

En Mis Palabras

In My Own Words



Study Guide

Presented by Central City Opera
Department of Education & Community Programs



¡Muchísimas Gracias!

Thank you!

A million thanks for the support from the following organizations, without whom our programs would not be possible.

Anschutz Family Foundation
Thomas W. Bean Foundation
Bonfils-Stanton Foundation
Central City Opera House Association Guild
City of Glendale
Colorado Council on the Arts
Denver Lyric Opera Guild
El Pomar Foundation
Fine Arts Foundation
Gay and Lesbian Fund for Colorado
William Randolph Hearst Foundation
The Hill Foundation
Mabel Y. Hughes Charitable Trust
Helen K. Arthur E. Johnson Foundation
KWGN 2, a fund of the
McCormick Foundation

Raphael Levy Memorial Foundation
J.K. Mullen Foundation
National Endowment for the Arts
Post-News Charities, a McCormick
Foundation Fund
Schramm Foundation
Henry R. Schwier Charitable Fund
Galen and Adabelle Spencer Foundation
Scientific and Cultural Facilities District
Lloyd David and Carlye Cannon Wattis
Foundation
Wells Fargo
Xcel Energy Foundation

Table of Contents

Palabras – Words

- ¡Bienvenidos!
- En Mis Palabras
- El Poder de Nuestras Palabras – The Power of Our Own Words
- ¡Drama, drama y más drama! – The Spanish Telenovela
- La Canción de un Pájaro – Songbird – Rodolfo’s Extended Metaphor Poem

Cultura – Culture

- Mexico, Colorado – An Investigation of Mexican Culture
- Día de los Muertos – Day of the Dead

La Inmigración – Immigration

- Estación de Inmigración – Immigration Station

Sources and Special Thanks

Appendix A: Opera Dictionary

Appendix B: How to be a Good Theatre Audience

Appendix C: Colorado Model Content Standards

Appendix D: Central City Opera’s Education & Community Programs

¡Bienvenidos!

