



*The Very Last Green Thing*

Teacher's Resource Guide

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<sup>1</sup> Most lesson plans may be altered to suit a wide range of grade and ability levels.

*Contents based on the study guide originally created by the Opera Theatre of St. Louis*



## The Michigan Opera Theatre Children's Chorus

### **HISTORY**

The Michigan Opera Theatre Children's Chorus (MOTCC), led by Michigan Opera Theatre Chorus Master Suzanne Mallare Acton, is a permanent children's ensemble for Metro Detroit youth interested in vocal musical theatrical art. Accepting children ages 10-16 with unchanged voices by audition, the choir will perform as a separate ensemble as well as with international opera stars in Michigan Opera Theatre productions.

Children accepted into the MOT Children's Chorus will learn the various aspects of opera and voice training, including voice studies, movement and audition techniques in a professional environment with internationally-renowned opera singers and voice specialists as coaches and mentors. With the opening of the new Ford Center for Arts and Learning at the Detroit Opera House in 2006, the physical space is now available to undertake this large and promising project. A generous grant from the Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation provided the startup funding necessary to form the ensemble.

### **MISSION**

The mission of the Michigan Opera Theatre Children's Chorus is to provide exceptional choral music and theatrical performance instruction in a professional environment to young people. This instruction will foster their creativity, personal expression and social growth. Offering a curriculum that embraces diverse cultures and traditions and a rich and extensive range of musical genres, the program will seek to instill personal and artistic excellence in its students. In keeping with its role as a major cultural resource to the entire community, Michigan Opera Theatre will offer these unique learning opportunities to a diverse group of students from varied economic, cultural and social backgrounds.

### **AUDITIONS**

The MOTCC will hold auditions for its 2010-2011 season on Wednesday, May 26<sup>th</sup> from 3-7 PM and on Saturday, June 5<sup>th</sup> from 12-6 PM at the Detroit Opera House. Please visit

[www.motcc.org](http://www.motcc.org) for more information. Auditions can be scheduled on the Michigan Opera Theatre website, [www.motopera.org](http://www.motopera.org).

## CONTACT

The Michigan Opera Theatre Children's Chorus



Website: [www.motcc.org](http://www.motcc.org)

Chorus Administrator's Email: [mlandry@motopera.org](mailto:mlandry@motopera.org)

Chorus Administrator's Phone Number: (248)914-1966

The Detroit Science Center



Website: [www.detroitsciencecenter.org](http://www.detroitsciencecenter.org)

The Detroit Science Center will present a 15 minute long, pre-opera presentation. The DSC offers their own "Going Green" stage show which is a perfect complement to the plot of *The Very Last Green Thing*. The DSC focuses on the 3 "R's" of being green – reduce, reuse, and recycle, to help students learn how to create a clean and healthy environment.



April, 2010

Dear Teacher,

The Michigan Opera Theatre Children's Chorus is pleased to offer this resource guide to you and your class. The guide is intended to provide you with information and lesson plans of an interdisciplinary nature that will enhance your student's understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of *The Very Last Green Thing*. The contents of this guide can be used as preparation or as follow up exercises to the performance experience.

Opera is an exciting art form which fuses almost every art discipline, including drama, costuming, stage design, dance, literature, poetry, and of course, vocal and instrumental music in an unparalleled format that stimulates the senses and challenges the mind. This season the MOTCC is very excited to present a children's opera that involves not only the arts, but other disciplines such as science as well. We hope that you are able to use this guide to expand even further the concepts presented at our production.

We hope that you will enjoy *The Very Last Green Thing*, and we welcome your feedback regarding your performance experience and the usefulness of this teacher's guide. Should you have any questions or need assistance, please contact our chorus administrator, Megan Landry, by email at [mlandry@motopera.org](mailto:mlandry@motopera.org) or by phone at (248)914-1966, and she will be glad to assist you.

