

# and then one night

## THE MAKING OF DEAD MAN WALKING

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**KQED**  
*san francisco*  
**OPERA**

### **Lesson: The Art of Social Protest**

**Grade levels** 9-12

**Subject areas** Civics, Language Arts

**National Standards**

Adapted from <http://www.mcrel.org/>

Grades 9–12, Level IV

#### **Civics**

Standard 13

Understands the character of American political and social conflict and the factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity.

- Knows why people may agree on values or principles in the abstract but disagree when they are applied to specific issues, such as the right to life and capital punishment.

#### **Language Arts**

Standard 7

Uses reading skills and other strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.

- Uses discussions with peers as a way of understanding information.
- Uses features and elements of text (for example, vocabulary, structure, evidence, expository structure, format, use of language, arguments) to support inferences and generalizations about information.

#### **Listening and Speaking**

Standard 8

Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

- Uses criteria (for example, judges accuracy, relevance and organization of information; clarity of delivery; relationships among purpose, audience and content; types of arguments used; effectiveness of own contributions) to evaluate own and others' effectiveness in group discussions and formal presentations.
- Asks questions as a way to broaden and enrich classroom discussions.
- Uses a variety of strategies to enhance listening comprehension (for example, focuses attention on message; monitors message for clarity and understanding; asks relevant questions; provides verbal and nonverbal feedback; notes cues, such as a change of pace or particular words, that indicate a new point is about to be made; uses abbreviation system to record information quickly; selects and organizes essential information).

- Adjusts message wording and delivery to particular audiences and for particular purposes (for example, to defend a position, to entertain, to inform, to persuade).
- Makes formal presentations to the class that include a number of elements and strategies (for example, definitions, for clarity; support of main ideas using anecdotes, examples, statistics, analogies and other evidence; visual and technological aids, such as transparencies, slides, electronic media; citation of information sources).
- Uses a variety of verbal and nonverbal presentation techniques (for example, modulation of voice; varied inflection and tempo; enunciation; physical gestures; rhetorical questions; varied use of language, including figurative language, standard English, informal usage and technical language) and demonstrates poise and self-control while presenting.
- Responds to questions and feedback about own presentations (for example, clarifies and defends ideas, expands on a topic, uses logical arguments, modifies organization, evaluates effectiveness, sets goals for future presentations).
- Understands influences on language use (for example, political beliefs, positions of social power, culture).
- Understands reasons for own reactions to spoken texts (for example, to emotional appeals).

### **Thinking and Reasoning**

#### Standard 6

Applies decision-making techniques.

- Analyzes current or pending decisions that can affect national or international policy and identifies the consequences of each alternative.
- Evaluates major factors that influence personal decisions.

### **Overview**

The purpose of this activity is for students to examine how art and music help define and unify a social movement and also how they can function as symbols of protest. Various historical examples will be used to illustrate the impact of art and music on social protest. Students will watch the KQED program **And Then One Night: The Making of Dead Man Walking** and discuss what happens when art takes on a social issue. Students will look at contemporary and historical examples of art as protest, design an art-based project to communicate their thoughts and feelings on a social issue, and write an opera synopsis based on a current issue.

### **Learning Objectives**

This lesson will enable students to

- explain how artists and musicians use their work to make statements on social issues.
- analyze the issues surrounding capital punishment.
- evaluate the effectiveness of a piece of art or music in communicating a message.
- express their views on capital punishment.

**Time**

Five 50-minute class periods (This may vary depending on how much work is done outside the classroom)

**Materials**

Videotape: **And Then One Night: The Making of Dead Man Walking**

Gorecki's Symphony no. 3, Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, op.36

Art supplies

Writing materials

**Pre-viewing Activities****Activity One**

Invite students into a class discussion about how, since the beginning of time, people have struggled to find ways of expressing themselves. The following is a list of possible discussion questions:

- What is our primary means of communication?
- What other means, besides language, do people use to communicate?
- How is verbal communication different from these other forms of communication?
- Can you give an example of a piece of art or music that captures and expresses one of your thoughts or feelings?
- Can you explain how this avenue of expression is different from a verbal explanation of this thought or feeling?
- How can art and music be used to communicate a message that deals with a social issue?

