (Pagliacci)*
- Fun fact: Leoncavallo wrote a symphonic poem called "La Nuit de Mai." The piece debuted in 1887. With the success of his first masterpiece and with the money he had saved over time, he returned to Milan where he became a composer of opera.



Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

- Period: Romantic
- Famous Operas: *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*
- Fun fact: He worked with an author and poet called W. S. Gilbert, and together they wrote fourteen comic operas. Their names are always mentioned together: "Gilbert and Sullivan." They worked together for 25 years, from 1871 to 1896.

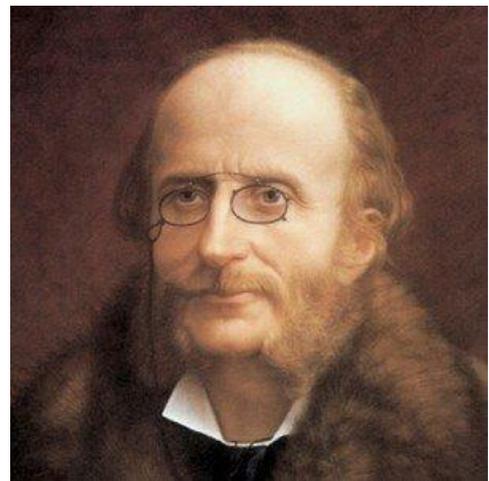


Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

- Period: Romantic
- Famous Operas: *Carmen*, *The Pearl Fishers* (*Les pêcheurs de perles*)
- Fun Fact – His original name was Alexandre César Léopold Bizet, but changed his name when he was baptized. He wrote maybe one of the most important French operas of all time, but the story and music are influenced by Spanish themes.

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

- Period: Romantic
- Famous Operas: *The Tales of Hoffmann* (*Les contes d'Hoffmann*), *Orpheus in the Underworld* (*Orphée aux enfers*), *The beautiful Helen* (*La belle Hélène*)
- Fun Fact: Offenbach wrote nearly 100 operas and or operettas, but he is most famously remembered for his uncompleted work, *The Tales of Hoffmann*. One of his most famous tunes that you probably know from cartoons is his famous Can-Can from *Orpheus in the Underworld*.



## Musical Periods

Think about your parents' favorite music; now think about your favorite music. They're pretty different, right? That's because the style of music changes over time, and what might have been popular and fashionable at one time may not stay that way forever. This is also true about classical music, which took a longer time to change more noticeably. Here are some of the major periods in classical music.

Period	Years	Italian	French	German/ Austrian	UK/US
Baroque	1600-1750	Vivaldi Cavalli	Lully Rameau	Bach Telemann	Purcell Handel
Classical	1750-1820	Scarlatti Cimarosa <b>Rossini</b>	[...]	Gluck <b>Mozart</b> Haydn <b>Beethoven</b>	J.C. Bach
Romantic	1820-1900	<b>Donizetti</b> Bellini <b>Verdi</b>	Berlioz Gounod <b>Offenbach</b> <b>Bizet</b>	J. Strauss Wagner Mahler	<b>Sullivan</b>
20 <sup>th</sup> Century	1900-2000	<b>Puccini</b> <b>Leoncavallo</b> Mascagni	Debussy Ravel Poulenc	R. Strauss Berg Webern Weill	Gershwin Britten Copland Menotti Bernstein Glass

The most important thing to know about music is that it is always changing and evolving. If you listen to Baroque music, it's not very likely to sound like something that you'd hear on your favorite radio station. But remember, during its time, the music of the Baroque period was the popular style. Every era discovered new technology or a new way of thinking about the world, and those discoveries eventually had an influence on music. Even discoveries in physics, mathematics, and computer sciences have had large effects on how music is produced and played now. In 100 years, we could be looking back on music from today with a completely different perspective based on technological or cultural changes that we can't imagine.

## The Form/Genre of *The Tails of Cats and Mice*

### In Music & Theater

*The Tails of Cats and Mice* falls under several different **genres**, or general types of similar things. It can be thought of as a **comedy**, since it is humorous and features a happy ending. But it also belongs in a special genre of opera known as a **pastiche**.

**Pastiches** are basically operas where their music might come from a variety of composers. Some of the most well-known pastiche composers were Handel, Vivaldi, Rossini, Gluck, Mozart, and Haydn. The reason that these operas were written was so that companies could put on shows very quickly without much rehearsal. A composer might ask a singer what arias they knew, and would then try to assemble those arias with others to try and tell a complete story without having to write something completely new.