We thank you for giving your students the opportunity to experience firsthand the exciting world of opera.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Mallare-Acton

Director of the Michigan Opera Theatre Children's Chorus



*The Very Last Green Thing*

Cast of Characters

Amy	A very inquisitive child
Bobby	A very intelligent child
Zelda	A rather shy child
Asia	An extremely outgoing child
Lionel	A completely silent child
Android	Portrayed by a young adult with a baritone voice
Student 1	
Student 2	
Student 3	
Student 4	

Chorus of Children from the Past (Our Present)

Chorus of Children from the Present (Classroom of the year 2492)



*The Very Last Green Thing*

Synopsis of the Plot

**Prologue**

As the opera begins, we see the Children from the Past carefully placing items in a time capsule to be found by a future generation. The first item that is placed in the capsule is the “Green Thing.”

**Scene 1**

The action moves to a classroom in a boarding school of the future. As the students await the arrival of their teacher, there is a complete free-for-all which abruptly stops with the entrance of their “teacher” who is an android. All students fall silent as he “scans” the classroom to take attendance. The Android then announces the day’s lesson which “People who have influenced our lives.” The lesson progresses until the Android takes the students on a very rare field trip “outside.” The students express concern about leaving the classroom’s controlled environment, but the Android assures them that by using their goggles and masks the air is “quite breathable” and the sun “quite agreeable.”

**Scene 2**

With their protective gear on, the students leave the classroom. As they embark on their journey, they observe various buildings and statues of historical importance. They continue until they discover the time capsule. The Android identifies it as being from the late twentieth century. As the Children from the Present begin to remove objects for inspection, the Children from the Past “assist” with the action of the scene.

The first item to be removed from the capsule is a pair of running shoes, “Reeboks.” Lionel puts them on and immediately begins to move, strutting in a sort of 2010 fashion. He is held down

while the shoes are removed. As each object is removed from the capsule, the object “comes alive” for the child handling it. When it appears the capsule is empty, Amy remarks that there is still something left. The children are intrigued and mystified as she removes a watering can, garden trowel, and a small, pathetic withered plant. As the children try to figure out what it is, the Android insists that they leave it behind. As the children leave triumphantly carrying the objects they discovered, Amy runs back to retrieve the plant and carries it back in her arms.

### **Scene 3**

This scene takes place in Amy’s bed chamber. She places the plant on her bed then hides it as the Android makes sure she brushes her teeth and washes her face. As she undertakes her evening ritual, a group of children begin singing. Amy retrieves the plant from under her bed and begins to question its existence. It is unlike anything she has ever known...

### **Scene 4**

The Children from the Present are back in their classroom looking over the objects from the time capsule. The Android notices that Amy has brought the plant inside and begins to reprimand her. During his interrogation, the students begin questioning him and wonder why he is so angry about the plant. During this sequence, the Android begins to break down, or short-circuit. The Children from the Past and the Children from the Present unite to sing of the plant’s importance as Amy waters it to renew its life.

## Time Capsules

Grade Level: Any

Major Curriculum Area: Social Studies

Cross Curricular Connections: Fine Arts, Language Arts

Connection to *The Very Last Green Thing*: Students of the future find a time capsule, open it, and examine the contents

Levels of Thinking: Analysis, Evaluation

Objective: Students should be able to:

1. Determine the most important elements in society that should be remembered;
2. Persuasively support the decision to include a given object in the time capsule.

Materials: Those chosen by the group constructing the time capsule.

Procedure:

After seeing or discussing the synopsis of the opera, *The Very Last Green Thing*, the students should engage in a conversation about what they would include in a time capsule that would best represent their culture. Brainstorm a list of items to include and write them on the board. Discuss what criteria should be used when deciding on an object's importance. Allow the students to derive those criteria that are important to them.

Instruct the students to talk with an adult about their perception of what would be important to preserve for future generations. The next day in class, group the students into groups of 3-4 and direct them to choose one item to nominate for the time capsule. They should be prepared with reasons they feel this is an item that must be included.

Each group will report to the whole class and the class will vote on whether that item should be included based on the persuasive arguments made by the group.