**Activity Two**

1. Show students W. Eugene Smith's famous photo of soldiers in Saipan rescuing a baby who had been wedged between two rocks. Photograph can be found at <http://www.pathfinder.com/photo/gallery/arts/smith/cap03.htm>.

2. Inform students that when Smith was in Japan, he wrote the following on the back of one of his photographs: "... Each time I pressed the release it was a shouted condemnation hurled with the hopes that it might survive through the years and at least echo through the minds of men."

3. Discuss the following with your class:

- What was your initial reaction to Smith's photograph?
- Do you think Smith was successful in conveying his message about war?
- Do you think photography, as an art form, can be a successful method for encouraging people to think about social issues? Explain.
- Can you think of other examples in which art and music have been used to express thoughts and feelings on social issues?

### **Activity Three**

Tell students they are going to watch a program entitled **And Then One Night: The Making of Dead Man Walking** and that it chronicles the creation of an opera that is based on the controversial topic of capital punishment.

1. Create a KWL chart to help activate students' prior knowledge on the topic of capital punishment. Ask students what they know about capital punishment and write their answers under the **K** (what we already know) section of the chart. Find out what students want to learn about capital punishment and write those responses under the **W** (what we want to learn) section of the chart. As new information is discovered throughout the lesson, write it under the **L** (what we have learned section of the chart.
2. Ask students to share their thoughts on the use of art as a vehicle to explore the social issues of capital punishment.
3. Invite students to think about what they might include in a play about the death penalty.

### **Focus for Viewing**

In act 1 of **And Then One Night: The Making of Dead Man Walking**, Sister Helen Prejean states, "When I heard that they were going to do an opera, I thought 'music can take us into places of our hearts we don't even know we have. And so what better way than through music for this story?'" Ask the students to think about Sister Helen's quote as they view this film and to take notes on how the opera's music is used to tell the story, and to think about the places in their own hearts the music takes them.

### **Viewing Activities**

You may choose to show the program to students in acts. (act 1, "Present at the Creation"; act 2, "From the Group Up"; act 3, "To the Precipice"). It is recommended that you begin any viewing by watching the five-minute introduction to the program.

#### **View act 1, "Present at the Creation" (approximately 20 minutes)**

Stop the tape after the second blond woman says, "I'm not totally opposed to the death penalty, either." Elicit quick, one-line responses from your students about their views on the death penalty.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Phyllis Wattis says, "People look forward to it, and like many things, they hate it or they love it." Ask students what they think of capital punishment as a topic for an opera.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Frederica Von Stade talks about the woman not having any control over what has happened to her children. Ask students to respond, either verbally or in writing, to the viewpoint of the mother of the condemned prisoner.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Patrick Summers says, "So what better way than to have compositions that are right out of our own time, and even in this country, right out of the American vernacular?" Ask students to think of other topics from our time that could be made into operas.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Jake Heggie states, " ... the whole point of the story, which is this man has taken away these children from these parents and it's a loss that will never, ever, it's a hole that will never, ever be filled-ever." Have students spend a few minutes writing about Jake's comment.

Resume play.

James Anderson, Mike Farrell, Terrence McNally, Robert Orth and Catherine Cook each talk about the death penalty. Stop the tape briefly after each person's comments and ask for students' reactions to what each person said. After Catherine Cook's comment, ask students to spend several minutes writing about their own opinion on the topic.

At the end of act 1, have the class talk about how the opera was used to discuss the death penalty.

**View act 2, "From the Ground Up ... One Year Later" (approximately 10 minutes).**

Stop the tape after Packard sings, "Everything is gonna be all right." Discuss whether or not the students think life in prison is an appropriate punishment for Joe.

Resume play.