Welcome to the Study Guide for *En Mis Palabras* (In My Own Words). *En Mis Palabras* is the story of Ana Maria, a young Mexican girl torn between her family's culture and American society. *En Mis Palabras* is a powerful story about finding your own voice – and how appropriate, considering it's an opera! In this guide you will find activities about words, culture and immigration – all related to Ana Maria's struggle to find her true self. Because *En Mis Palabras* is a bilingual opera, in English and in Spanish, you will also see lots of Spanish vocabulary words. If you don't speak Spanish, take this opportunity to learn some new words! Like this one - *¡Diviértate!* (dee-vee-YER-tah-tay) Have fun!

~~~~~

Have you seen an opera before? If yes...

- When?
- Where?
- What company performed the opera?
- What production did you see?
- What did you think of it?

If you have not seen an opera, have you heard opera music before? (Think about television shows and commercials – they frequently use opera music.)

What do you think of opera?

Are your thoughts stereotypical or are they based on real experience?

*En Mis Palabras* is a relatively new opera. It was commissioned by Central City Opera in 2005. That means the opera company hired a composer and librettist and worked with them specifically to create this opera. It took one year to write the opera and prepare it for performance. *En Mis Palabras* premiered in January 2006.

## ***AFTER YOU HAVE SEEN THE PERFORMANCE,***

answer the following questions...

- What is one thing you learned about opera?
- What is one thing that surprised you about the show?
- Have you ever heard people sing like that before?
- How is opera different than a play? A ballet? A musical?



## **En Mis Palabras**

In a quest to find her own voice, fifteen year old Ana Maria is pulled in many directions as she struggles to find the balance between her Mexican heritage and being an American teen. Her brother wants her to defy their father and try her wings, her father doesn't understand her desire to be like her friends, her grandmother counsels that she must search her heart for the answer. Ana Maria finds that there is no easy choice, no choice that won't bring pain to someone. But through her journey she finally hears her heart and learns to truly speak in her own words.

**Central City Opera presents**



Musc by Roger Ames | Book and Lyrics by Jeffrey Gilden | Directed by Anthony J. Garcia

**EN MIS PALABRAS (In My Own Words)**

A New One-Act Opera in Spanish and English

# ***En Mis Palabras***

## ***Synopsis***

### **Cast:**

Ana Maria, a Latina teen – soprano  
Rodolfo, her older brother - tenor  
Esteban, her father - baritone  
Abuela, her grandmother – mezzo-soprano

**Setting:** Scene 1 - Ana Maria's home, Scene 2 – a few months later; a funeral home

**Duration:** approx. 55 minutes

**Accompaniment:** piano and guitar

Commissioned by Central City Opera, 2005

**Scene 1:** 15-year-old Ana Maria is alone, writing in her journal as she expresses her confused thoughts. In another room her brother and father argue about her. Rodolfo then comes to her and encourages her to “spread her wings” – he’ll support her. She is torn by loyalty to her family. Rodolfo departs but soon her father confronts her about the clothes and makeup she is wearing. He reminds her of the sacrifices he has made to make a better life for his children. She argues that she must make her own choices.

Ana Maria is again alone when her grandmother enters. Abuela asks her about the changes she has been making to her appearance. Ana Maria wants her to understand. Abuela points out that a person can choose who they want to be, but that choice can affect others as well. Esteban bursts in and accuses Ana Maria of having a boyfriend. He forbids her to see him or her friend Sara anymore. Ana Maria threatens to run away. Rodolfo defends her and turns on his father. Their anger at one another causes serious consequences.

**Scene 2:** Rodolfo and Esteban talk awkwardly about memories of Abuela. Ana Maria enters and sees her father for the first time since leaving home. They are civil, but can't find the words to make things right. Ana Maria leaves the room. Abuela appears (as if Esteban is remembering her) and advises him to stop clinging to the past and to embrace the future in the person of his beautiful child. Ana Maria also speaks to the memory of her grandmother, wondering how she can mend things with her father. Abuela reminds her of how much he has always loved her and tried to protect her. She counsels Ana Maria to let the past guide her into the future. Esteban returns and joins them in a trio of love and promise.

### **Production Staff:**

|                                        |                              |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Michael Gorgan                         | Scenic Design and Properties |
| Wanda Price                            | Costumes                     |
| Anne Davis                             | Wigs and Make-up             |
| Roger Ames and<br>Deborah Schmit-Lobis | Music Directors              |
| Carl Morrow                            | Additional Direction         |