If an item is accepted by the class, the group should make or acquire it and be prepared to place it in the time capsule. If a song or a piece of art is chosen, students should best decide how best to preserve it so that it can be recreated in the future.

A time capsule should be constructed that will contain the items. Students should discuss the type of material from which the capsule should be made. Library research will inform students on the durability of materials and their availability. If one group's item was not chosen, they could be the team that "constructs" the time capsule. If the capsule cannot be made of the precise materials chosen, a representation of those materials could be constructed.

Once the capsule is constructed, a ceremony should be held with each group explaining again the reason the item is being placed in the capsule. If it is possible, all students who viewed *The Very Last Green Thing* could observe this ceremony. Some school administrators are willing to store the time capsule until this group of students is seniors in high school. At that time, the capsule could be opened by those still in the district and the experience can be remembered and enjoyed. Additionally, the ceremony could be video recorded and uploaded onto the schools website and similarly saved for the students to enjoy when the time capsule is re-opened.

Assessment:

Students should be assessed on the strength of the support they give to the item the group chose. Criteria should include those chosen by the class as important.

## Who Would You Choose?

Grade Level: Any

Major Curriculum Area: Language Arts

Cross Curricular Connection: Multicultural Studies; Any discipline area depending upon what person is chosen

Connection to *The Very Last Green Thing*: When in class, students from the future gave examples of famous people from the past.

Levels of Thinking: Knowledge, Comprehension, Analysis, Evaluation

Objective: Students will be able to:

1. Decide the major contributions of a contemporary person;
2. Choose an influential person of this century who should be considered to have contributed to society and defend that choice;
3. Give a persuasive speech.

Materials: Various biographies or reference materials at the appropriate reading level, or access to a library or computer lab.

Procedure:

This lesson can tie in to the lesson on constructing a time capsule. The lesson focuses on the choice of the most appropriate people to represent our time.

Discuss with the students the following questions:

1. Who are some important people you know?
2. Why are these people important to you?
3. Are these people important to other people who live in your neighborhood, town, or state?
4. How can you determine if a person is important to a large number of people?
5. What qualities should a person have to qualify as an “important person”?
6. If you had to choose the 5 most important people to the whole world, what characteristics or contributions would you look for?

Students should choose an important person to her or him and research that person. The research should focus on the characteristics the students discussed plus any important contribution the person has made to the world.

Students should write a persuasive speech that will be presented to the class. The class will vote on the five most important people based on the information from the speeches. These people can be included in the time capsule.

Assessment:

Speeches will be assessed based on the argument for that person being supported with facts. Additional assessment could include effective speaking techniques, correct grammar, etc.

## Solid Pollution in Your Neighborhood

Grade Level: 3-5

Major Curriculum Area: Science

Cross Curricular Connections: Math, Social Studies, Fine Arts

Connection to *The Very Last Green Thing*: Environmental degradation

Levels of Thinking: Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation

Science Process Skills: Manipulating Data, Interpreting Data, Inferring, Classifying

Objective: Students should be able to:

1. Name the most common solid waste on the school ground;
2. Infer the source of the waste;
3. Analyze the solid waste problem on the school ground and develop a plan to address the problem.

Materials: Paper bag, graph paper

Procedure:

Take students for a walk around the school ground. Pick up all of the trash and place it in the paper bag. Take it back to the classroom for analysis.

In groups of 3, students should combine their trash and classify it into groups of like things, such as candy wrappers, notebook paper, etc. Do not tell the students what groups to use. They should develop them.

Groups should report their results to the whole class. At this time, any disagreement about groupings can be resolved.

Make a chart with the name of the groups and the number of objects in each group. Allow the students to decide how it should look.

Using a bar graph, graph the data with the category on the horizontal axis and the number of objects on the vertical axis.

Questions:

1. Which group had the most solid pollution? What do you infer is the reason for this?
2. Which had the next? What do you infer is the reason for this?