When *The Tails of Cats and Mice* was written, the writer reached out to singers to find out what music they knew. He used that information to find similar music that worked in their voice to write a brand new show. For that reason, Matt Cooksey isn't a **composer** because he did not write original music. A better title for him would be an **arranger**, because he made editions or small changes to the music rather than making something completely new.

*The Tails of Cats and Mice* also falls into the genres of children's opera and one act shows. In a one-act show, the play, musical, or opera is performed without a formal break, like an intermission. And children's opera can mean that an opera is meant to be performed for children or by children. Some of the most important children's operas were written starting in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century from people like Benjamin Britten, Aaron Copland, and John Davies.

### In Literature

As you read earlier, *The Tails of Cats and Mice* is based on four of Aesop's *Fables*. A **fable** is a story that is meant to give a moral or attitude for life. Often the fable might have animal creatures, but sometimes not.

However when multiple stories are combined together like this, that might fall into the genre known as **mash-ups**. A mash-up will take different stories, and try to give them a new central storyline. This might even give the individual stories a new meaning that wasn't originally thought of or intended. One of the most famous mash-ups of the last 30 years was the book *Wicked* by Gregory Maguire, which combined various parts of *The Wizard of Oz* book series, and recast the Wicked Witch of the West as the central character. This book was later adapted for Broadway and became a musical, and brought the mash-up story to an even wider audience.

## How to behave in a performance

Whenever you go out in public, you know that there are different rules for how you should act. If you go to the library, you know that you should be quiet so other people can read and work in peace. If you're at a sporting event, it's usually fine to be as loud and excited as you want. Seeing an opera falls somewhere in the middle.

When you watch an opera performance, you are welcome to enjoy the show. If something is funny and you want to laugh, then laugh! If something was great and you want to applaud, clap it up! You should be welcome to react to the action however you feel at the moment. But it is important to be respectful to people around you who are also watching the show. If you're talking during a performance, you could be distracting other people in the audience who are trying to watch what's happening on stage. Think about how annoying it is when some family member talks over something you're trying to watch.

For our performance of *The Tails of Cats and Mice*, you'll have an opportunity to ask the performers questions at the end. If you liked their performance, try to think of a question to ask them how they did something. You could say, "You sing high notes really well. How do you do that?" Just try to remember to ask questions, rather than sharing a comment. The artists want to help inspire you to try doing what they do, so they can offer the best information when you ask a question.

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1 What is a Story?

(A lesson in storytelling and plot development)

A story has five basic elements: Characters, Setting, Plot, Conflict and Resolution, and a Theme.

**CHARACTERS:** A character is someone in a story. *Who* is in the story?

**SETTING:** The setting is where the story takes place. *Where* are the characters?

**PLOT:** The plot describes what happens in a story. The story should have a beginning, middle, and end. *What* is happening to the characters?

**CONFLICT & RESOLUTION:** The conflict is the main problem for a character or between a group of characters, and the resolution is how the problem is solved. *How* do the characters solve the problem?

**THEME:** Most stories are written in a way that a character learns something important about themselves or others. This big idea in storytelling is called a theme. *What* is the main idea of the story?

**PUT IT ALL TO WORK:** Let's finish the story!

In *The Tails of Cats and Mice* you experienced the story of a country mouse on a big trip to the city! On the way, she meets a lion. He has a thorn in his paw and asks for her help. Helping the lion could be very dangerous! What would you do if you met an injured lion?

**DIRECTIONS:** Decide how you would react to the injured lion. Would you help him or not?

Draw a picture of your story and write about what you would do on worksheet 1.

Then, fold the piece of paper on the dotted line and share just the picture with a classmate. Ask him/her to tell you the end of the story from the picture you drew. Next, share your story with your classmates!

**WORKSHEET 1 ACTIVITY 1- What is your story?**

NAME:

DATE:

This is what would happen if I were the Country Mouse and met a Lion with an injured paw.

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The country mouse faced a difficult choice when she met the injured lion! The Lion is very big and could hurt her, but if she helped him – he may let her go on her way! What would happen if you met an injured lion? Write what happens next on the lines below.

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**Activity 2 Learn to Sing** (A lesson in singing and vocal health)

If you've ever heard a great singer perform, you might wonder how they do what they do. But did you know that your singing voice is much like your speaking voice? If you can speak, you can sing! Singing can be like an athletic skill for some really good singers. Just like many people can throw a ball, a smaller number of people can throw a ball really fast, and an even smaller group can throw it with a curve. Opera singers are similar, and spend years learning how to do something common like singing at a very high level.