## Biographies En Mis Palabras

**Roger Ames**, composer, has premiered his operas, musicals and choral pieces throughout the United States and Europe. His recently completed works include "The End of Forever," an opera about the Native American experience in Indiana commissioned by the Indianapolis Historical Society and the Indiana Opera, and "In Memoriam, Warsaw 1943," a commission from the Westminster Choir College that deals with the subject of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943. Mr. Ames is also music director of the Composer-Librettist Workshop at New Dramatists in New York City and teaches high school fine arts on Long Island.

**Jeffrey Gilden**, librettist, has had a number of stories and essays published. He won awards in several screenwriting competitions for his first screenplay, "Red Lantern." Mr. Gilden previously worked for Nickelodeon and now specializes in teaching high school students an alternative playwriting course called Stages which guides them through the collaborative writing and production of full-length musicals.

**Anthony J. Garcia**, director, is the Executive Artistic Director at El Centro Su Teatro, the region's oldest Teatro Chicano. He also serves as resident playwright at the Centro, generating such successes as *Introduction to Chicano History: 101* and *I Don't Speak English Only* which subsequently toured to the east coast, southwestern states and Mexico. Tony has received many awards, including an NEA/Theater Communications Group Directing Fellowship. His most recent original offerings are *El Sol Que Tu Eres* and *The Westside Oratorio*. He is also an instructor in Chicano Studies at the Metropolitan State College of Denver.

# *El Poder de Nuestras Palabras –* *The Power of Our Own Words*

Part of the process of growing up is finding out who you are through what you believe – and it isn't always easy. Just as Ana Maria is struggling to find her own voice, perhaps you have experienced some of the same things. Listen to the words of the first song that Ana Maria sings:



I write my world, I draw my dreams,  
I paint my plans, I swim my streams,  
I chart my stars, or so it seems,  
In my own words,  
In my own words,  
En mis palabras.  
En mis palabras.  
I long for love, I hope for fame,  
I sketch my life, I light my flame,  
I raise my voice and shout my name,  
In my own words,  
En mis palabras,  
En mis palabras.

-----

Our own words and opinions are so important in determining who we are. Ask yourself the following questions about yourself! Your words and thoughts and dreams are important! Speak them loudly as Ana Maria is trying to!

What is your favorite thing about yourself?

What is something that makes you different than everyone else?

What accomplishment of your own has made you most proud?

What is a goal you are working on right now?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

What are 10 things you want to do before you turn 25 years old?

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| 1 | 6  |
| 2 | 7  |
| 3 | 8  |
| 4 | 9  |
| 5 | 10 |

Whose opinions do you admire?

Whose opinions influence you the most?

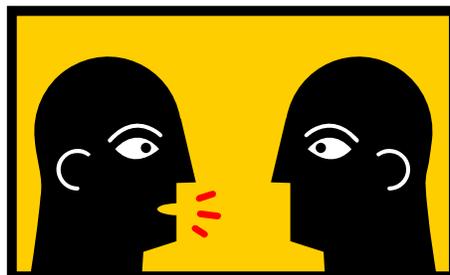
Do you think it's a good or bad thing to be opinionated?

Try to remember a time when your opinion about something differed from that of your family's. What happened? Did it cause problems? Did you learn something from the experience?

Do you always have the same opinions as your friends? Why or why not? Describe an example of how your opinions have been the same or different as those of your friends:

Have you ever had to keep an opinion to yourself because you knew that if you said anything it would cause problems? What was your opinion? Describe the situation:

Are you comfortable speaking your opinions in front of your family or classmates? Why or why not?



# ¡Drama, drama y más drama! – The Spanish Telenovela



Just like our soap operas in the United States, *telenovelas* are incredibly popular in Latin America and all over the world. A *telenovela* is a Spanish term for a television serial. The word is derived from the terms *tele*, short (or slang) for “television” and *novela*, for “novel”. These shows are produced in all Spanish-speaking countries as well as Brazil, Germany and the United States. Many of these shows are then translated into other languages and have followings in Russia, Eastern Europe, France, Malaysia, Singapore, China, the Phillipines and Japan.

Here are some fun facts about *telenovelas*:

- In Spain, *telenovelas* are called *culebrón* which means “long snake” because of their complicated plots and large number of episodes (usually over 100.)
- The first *telenovelas* were created **in the early 1950’s** in Brazil, Cuba and Mexico. These shows were called *Su Vida Me Pertenece* – “Your Life Belongs to Me” (Brazil, 1950), *Senderos de Amor* – “Love Paths” (Cuba, 1951) and *Angeles de la Calle* – “Angels of the Street” (Mexico, 1951).
- Most traditional Mexican *telenovelas* base their stories on a similar plot – **a poor girl falls in love with rich man whose family spurns her**. There are other kinds of *telenovelas* such as “era telenovelas” that are historical in nature, “teen telenovelas” about the lives of teenagers (think of The OC here in the United States) and now “musical telenovelas” about the lives of aspiring musicians (think American Idol!)