3. If we did this activity on the streets of different areas such as a business district, country road, neighborhood, or downtown Detroit, what would you expect to find? Why?
4. Do you consider this a major solid waste problem? Why or why not?
5. If yes, how could this problem be reduced or solved? Design a plan to present to the principal that would assist in the reduction or solid waste.
6. What solid waste would you expect to find in the future school in the Opera on its school playground? Explain your answer.
7. Draw a school playground of the future.

Assessment:

The plan should be assessed based on the correlation to the factors outlined as the problem. For example, students may propose locating trash cans in various locations on the school ground, or implementing a student education program about pollution in the school if they think students are the source of the pollution.

The drawing should incorporate the landscape of the future as depicted in the Opera and should take into consideration the inhospitable environment for people, thus little trash or places to play will probably be evident if it is outdoors. An indoor environment may exhibit high-tech trash.

## “In the Future...” A Create Writing Experience

Grade Level: Any

Major Curriculum Area: Language Arts

Cross Curricular Connections: Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, Fine Arts

Connection to the Opera: The setting of the opera is in the future, the year 2492.

Levels of Thinking: Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation

Objective: Students will be able to:

1. Write a creative story;
2. Support the components of the story as evolving from something that exists today;
3. Write using correct grammar and structure.

Materials: Pieces of literature illustrating the schools of the past

Procedure:

Read a short excerpt from a piece of literature describing a school of the past. For example, a passage from a Laura Engels Wilder book can be used. Discuss the school, equipment, role of the teacher, and how children got to school. Relate this school to the schools of today. What are the similarities? Discuss how today’s schools evolved from those of the past. For instance, students used to have individual slates on which to write their lessons. They did not use pencils and paper because these items were too expensive and hard to ship from eastern or western coasts to the Midwest. Today, these items are inexpensive, and are even giving way to laptop computers in some classrooms.

Have students begin to think of their schools of the future. What do we have now that they believe will be similar to what will exist in the future? What will be different?

Each student should write a creative story about the school of the future. They should be prepared to explain why they think the things they put in their story will be there. For instance, some students may believe we will be taught by computers instead of teachers. This is something that is becoming more prominent in schools today with distance learning through online classes.

Invite students to share orally their stories with their classmates. Some of the students may want to dramatize their stories as well as read them. Others may simply want to draw their schools of the future or write songs about what happens in them.

Assessment:

Students' stories should be assessed on how they met the criteria of logical creativity. No matter how extreme the school seems, if the students can relate to some precursor in today's school or society, they should be given credit for the assignment.

The stories should be grammatically correct and logically constructed.

## Where Is the Family

Grade Level: Any

Major Curriculum Area: Social Studies

Cross Curricular Connections: Language Arts, Fine Arts

Connection to the Opera: In the opera, there was no mention of a family of the students. The only “adult” was the Android teacher.

Levels of Thinking: Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation

Objective: Students will be able to:

1. Describe the multiple roles of families in today’s society;
2. Evaluate the needs of a future family;
3. Synthesize a role for a family that meets those needs.

Procedure:

Ask the students, “What is a family?” As they respond, represent the family with stick figures on the board. Some descriptions may be of the nuclear family; some may be variations that include extended families. Be sure that all family structures are represented and that no judgments are made on the types of structures that students describe.

Pick three unique structures and ask the students to describe what they think the role of each of the people in these families would be. Who works outside the home? Who takes care of the young children? Who goes to school? Who cleans the house or mows the lawn?

After seeing the opera, have the students describe the families of the students in the opera. (They should not be able to do this because no family is mentioned.) Have them think about where families of these students were. Were they outside working? Were they on another planet? Who takes care of these children? Who takes them away from school on weekends? Are there weekends on this planet? Are there lawns to mow?

Group students into groups of 3-4 and have them discuss the family of the year 2492. If a family of people lived in this environment, what needs would they have? Students should create a way to describe or illustrate that family and the roles of the members to the rest of the class. They may write an essay, write and dramatize a play, compose a song, or use any other creative means to illustrate their family of the future.