Stop the tape when Packard walks into the injection chamber. Discuss as a class, or ask students to write about their thoughts and feelings about this segment.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Michael Yeargan talks about the images going around Sister Helen like a Ferris wheel. Have the class discuss how the set helps to determine the mood of the performance.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Joe Mantello says, "...what's human about him and show us what's repellent about him and let us make up our minds." Ask students to discuss, and have them give examples of, how Joe's character is portrayed in the opera.

Resume play.

Stop the tape when Jake Heggie talks about Von Stade's singing, "I just don't know what good my Joe's being dead will do." Ask students to write about what they think and feel after viewing.

Resume play.

Bill Babbitt, William August, Robert Orth, James Anderson, Betty Carlson and Sister Helen each make a comment. Stop the tape briefly after each of them talks and ask students to comment on what each person said. After Sister Helen's statement, stop the tape and ask students to write down their thoughts and feelings about the statements.

**View act 3, "To the Precipice" (approximately 13 minutes).**

Stop the tape after John Packard says, "But it's especially intense 'cause the characters are so intense." Discuss how the various elements of the performance help to create this intensity.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Susan Graham talks about how forgiveness comes in many forms. Ask students to spend a few minutes writing about a time when someone forgave them or they forgave someone else.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Sister Helen talks about making a journey out of the other side. Discuss the topic of forgiveness as it relates to capital punishment.

Betty Carlson, James Anderson, Mike Farrell, and Bill Babbitt each talk. Stop the tape briefly after each of them talks and ask students to comment on what each person said. Ask students to write down their thoughts and feelings about the statements they heard.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Sister Helen says, "How can we put this God job on people that only have human consciousness and wisdom and all the frailties?" Hold a class discussion around this question.

Resume play.

Stop the tape after Sister Helen says, "Art helps us explore alternatives, to make new choices and brings us to that deeper place to do that." Have the class discuss whether or not the opera accomplished this.

## Post-viewing activities

### Activity One

1. Lead the class in a group discussion about the program. Here are some possible discussion questions.

- What was your overall impression of the program?
- What segment elicited the most powerful response from you?
- What was the most surprising segment in the program?
- What segment made you angry? sad?
- Do you think music is an effective way to tell this story? Explain.
- What did you learn about the topic of capital punishment from watching this program?
- Did you change your views on capital punishment after viewing this program? Explain.
- Do you think art and music can provide an effective tool for people to reflect upon and respond to social issues? Explain.

### Activity Two

1. Read the account of the bombing of Guernica, Spain, located at

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/articles/05482.html>.

2. View Picasso's painting entitled *Guernica*, providing time for students to scroll down to and click on the Details of Guernica section,

<http://www.cc.emory.edu/PHILOSOPHY/ART/guernica.html>.

3. Compare and contrast the differences between the factual text account of the event and the artistic images of the bombing.

4. Discuss the following two quotes as they apply to this situation:

- "It isn't up to the painter to define the symbols. Otherwise it would be better if he wrote them out in so many words! The public who look at the picture must interpret the symbols as they understand them." - Pablo Picasso
- "Art can encourage individual conscience." - Robert Rauschenberg

### Activity Three

1. Borrow a copy of Gorecki's Symphony no.3, Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, op.36 from your school or local library. Explain to the students that the second movement is based on text that an 18 year-old Polish girl, Helena Wanda Blazusiak, scratched on the wall of her cell at Gestapo headquarters. For more information regarding this symphony, visit

<http://inkpot.com/classical/goreckisym3.htm>.

2. Play the second movement and discuss the piece's impact at the personal level and at the political level.

#### **Activity Four**

1. Divide the class into small groups and have each group research examples of how the arts have been used as tools to further social protest. Here are some suggested topics. Students may also research a topic of their own choosing.

- A photo essay to protest the treatment of displaced peoples.