- Most *telenovelas* have an average run of **eight months to a year** unlike American soap operas which may run for up to 30 years or more with the same characters and settings!

*En Mis Palabras* could be seen as a *telenovela*. Part of the popularity of these shows is that they give us stories similar to those that may be happening in our own lives. Sometimes life does feel like an **overly dramatic soap opera!** Pick a situation you have lived through and outline a plot for a *telenovela* you would direct. Give it a colorful and enticing title, change the names of your friends or family, heighten the drama if you want and have fun!

To get you started, here are some titles of popular *telenovelas* that might inspire your title:

- *El 0957 Está Ocupado* – Extension 0957 is Busy – Colombia
- *Simplemente María* – Simply Mary – Peru
- *Los Ricos También Lloran* – The Rich Cry Too – Mexico
- *Eramos Seis* – There Were Six of Us – Brazil
- *Selva de Piedra* – Stone Jungle – Brazil
- *El Extraño Retorno de Diana Salazar* – The Strange Return of Diana Salazar – Mexico
- *Gitanas* – Gypsies – Mexico
- *Maria la del Barrio* – Maria from the Barrio – Mexico
- *Chiquititas* – Little Girls – Argentina
- *Estúpido Cupido* – Stupid Cupid – Chile
- *El Adorable Profesor Aldao* – The Adorable Professor Aldao – Peru
- *Yo Se Que Mentía* – I Know He Lied – Puerto Rico
- *Cara Sucia* – Dirty Face – Venezuela
- *Mi Gorda Bella* – My Sweet, Fat Valentina – Venezuela

Title of My Telenovela:

Main Characters:

Setting:

Main Story Lines:

*¡Para divertirse!* - For fun:  
Write a scene of dialogue and get your friends to act it out with you!



# *La Canción de un Pajaro - Songbird*

## Rodolfo's Extended Metaphor Poem

When Rodolfo (Ana's older brother) gives Ana Maria his own opinion about what she should do, he sings it in a beautiful extended metaphor poem. Read the lyrics:



Young Mexican bird  
In your Mexican nest  
Hanging on tightly,  
Ignoring the rest  
Not passing, not failing,  
Not taking the test  
Of lifting your face to the sky  
You're stuck here, dear sister.  
But why?  
Why, dear Mexican bird?  
A wing's not a wing  
If it's never been flapped  
And yours are unopened,  
Your feathers still wrapped  
And when will you see  
That your whole life's been mapped  
It's time to spread them and fly,  
Good riddance, my sister,  
Goodbye.  
And if you're not ready  
To spread out your wings,  
Too cautious to flap 'em  
And seek out new things,  
And if you're content with  
What yesterday brings  
Then stay.  
But you'll never soar skyward  
As long as he clings  
To you,  
As long as you cling to him,  
To this house  
As long as you cling to your name.  
As long as you cling to your name.



# Mexico, Colorado

## An Investigation of Mexican Culture

Colorado, which was once a part of Mexico, is host to many people from Mexico or whose families are from Mexico. One of the best things about the United States is that as people come in from other countries, they bring with them rich traditions from their homeland. Perhaps you yourself are from Mexico or your family is – but if not, do some investigation to find out about how Mexican culture is becoming a part of American culture! You may need to visit the foreign foods aisle in your grocery store, do some research online or do some interviews with people you know whose culture is Mexican.



What current American states were originally part of Mexico?

What does the word "Colorado" mean?

What other states have Spanish-derived names?

Name 5 U.S. cities with Spanish names:

If you don't speak Spanish, chances are you know some Spanish words already. Make a list of as many of those words as you can.

Name 5 Mexican restaurants near you.

How many Mexican restaurants are listed in the phonebook?

What do the following words mean?

- *Panadería*
- *Carnicería*

What are some names of popular Mexican candies?

Have you ever tried Mexican candy?

How is Mexican candy different than American candy?

Name a popular music group or singer from Mexico:

Have you ever heard this music here? If so, where?

What radio stations in the area are solely Spanish speaking?

What TV stations in the area are solely Spanish speaking?

What holidays are celebrated on these days in Mexico:

- January 6
- February 21
- May 5
- May 10
- September 16
- November 1 and 2

What is "*El Grito*"?

Are any of these holidays celebrated here in the United States?

What do the following names translate to in English?

- María
- Esteban
- Ernesto
- Pablo
- Roberto
- Rosa
- Juan
- Enrique
- Carlos
- Luz
- Tomás
- Jorge

Do you know anyone who is from or whose family is from Mexico?

If so, what city and state in Mexico is he or she from?

How many states are there in Mexico?

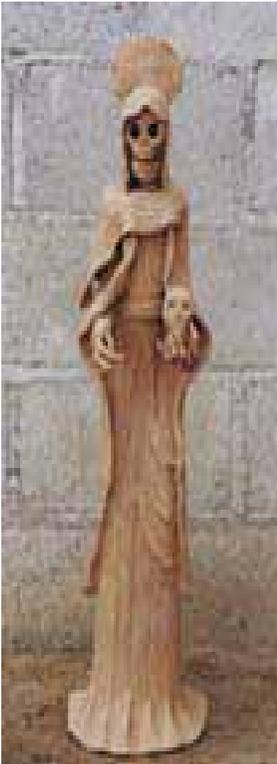
What is the capital of Mexico?

Is Spanish the only language spoken in Mexico?



# *Día de los Muertos – Day of the Dead*

In *En Mis Palabras, la abuela* (Ana Maria's Grandmother) is a very central character to the story. She helps both Esteban and Ana Maria try to understand each other and why they still need to respect and honor their relationship even if they disagree about things. In Mexico, elders are very important and so is honoring their memory when they are gone. In *En Mis Palabras*, it takes the death of Ana Maria's Grandmother for Ana Maria and her father to come back together. Let's learn about how Mexican culture honors the ancestors who have passed on.



*Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, is celebrated in Mexico on November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and though its name sounds a little scary, it is a beautiful, big *fiesta* (party) that includes people of all ages. The main character of this event is, of course, *La Muerta* (Death) who is depicted in art, floats and other decorations as a fancy skeleton woman; she is also called *La Flaca* (Skinny), *La Huesada* (Bony) or *La Pelona* (Baldy).

During this time of year stores are filled with *Día de los Muertos adornitos* (decorations) – little skeletons playing instruments, getting married, driving cars, taking baths – in any scene or situation you can think of, really! These decorations will later decorate ornate shrines or altars that people create in their homes to honor deceased relatives and loved ones. These shrines, usually made of boxes covered with colored material, contain pictures of the loved ones, candles, and *ofrendas* (offerings) of favorite food and drinks of their loved ones. People will also go to the burial grounds of their loved ones and decorate the gravesites with *papel picado* (confetti), flowered wreathes and crosses, candles and flowers and often stay there all night with other families singing, lighting candles and playing music. There are also big parades in the streets.

Special foods are made during this time, like candies and breads shaped into *calaveras* (skulls), coffins, *animas* (human figures) and skeleton bones. November 1<sup>st</sup> focuses on children or *angelitos* (little angels) and November 2<sup>nd</sup> focuses on adults who have passed away.

Here is a Day of the Dead recipe you can try at home to honor your ancestors.

## *Pan del Muerto - "Bread of the Dead"*

- ½ cup butter
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup water
- 5 - 5½ cups flour
- 2 packages dry yeast
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon whole anise seed
- ½ cup sugar
- 4 eggs

In a saucepan over medium heat, heat the butter, milk and water until very warm but not boiling. Meanwhile, measure out 1 ½ cups of flour and set the rest aside. In a large mixing bowl, combine the 1½ cups flour, yeast, salt, anise seed and sugar. Beat in the warm liquid until well combined. Add the eggs and beat in another cup of flour. Continue adding more flour until the dough is soft but not sticky. Knead on a lightly floured board for ten minutes until smooth and elastic. Lightly grease a bowl and place dough in it, cover with plastic wrap and let rise in warm place until doubled in bulk, about 1 ½ hours. Punch the dough down and shape into loaves resembling skulls, skeletons or round loaves with “bones” placed ornamentally around the top. Let these loaves rise for 1 hour. Bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 40 minutes. Remove from oven and paint on the glaze.

### Glaze Recipe

- ½ cup sugar
- 1/3 cup fresh orange juice
- 2 tablespoons grated orange zest

Bring to a boil for 2 minutes, then apply to bread with a pastry brush. If desired, sprinkle on colored sugar while glaze is still damp.



### ¿Sabías que? – Did you know?

There's one Mexican festival that's more popular north of the border than south!!! – Cinco de Mayo (May 5<sup>th</sup>) is not, as many people think, Mexico's Independence Day – but it is an important day in Mexican history. **Cinco de Mayo** is the celebration of the victory of the Mexicans over the French in the Battle of Puebla in 1862. At the time, Mexico was engaged in a lot of violence and chaos with other countries and was in debt after gaining its independence from Spain in 1821, fighting the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and fighting its own Civil War in 1858. France was intent on taking control of Mexico and so Napoleon III (Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew) put a Hapsburg prince in charge of Mexico – his name was Maximilian. The French, with their cutting-edge war technology and confidence didn't expect that anything would stand in their way when they charged upon Mexico City. The French army of 7,000 was surprised and defeated by a small Mexican army of 2,000 men led by General Ignacio Zaragoza. **Although the war was eventually won by France, this small battle was won by dedicated men who fought to protect their country however they could – without technology but with a driving sense of pride, determination and patriotism.** This battle gave the Mexicans a much needed morale boost. Today, Cinco de Mayo is celebrated in Puebla where the battle took place but is a much bigger deal north of the border. For people of Mexican heritage living in the United States, Cinco de Mayo is a day to celebrate Mexican culture and pride with food, music, and Mexican fanfare! In many cities like Denver, Cinco de Mayo is a time for everyone to learn more about Mexico, eat a spicy taco, dance to *música ranchera* and celebrate a beautiful country!