Today, let's do a few fun exercises to learn basic elements of healthy singing!

**BREATHING:** Singers breathe in which carries the sound that they create when their vocal cords vibrate. Without air, there is no sound.

**Exercise A: The Singer's Breath (You will need a book for this exercise)** Lie on the ground with your back on the floor, feet extended, and arms at your sides. Place the book flat side down on your torso right below your belly button. Lightly balance the book there and take a deep breath in and let the air out. When you breathe in, allow the book to move towards the ceiling. When you exhale, let the book fall back towards the floor. This is a singer's breath! See if you can feel your back get closer to the floor as you breathe in, too.

**SINGING:** Singing is much like speaking, except the duration of the sound is longer and requires more air than speech.

**Exercise B: Singing Sirens** Say the word 'sung' several times and hold the 'ng' sound. Take a good singer's breath and use the 'ng' sound. Start in low range while sliding the voice to a high range and back to a low range. This should take three to four seconds and should sound just like a fire truck! Try the exercise on different words such as paw, wow, and loop!

**DYNAMICS:** Dynamics are how composers ask for something to be loud or soft in music. To be loud is called *forte* (Italian for strong), and to be soft is called *piano* (Italian for floor). A dynamic can change, too. When a composer wants something to get gradually louder, he will write in a *crescendo*. A *decrescendo* is the opposite, which is when someone gradually gets softer.

**Exercise C: SSSSSS like in Snake** For this exercise, use a hiss as in the word “snake” using a sustained ‘s.’ Take a singer’s breath and start the hiss quietly (*piano*). Over the duration of eight counts allow the hiss to become louder (*crescendo*). Take another singer’s breath and start the hiss loudly (*forte*). Over the duration of eight counts, allow the hiss to become quieter (*decrescendo*).

**TEMPO:** The tempo in music refers to pacing. The tempo of a piece can have a range that varies from fast to slow.

**Exercise D: Slow Motion, Fast Pace** Choose a familiar song that everyone participating in the exercise will know. Suggestions include “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” and “Happy Birthday.” First, sing the song in a moderate tempo. Next, sing the song as fast as you can. Then, sing the song as slowly as you can. End by singing the song in a moderate tempo. Notice how the tempo affects the song and the way you sing it!

**PHRASING:** Phrasing, in music, is how certain musical ideas are grouped together. Phrasing and emphasis help us understand a sentence easier and know what’s important.

**Exercise E: Change the Phrase** Let’s use two suggested songs from Exercise D: “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” and “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” In this exercise, sing the song in a moderate tempo. Next, sing the song in a moderate tempo and emphasize the italicized words. You will notice changes in the word stress can change the phrase.

Twinkle Twinkle *Little* Star  
How *I* wonder *what you* are  
*Up* above the world *so* high  
Like *a* diamond *in the* sky  
*Twinkle* Twinkle *Little* Star  
How *I* wonder *what you* are

*Row* Row Row *Your* Boat  
*Gently* Down *the* Stream  
*Merrily* Merrily *Merrily* Merrily  
Life is *but* a dream

**ACTING:** Singers are actors who get to pretend. Acting is just as important as music in an opera, because actors tell us how the characters feel about their problems.

**Exercise F: Pretend** The instructor should print or photocopy and cut out the cards on the following two pages. Sing through any of the suggested songs with the class that everyone knows. While singing, hold up different cards at different times. Have students act out what is on the card while singing. After the class has done this once, divide the class into two groups. Have one group watch while the other group sings. You should notice a change in the performance with the addition of cards.

**Happy**

**Confused**

**Sad**

**Excited**

**Mad**

**Surprised**

**Lonely**

**Curious**

**Afraid**

**Bored**

### Activity 3 Write a Scene (A lesson in dialogue)

In most stories, a character will talk to another character. These conversations are also known in theater as dialogue. There are many scenes with dialogue in *The Three Sillies*, which helps introduce or solve a problem for one character or another.

**Directions:** You are now a composer and librettist for a new opera!!! Two of the characters are onstage and are having a conversation. Decide *who* the two characters are and *what* the characters are talking about! First, name and describe the characters. Then, fill in the conversation in the blanks below.

#### EXAMPLE: Character Descriptions

Character A's name is Miss Petunia.

Character A could be described as an babysitter with bad breath.

Character B's name is Isaiah.

Character B could be described as a kid trying to do his homework.