The groups will present their interpretation of the future family to the class. The class members should be given an opportunity to question each group about what they have presented. The group members should be ready to defend their description of the future family.

Assessment:

Descriptions should be based on the description of the children and the environment in the opera. Any logical conclusion based on these descriptions should be accepted.

## What Good is a Plant Except to Look Nice?

Grade Level: 3

Major Curricular Area: Science

Cross Curricular Connection: Mathematics

Connection to the Opera: After discovering the plant in the time capsule, the students were trying to determine what a plant was used for since there were no plants left on the planet.

Levels of Thinking: Knowledge, Comprehension, Analysis

Science Process Skills: Observation, Classification, Inference

Objective: Students should be able to:

1. Name some ways man uses plants;
2. Recognize if something in the student's everyday environment came from a plant;
3. State the benefits of plants to humans on the planet.

Materials: A green plant

Procedure:

Show the students the plant. Ask, "What is this?" "What is it used for?" Students will probably say it is used to make the room attractive, or some may indicate that it gives off a gas that we used. Some may know that there are many products from plants that we use. Some will not.

Hold up a pencil. Ask, "What does this have to do with plants?" Guide the discussion to the point that a pencil is made of wood which comes from plants. Ask if there is anything else they can see that is made of wood. Have them infer how big the plant must have been to be able to make this object.

Make a survey of the classroom and school. Students could go in groups of 2-3 to assigned parts of the school to see if they can determine ways in which plants are used. Have them create a chart on which to record their data. Allow students to use a chart they create as long as they can record all they need to know on it.

Make a chart similar to the one below:

<b>Object:</b>	<b>Where it was found in the school:</b>
Principal's desk	Principal's office

Bench

Playground

Have students group like things together, for example, all of the furniture could be in one group, things to write with in another, etc.

Assign the same task to the students to complete at home. Combine the home data with the school data the following day.

Discuss what things were made out of wood on the planet in the Opera. (From what materials were the things in this classroom constructed if there were no plants on the planet?)

Have students summarize their understanding of the benefits of plants to the inhabitants of the world.

Assessment:

The summary statement should indicate that students recognize that plants contribute to the benefit of human's living on earth.

## O<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub> Everywhere!

Grade Level: 3-6

Major Curriculum Area: Science

Cross Curricular Connection: Mathematics, Fine Arts

Connection to the Opera: The students found a plant in the time capsule. The plants on Earth provide oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) to support animal life.

Levels of Thinking: Knowledge, Comprehension, Analysis

Science Process Skills: Observation, Predicting, Collecting Data, Manipulating Data

Objective: Students will be able to:

1. Identify plants as producers of O<sub>2</sub>, which we use;
2. Predict what would happen on Earth if all of the plants were gone.

Materials: plant, small sticky dots with O<sub>2</sub> written on them

Procedure:

This activity could follow the activity, What Good is a Plant Except to Look Nice?

Review with the students what they discovered about the uses of plants. Explain that there is another use that we cannot see but is very important to us and other animals. Plants produce oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>), a gas that helps animals to produce energy. Without O<sub>2</sub>, we would become very tired and would not be able to do anything. Eventually we would die.

Provide each group of 2-3 students a page of sticky dots. Each group should have a different color that identifies them. Have them write O<sub>2</sub> on each dot. Then let them circulate throughout the classroom, school, and playground. Each time they see a plant, they should stick a dot on it. If another team's dot is there, they may not put theirs on the plant.

At the end of a certain amount of time, count the number of correctly placed dots of each color. Make a bar graph and determine which team found the most plants.

Each group should discuss what would happen on Earth if there were no plants. In some way, illustrate what you think will happen. Share your illustrations with the class. Groups can also offer ideas as to how the students in the Opera may have survived on their planet without any plants.

Assessment:

Groups should be commended for the number of plants they found in the school environment.

Their inferences about the condition of Earth without O<sub>2</sub> should address the fact that no animal life could exist.