# *Estación de Inmigración – Immigration Station*

Immigration is a hot-button issue in the United States. Our country was founded with the idea that people from all walks of life and all countries, races, religions and creeds could come here and be welcome. Part of what Ana Maria is trying to do is to become more “American” even though her roots are Mexican.

Read the following vocabulary *palabras* (words) to learn more about immigration. Complete the activities that go along with this section.

**Immigration** – the movement of people from one country to another. Often these groups of people settle permanently in another country.

**Immigrant** – a person who leaves his or her homeland to settle permanently in a new country.

- Do you know any immigrants?
- Who are they and what countries are they from?

*Millions of people in the United States today identify themselves as Mexican immigrants or Mexican Americans. They are among both the oldest and newest inhabitants of the nation. Some Mexicans were already living in the Southern and Western regions of the North American continent centuries before the United States existed. Many more Mexicans came to the country during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Mexican immigrants continue to arrive today.*



**Push factors** – factors that “push” people out of their homeland and cause them to move to another country. Some factors are environmental disasters such as famines, floods, hurricanes, mudslides and volcanic eruptions. Others include poverty and human rights abuses.

- What factors might push people out of Mexico into the United States?

**Pull factors** – factors that “pull” or draw people to move to another country permanently. Some examples are the expectation of a better life, better paying jobs and more opportunities for employment or jobs, better education, family members who already live in that country and religious freedom.

- **What factors pull people into the United States?**

**Ethnic groups** – Groups of people who share the same cultural values or characteristics such as the same language, food, customs, clothing, history, holidays, etc.

- **How many ethnic groups are represented at your school?**
- **What ethnic group are you a part of?**

**Waves of Immigration** – Large groups of people often from the same country or the same ethnic group who have immigrated to a new country. In the United States there were large “waves of immigration” from Europe in the mid-1800’s to the early 1900’s. An example would be when millions of people left Ireland to come to the U.S. because of the potato famine.



**The Statue of Liberty** – was a gift to the United States from France and was presented on July 4, 1884. It sits on Liberty Island in the New York Harbor. It was dedicated to symbolize the friendship between the two nations. To the world, it is a symbol of liberty and the desire to be free. In the past, many immigrants would see the Statue of Liberty when they first arrived by boat to the United States. Today it is still one of America’s most popular tourist attractions.

- **Read this excerpt from Emma Lazarus’ poem “The New Colossus” which is printed on a plaque at the Statue of Liberty...**

“...Give me your tired, your poor,  
your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,  
the wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

- **Who are the “tired, poor, huddled masses” in this poem?**
- **What do you think “tempest-tost” means?**
- **What is the “golden door” referring to?**
- **What does this poem say to people coming to the United States?**
- **Do you think that the United States still feels this way about people coming into our country? Why or why not?**

***" Mexican culture brought many firsts to North America: The first Thanksgiving took place in either New Mexico or El Paso (when it was still Mexico); the first university in North America was founded in Mexico City and the first printing press on the continent arrived in Mexico in 1538, more than a century before printing came to New England."*** – Immigration...Mexican: Becoming Part of the United States – [www.memory.loc.gov](http://www.memory.loc.gov)



**Passport** – an official government document that certifies one's identity and citizenship and permits a citizen to travel abroad.

**Visa** – in the United States, a visa allows you to enter the country at the border. There are two categories of U.S. visas – immigrant and nonimmigrant. Immigrant visas are for people who intend to live permanently in the U.S. and nonimmigrant visas are for people with permanent residence outside the U.S. but who wish to be here on a temporary basis – for tourism, medical treatment, business, temporary work or study.

- Do some research and name five countries that require visas to enter.
- Find one country that does not require a visa to enter.
- Does the United States require all foreign citizens to have a visa to enter the country?

**Green Card** – formerly a green colored card, a green card is an official document issued by the U.S. government to "aliens" allowing them to work in this country legally.

**Alien** – Owing political allegiance to another country or government; foreign. Also an unnaturalized foreign resident of a country. Also called a noncitizen.

- What's a more common usage of the word "alien"?