#### Conversation:

Character A: Isaiah, you're making too much noise down here. I need to work on my beauty regime, so keep it down.

Character B: I'm sorry Miss Petunia, but I wasn't making any noise.

Character A: Lying won't help you now. I need to be able to concentrate on brushing my teeth.

Character B: Oh, if that's the case, I'll be quiet as a mouse. Brush away!

**Now you try!**

**EXAMPLE: Character Descriptions**

Character A's name is

Character A could be described as

Character B's name is

Character B could be described as

**Conversation:**

Character A:

Character B:

Character A:

Character B:

Character A:

Character B:

**Activity 4**  
**Everyone has a voice!**  
 (A lesson in voice types and classification)

Everyone has a voice that is special and one-of-a-kind. No one else has your exact voice. However, many people have similar voices in music, and they are grouped together by how high or low they might sing. Here is a list of common voice types.

VOICE TYPE	QUALITY
Soprano	Highest female voice
Mezzo-Soprano	Second highest female voice
Tenor	Highest male voice
Baritone	Second highest male voice
Bass	Lowest male voice

**Directions:** Fold the paper in half on the dotted line. Study the voice types above for highest and lowest male and female voices. Then flip the paper and answer the question on the other side.

**Directions:** The voice types in the left column are out of order. Put the voice types in order from highest to lowest voices in the right column in front of the .

Mezzo-Soprano	<input type="checkbox"/> Highest female voice
Bass	<input type="checkbox"/> Second highest female voice
Soprano	<input type="checkbox"/> Highest male voice
Tenor	<input type="checkbox"/> Second highest male voice
Baritone	<input type="checkbox"/> Lowest male voice

## Activity 5

### What is rhythm?

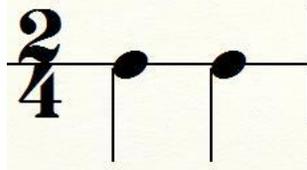
(A review of basic rhythm)

Rhythm is a regular pattern of sound. The rhythm usually has a steady beat or pulse of strong and weak accents.

### Layering Rhythms

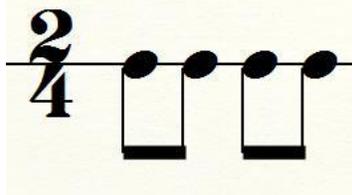
**Instructor Directions:** Teach the group as a whole the four different rhythms listed below of quarter notes, eighth notes, quarter rests, and eighth rests. Divide the students into five groups and assign a rhythm to each group. Every eight counts add another group to layer the rhythms. Use different sounds and words to change the sound of the rhythm!

#### Rhythm 1 - With Hands



Clap Clap

#### Rhythm 2 - With Fingers



Snap Snap Snap Snap  
Rhythm 3 - Spoken Words



Squish! Squish!

#### Rhythm 4 - High-Pitched Spoken Words



Beep! Beep!

## Activity 6

### What is Melody and Accompaniment?

(A review of melody and accompaniment in music)

A **melody** is a single line of music that is heard as one idea. **Harmony** is a combination of notes into chords that support the melody. In the opera *The Three Sillies*, the singers provide the melody while the pianist plays the harmony. An **accompaniment** partners with the melody.

**Directions:** Let's make music with melody and accompaniment! Earlier we learned how to clap rhythms. Let's sing a melody and clap/snap an accompaniment. In the rhythm, quarter notes are claps and eighth notes are snaps!

#### MELODY



A B C D E F G H I J K LMNOP

#### ACCOMPANIMENT RHYTHM



Q R S T U V Double U X Y and Z



Now I know my A B C's Next time won't you sing along with me



**ACTIVITIES**  
Activity 7 Theme

(Discussion of morals and themes)

The **theme** is the main idea of the story. The theme can often be stated in one word. Stories can have a wide range of themes such as love, power, friendship, fate, heroism, growing up, bullying, or change. The theme might also include a moral, or lesson about what is right and wrong.

**Directions:** The instructor will ask the class for a certain kind of word. The word will be written in the blank above the word type. After all the words are filled in, the teacher will read the story and ask the class what the theme is. *Note to instructor: Do not read the story until all the words are filled in. The theme is listed at the end of the page.*

### A LETTER ABOUT MY NEW PET

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, my favorite \_\_\_\_\_,  
NAME FAMILY ROLE

I cannot wait to tell you about my \_\_\_\_\_!  
COLOR ANIMAL

I know I already have \_\_\_\_\_ pets but I just love animals!  
NUMBER

My new pet likes to eat \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_.  
FOOD (PLURAL) FOOD (PLURAL)

Pets are great! I hope \_\_\_\_\_ will get a new pet just like \_\_\_\_\_.  
INSTRUCTOR'S NAME CELEBRITY

Have a great day!