# I'm a Tree!

Grade Level: Any

Major Curricular Area: Fine Arts, Performing Arts

Cross Curricular Connection: Science

Connection to the Opera: Students found a plant in the time capsule and did not know what it was or what it was for.

Levels of Thinking: Knowledge, Synthesis

Objective: Students will be able to:

1. Identify with a tree in various environments;
2. Express their feelings while acting like a tree.

Materials: recordings of various weather conditions (storms, sunny days, windy days), tape recorder

Procedure:

Have students stand at arms length apart from each other. They can stand and stretch out their arms and make sure the other person is touching only at the finger tips. This is necessary for the safety of the children during their simulation of a tree.

Tell the students you are going to talk to them, and they are to show with their bodies how they are feeling as they listen to you.

Teacher Script:

“Close your eyes. You are a tree. You are a tall, strong tree with wide-spreading branches. You stand in the sunlight (begin recording of a sunny day). You soak up the warm sun. Your leaves turn toward the light. You can feel the water flowing up your trunk and branches to the leaves. You can feel the food you make in your leaves going to all parts of your body to provide energy. You have been around for many years, and you know you will be here for many more. Birds nest in your branches; squirrels gather your seeds; insects live in your bark. You welcome your friends and give them shelter and share your food.”

(Begin the windy music.) “Suddenly the wind begins to blow. Birds fly to their nests; squirrels scamper to shelter; insects become very still in your bark. Your branches bend; your leaves flutter. The wind increases and pushes against your trunk. You lose some of your leaves; a branch breaks; but you are strong and your trunk remains tall and straight.”

(Begin stormy music.) “Thunder booms; lightning flashes. You are not afraid. You have seen this kind of storm before. A deer finds shelter and lies down under your branches to be

safe from the storm. Rain pelts your leaves and branches. It hits very hard. The wind is blowing stronger; lightning lights the sky. The birds in their nests huddle down in the protection of your branches and leaves. Rain drips from the tips of your leaves to the ground below. You are soaked, but at the same time, are cleaned by the rain.”

(Begin the sunny music again.) “Then, as suddenly as it started, the rain stops. The sun comes out and begins to dry the water on your leaves. The deer rises and moves away from your protection. The bird flies away to get food for the young birds. Insects begin to move around in your bark looking for their own food. Your leaves turn toward the sun as you begin the process of making food for your own self. You feel strong and confident that you have stood through another storm and provided shelter for other animals in your forest. You know that you will be here for many years. You settle down to bask in the sun and enjoy its warmth.”

(End of Script)

Ask students to talk about how they felt being a tree. If the tree is so strong, why was the planet in the Opera void of trees? What could have caused them to disappear?

Students should write how they feel about trees and what we should do to make sure that all of the trees do not disappear.

Assessment:

Accept all student attitudes as valid. Discuss with the class some of the ideas presented by the students about how to maintain the supply of trees on Earth.

## Listen to the Trees

Grade Level: Any

Major Curriculum Area: Fine Arts/Performing Arts

Cross Curricular Connection: Science

Connection to the Opera: Students found a plant in the time capsule and did not know what it was.

Levels of Thinking: Knowledge, Synthesis

Objective: Students will be able to

1. Express their observations of a natural phenomenon;
2. Create a musical expression of this phenomenon.

Materials: various instruments (keyboard, recorder, drums, etc.), windy day, place with trees

Procedure:

On a windy day, take the students to a place where there are several trees. Have the students sit within the trees and be very quiet. They are to listen to the sounds from the trees in the wind. Tell them to listen to the song the trees sing. Sing it in your mind with the trees. Remember the song.

Upon returning to the classroom, allow the students to choose an instrument and compose the song they heard the trees sing. This process may take several days. You may want to work with individual students to write down their music if they are unable to write music.

Allow the students to share their song of the trees with the class. Record the performances. Watch the performances as a class and compare and contrast the songs. Observe if there are any similar elements in many of the songs.

Assessment: Completion of the assignment is the most important aspect of this lesson. Accept all student interpretations of the sounds of the trees.

## Lessons Keyed to the Disciplines

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