<http://www.time.com/time/daily/special/photo/salgado/index.html>

- Art posters protesting the Spanish Civil War

<http://burn.ucsd.edu/scwtable.htm>

- A play that protests the use of cancer-causing pesticides in California's San Joaquin Valley

[http://www.brava.org/Pages/Reviews/heros\\_Moraga.html](http://www.brava.org/Pages/Reviews/heros_Moraga.html)

- Protest music from the Vietnam War era

<http://folkmusic.about.com/library/weekly/aa010501a.htm>

2. Instruct each group to create a brief class presentation based on their research. The presentation should include

- background information on the topic.
- a statement of what the students believe to be the creator's purpose.
- examples of how art/music was used to convey the message.
- an explanation of the effectiveness of the artist's work as a form of protest.

#### **Activity Five**

1. Instruct students to spend five minutes writing about their views on capital punishment.

2. After students have finished writing, pair students and ask them to share what they have written.

3. Ask each pair of students to write a list of questions regarding capital punishment.

4. Refer back to, and update, the class KWL chart.

#### **Activity Six**

1. Explain to the students that they are going to research the issue of capital punishment. Encourage students to use a variety of sources for their research.

These Web sites provide a good place for students to begin the Internet component of their research.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/angel/>

<http://www.prodeathpenalty.com/>

<http://www.geocities.com/trct111/thoughts.html>

<http://www.nieworld.com/special/hotcold/punish.htm>

<http://donlemaire.homestead.com/deathpen.html>

<http://www.derechos.org/dp/>

2. Tell students to answer as many questions as possible from the class KWL chart and to record any interesting pieces of information they uncover during their research.
3. Instruct students to share their findings with the class after they have completed their research, and place the information on the KWL chart.
4. Have the class as a whole create an art or music project that expresses their thoughts and feelings on the issue of capital punishment.
5. Invite an audience to view the class exhibit.
6. As the invited guests are leaving, students may ask them which work had the greatest impact on them. Students might also choose to conduct an exit poll to find out people's views on the death penalty.

### **Activity Seven**

1. KidsOp is creating an opera to raise awareness about the plight of children living in war-torn regions of the world. Visit the KidsOp Children-in-War opera project Web site and click on synopsis. <http://www.kidsop.com/20012/>
2. The scenario for this synopsis is based on a Romeo and Juliet-type story that takes place in the Balkans. Read the synopsis aloud and discuss how it is used to explore the issue of children living in war zones.
3. Read this comment of Sister Helen, from **And Then One Night: The Making of Dead Man Walking**. "True art, I think, brings you over to both sides of a conflict, and all you do is just bring people there." Discuss how this quote applies to the Children-in-War synopsis.
4. Explain to the students that they are going to write a synopsis about a topic of their choosing.
5. Ask the class to brainstorm a list of relevant social issues that have an impact on children and young adults.
6. Divide the class into groups based upon students' desire to work on a particular topic on the list.
7. Instruct students to follow the format of the Children-in-War opera (setting, characters and story) when they write their synopsis.
8. Read this Terrence McNally quote from **And Then One Night: The Making of Dead Man Walking**. "I write contemporary vernacular American English. And I said to Jake, this is how I write. Is that all right with you? I don't think people talk poetically in the situation these people find themselves in. It's the music that's going to add the dimension of the poetry."
9. Find the sections of the Children-in-War synopsis where they mention that a song will be included, and ask students what music they think might work well in each instance. Discuss how the music will add the dimension of poetry to the words. Teacher Note - The object here is for students to select music that reflects the mood of the piece. Explain that it is not the words from the song that they are concerned about, but the mood that the musical arrangement creates. Encourage students to include music they listen to in their everyday lives.
10. Instruct students to return to their own synopsis and have them discuss and select the music they will incorporate into their work.
11. Share the groups' work with the entire class.

**Extension Activity**

You may choose to work with the music department in your school to produce one of the plays as a school and/or community project.

**ASSESSMENT**

Students will be assessed on the quality of their participation in class discussions and the presentations they create in small groups. You may choose to create class rubrics for the activities. The following Web site is an excellent source of information on rubrics:

<http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/rubrics/weblessons.htm>.