**THEME: Owning a new pet**

**HARDER VERSION**  
**EXTRA, EXTRA, READ ALL ABOUT IT!!!!**

\_\_\_\_\_ won the lottery of \_\_\_\_\_ dollars!!!!  
CLASSMATE'S NAME NUMBER

People have started to refer to this person as the \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY

\_\_\_\_\_ in the local newspapers.  
OCCUPATION

Although this person may not be \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
ADJECTIVE ADJECTIVE

or \_\_\_\_\_,  
ADJECTIVE

This person does have a big \_\_\_\_\_ and heart.  
NOUN

To everyone's \_\_\_\_\_,  
EMOTION

this person decided to give all of the \_\_\_\_\_  
NOUN

and money to the \_\_\_\_\_ Foundation for  
CELEBRITY

\_\_\_\_\_ PLURAL NOUN  
ADJECTIVE

The head of the Foundation stated,

“Even if I had to \_\_\_\_\_ all day,  
ACTIVITY

I would still support good causes like \_\_\_\_\_!”  
NOUN

**THEME: Generosity**

**Activity 8**  
**Look at those Costumes!**

Costumes and makeup are used in an opera to change a person's appearance and add to the character.

**Directions:** You are now a costume designer! Design and draw the costumes that you think each of these characters in *The Tails of Cats and Mice* will wear.

<b>The Country Mouse</b>	<b>The City Mouse</b>

**The Lion**

**The Cat**

## **ACTIVITIES**

### **Activity 9 Be a set designer!**

The set, or setting, is the theatrical scenery used in a production. Props and the backdrop are part of the set.

**Directions:** You are now a set designer! Design and draw the set that you think the characters in *The Tails of Cats and Mice* will have onstage.

This can include a home for the country mouse, a home for the city mouse, or the hallway where the city cat lives!

CREATE YOUR DESIGNS HERE!

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 10 Blocking

(A lesson in stage direction)

In opera, the stage director decides the movement that takes place during each scene. The movement that takes place is called the blocking. There are four terms commonly used during blocking by stage directors. **Stage Right** - the actor's right side of the stage **Stage Left** - the actor's left side of the stage **Down-Stage** - the front of the stage towards the audience **Up-Stage** - the back of the stage towards the backdrop

**COPYCAT THAT! Directions:** Everyone begins by sitting on the floor. This is played just like "Simon Says" but in this version it is "Director Says!" How well can you follow a director's instructions? The person who is 'it' is the director. Anything that the "Director says" you must do in order to win the game. In order to win the game, if the person who is 'it' says to do something without saying "Director says" you must NOT do it to win the game. The last person left wins and becomes the director in the next round. Try using the terms above in your directions.

**Example:** Here is the first round of directions to get started! Ready! Let's begin by standing up.... (If they stand up, they are out!)

Director says stand up.

Director says jump Stage Right.

Director says jump Stage Left.

Stop! (Anyone who stops is out!)

Director says put your hands on your hips.

Touch your knees. (Anyone who touches their knees is out)

Director says take three steps Down-Stage.

Director says take two steps Up-Stage.

Director says look Stage Right.

Look Left. (Anyone who looks left is out)

## ACTIVITIES

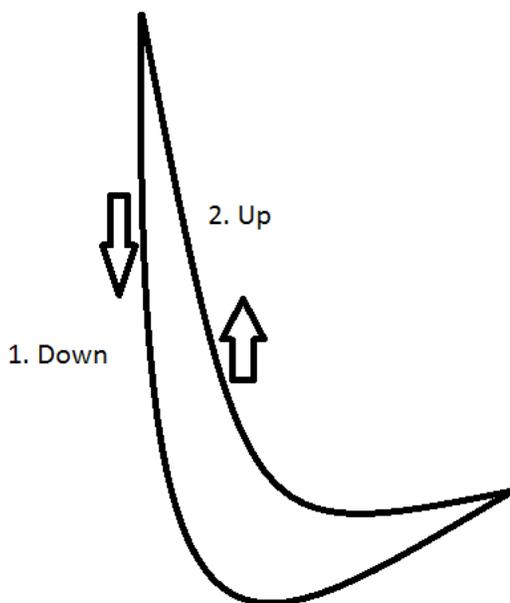
### Activity 11 What can you do with music?