- What do you think of the term "alien" being used to describe people who are noncitizens?
- Even if you were born here you may still encounter a situation where you feel like an outsider.
- Have you ever felt like an "alien"? What was the situation?

**Naturalization** – To grant full citizenship to one of foreign birth.

- To become a U.S. citizen you must go through a long process of getting a visa from your own country, applying for a green card and then applying for citizenship. Right now, it is actually a faster process to become a citizen than it is to get a green card! The whole process may take years. Part of the final process of becoming a citizen is to take a test about U.S. history.
- Here are a few sample questions. Without studying, how many of these questions can you answer?
  - How many stars are there in our flag?
  - What color are the stars on our flag?
  - What do the stars on the flag mean?
  - How many stripes are there in the flag?
  - What date is the Day of Independence?
  - Independence from whom?
  - What country did we fight during the Revolutionary War?
  - Who was the first president of the United States?
  - What do we call a change of the constitution?

**Assimilation** – To bring to a likeness or to conformity; to cause a resemblance between; to become similar or like something else.

- Part of Ana Maria's challenge lies in trying to determine how much of her Mexican heritage she wants to hold on to and how much she wants to assimilate into American society. She is dressing differently than her father would like her to, she changes the way she acts outside of the house, she listens to American music and even wants people to call her Anne instead of Ana Maria.
- Here's how her brother (who has gone through the same difficulty) describes it:



...When she leaves your house  
Strips off her accent,  
Tries so hard to hide  
Hopes that her shame  
Will at long last subside  
Tightens her clothing,  
Paints up her face  
Struggling and searching  
All over the place  
I know how she feels, Papá  
I felt it, myself...

- Later, Esteban, Ana Maria's father tells her:  
Yo te permito ser quien deseas. (I will let you be who you wish to be.)  
Pero no es necesario olvidar toda tu historia. (But it's not necessary to forget all of your history.)

- She responds:

I can never be me  
If you make me be Mexican.  
Why can't you understand that?

- Do you relate to Ana Maria and Rodolfo in this situation or to Esteban?
- Have you ever felt like you wanted to assimilate to something different than you are?
- We all play different roles in our lives – even if we aren't trying to change who we are. Think about the roles you play in your life and list the ways you act with these groups of people:

In my role as a...      *Son/Daughter*      I act...

*Brother/Sister*

*Friend*

*Grandson/Granddaughter*

When I'm at...      *School*      I act...

*Church*

*The mall*

*Alone in my room*

- Are there other situations or places that change how you act? List them below...

**Music and Immigration** - One of the most popular musicals ever created is called *West Side Story*. Have you heard of it? Created in 1961, it's a 20<sup>th</sup> century, loose retelling of the story of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, a tragedy about feuding families whose children are in love. *West Side Story* takes place in the Upper West Side of New York City and highlights the racial strife between rival gangs – newly arrived Puerto Ricans and white Americans. First, read an excerpt of the lyrics that the Puerto Rican girls sing from the song "America" and then an excerpt of Esteban's (Ana Maria's father) story of his life.

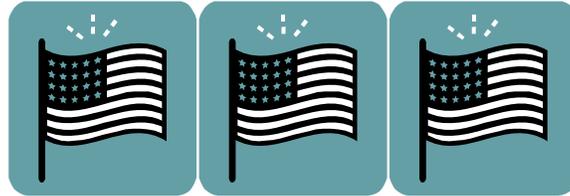


Puerto Rico...  
You ugly island...  
Island of tropic diseases.  
Always the hurricanes blowing,  
Always the population growing...  
And the money owing,  
And the babies crying,  
And the bullets flying.  
I like the island Manhattan...  
...I like to be in America!  
O.K. by me in America!  
Ev'rything free in America  
For a small fee in America!  
...I like the shores of America!  
Comfort is yours in America!  
Knobs on the doors in America,  
Wall-to-wall floors in America!  
- *West Side Story*



I've never been smart,  
Never did well in school,  
Was working the fields  
By the time I was eight.  
En los campos calientes (In the hot fields)  
Remolinos en mi mente (Swirling thoughts in my mind)  
Just one simple thing  
Kept me from sealing my fate.  
I looked up to the sky  
And raised up a fist  
And shouted, "Dios, (God)  
Juro por mi muerte, (I swear on my death)  
Tengo un corazón fuerte, (I have a strong heart)  
And enough common sense  
To hatch one simple plan.  
My children, my children,  
Won't have to be me.  
Won't suffer while straining  
And pulling a plow  
My children, my children,  
Can be anything  
And my spirit was lifted  
On the strength of this vow.  
- *En Mis Palabras*

- Do you think that the girls from Puerto Rico in *West Side Story* and Esteban have a similar dream?
- How does each character feel about their homeland? Are they singing about it in positive terms?
- Do you think that they will find a better life in America?