(A lesson in instruments and conducting)

Opera is just one kind of music you can participate in! There are many instruments to play including flute, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, horn, tuba, violin, viola, cello, bass, harp, ukulele, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and piano. Instruments in an orchestra are led by a conductor. Conductors use a baton and make specific patterns with it and their hands and arms to lead the orchestra.

**Directions:** You are now a conductor! Here is a conducting pattern in duple time (2 count rhythm). Hold a pencil as your baton in your dominant hand and follow the pattern. Mirror this with your non-dominant hand. Have one student stand in front of the class as a conductor. Have the rest of the class sing a song in duple meter such as “Jingle Bells” or “Hush Little Baby” following the tempo and non-verbal directions of the conductor. Have the conductor speed up and slow down so the students must watch carefully to react.

Here is the pattern for conducting in duple time:



*After the Opera*

**Answering Questions - Worksheet 1**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Who was your favorite character in the opera and why?**

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**2. Who was your least favorite character in the opera and why?**

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**3. What was your favorite scene in the opera?**

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**4. If the story continued, what would happen next?**

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## It is picture time! - Worksheet 2

**Directions:** Draw a picture of your favorite scene from the opera *The Tails of Cats and Mice*.

## Silly Scramble Word Search!

Worksheet 3 Directions: Find and circle the words.

# The Tails of Cats and Mice

S	M	C	U	E	O	E	E	B	E	L	L	A	M
O	O	O	P	Y	S	O	O	S	H	L	S	E	N
P	Z	S	U	L	C	U	P	I	E	B	O	R	B
R	A	T	C	Z	R	A	O	I	N	E	O	N	I
A	R	U	C	N	E	E	E	M	E	S	H	Y	T
N	T	M	I	A	H	R	O	E	S	O	I	C	E
O	O	E	N	E	C	H	O	I	C	E	S	O	N
L	C	P	I	A	E	E	N	E	Z	E	A	E	O
N	A	S	E	I	C	I	E	P	I	U	Z	A	R
I	A	C	S	R	B	P	O	O	Z	Z	E	M	M
E	R	O	U	A	A	C	E	N	O	I	L	C	A
W	A	P	A	P	O	A	O	N	A	I	P	S	T
N	N	C	E	N	O	T	I	R	A	B	T	S	S
O	S	Y	R	E	N	E	C	S	E	R	E	M	O

OPERA  
MEZZO  
PAW  
TENOR  
PUCCINI  
CHEESE  
CHOICES  
CAT  
SCENERY  
SOPRANO  
MOZART  
COSTUME  
BARITONE  
BELL  
MOUSE  
LION  
ROSSINI  
PIANO

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/883928/>

## Musical Spelling! – Worksheet 4

In *The Tails of Cats and Mice*, the City Mouse takes the Country Mouse out to a new restaurant. Only problem is, the sign for the restaurant is so high up that they can't look up at it. The City Mouse has sometimes looked in puddles to see the name of the restaurant in the reflection, and needs your help to find it.

Which sign should the mice follow??

**Directions:** The signs are reflected in the puddles. Turn the sheet over and trace the letters to de-code the secret message from the sign or use a mirror to read the scrambled letters! Then say which sign the mice should follow.



End of the packet:

Dear Educators,

My name is Matt Cooksey, and I am the writer/adaptor of *The Tails of Cats and Mice*. It has been my pleasure putting this show together, and I am so grateful that you have chosen to bring our production to your students.

This study guide has been put together by me, the staff at the Indianapolis Opera, and many of the original performers from our cast. We hope that this information and these activities have aided your student's enjoyment of the opera and help them learn more about music, theatre, and story-telling.

There are probably many other ways that you could tie this into other core subjects, the most obvious one in my mind being the animal kingdom and the organization of genus and species (there's a reference to some binomial nomenclature in one of the paths if the audience chooses not to bell the cat). While my story tries to reinforce the fact that we all have a lot in common and focusing on those commonalities is what makes us harmonious and kind to each other, we can at the same time realize that some things are inherently different even though they are related. Still, my background is not in science or sociology, so I'll leave that up to you to see how you could try that route of teaching.

If you have any feedback about our performance, the study guide, or anything you've experienced along the way, please feel free to reach out to myself or Dr. Rachelle Woolston. We are constantly looking to improve, and your input will always be valued.

Sincerely,

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317-283-3531