**Border Ballads** – Mexican Americans overcame their situations in part through a new type of music – the *corrido* or border ballad - in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the borderlands between the United States and Mexico were once again torn by political and social instability. Shaped by hard times and long distances, these storytelling songs were much like musical newspapers and carried news of current events and popular legends around the border region, also called *la frontera*. Passed from one singer to another, many of these songs survive to the present day.

- We can learn much about the lives and cultural values of a people through their music just as we are learning about Ana Maria’s feelings of being a Mexican in present-day American society.
- What types of music today tell stories about difficult times and colorful characters like the corridos did?
- Why does music make such a wonderful vehicle for telling the stories of people and the past?
- Choose a topic that is in the news or happening at your school and write a song about it!

**Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?** The United States has been characterized as a “melting pot” in which each ingredient blends into a single dish. Likewise the U.S. has been characterized as a “salad bowl” in which each ingredient reserves its own flavor and texture while contributing to the salad as a whole. President Jimmy Carter characterized the nature of the U.S. like this, ***“We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.”***

- So who is an “American”?
- How do you define an American?
- Does the definition matter? Why or why not?
- How does the diversity of the people here in the United States affect the country?
- How does it affect you?

# **Sources and Special Thanks**

## **Sources**

Day of the Dead – Dave Palfrey

En Mis Palabras – Composed by Roger Ames, Libretto written by Jeffrey Gilden

Library of Congress – Immigration...Mexico

MEXonline.com

National Park Service – Junior Ranger Program, Statue of Liberty National Monument Activity Guide

Statue of Liberty Facts – Gary Feuerstein

Televisa

TV Azteca

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

Virtual School for the Gifted – Extended Metaphor Poems

West Side Story – Music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

West Side Story – Review by Tim Dirks

Wikipedia – online encyclopedia

**Special Thanks to El Centro Su Teatro, Denver's Teatro Chicano, for use of their facilities for rehearsal and performance and as a valuable resource and friend.**



This guide was written and designed by Alyson Vivar,  
Director of Education for Milwaukee Ballet, 2005.

# ***Appendix A: Opera Dictionary***

## ***What is Opera?***

An **opera** is a musical drama or comedy where the actors sing rather than speak their lines. The word "opera" is derived from the Latin word *opus*, which means work (of art). Like a play, an opera is performed on a stage with singer-actors, scenery, costumes and make-up, and lighting.

Opera is truly a **multi-disciplinary** art form, which means it is a combination of many art forms (singing, orchestral music, theater, visual arts, dance) and subject areas (history, mythology, literature). Opera combines these disciplines in a very powerful way to tell a story. Opera can be funny, sad, scary, dramatic, mysterious, fantastical or any combination of feelings and moods.

The **libretto** contains all of the words of an opera. Italian for "little book," a libretto is usually shorter than the script for a play because it takes longer to sing lines than to say them, and because music is also a very important part of telling the story of an opera. The person who writes the words for an opera is often a playwright or poet and is called a **librettist**.

The **composer** writes the music for the opera. All of the music, both vocal (for singers) and orchestral (for instrumentalists) is written in the **score** with separate lines for each instrument and each singer's vocal part. The score, as a piece of music, reflects the mood, events and emotions of the characters in the story.

**Characters** are the people in the story. Singers perform the parts of the characters, also called **roles**.

A **synopsis** is a short written summary of the story.

## ***The Performers***

The **Music Director** is responsible for the interpretation of the score. The Music Director is also usually the **conductor**, who is responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor stands at the front of the orchestra pit and uses a **baton** (a short white stick) and his/her arms and body to interpret the music, cue singers and instrumentalists and keep the beat so everybody stays together. **Maestro** (**maestra** for a woman) is the Italian word for conductor (literally "master") and is a term of great respect.

**Soprano** is the highest female voice. She is often the heroine of the opera and a lot of the time she is in love with the tenor. A star soprano is often referred to as the "Prima Donna."

**Mezzo-soprano**, or just mezzo, is the second highest, or middle, female voice. The mezzo sound is typically darker and warmer than the soprano. The mezzo usually plays the older female character (like the mother), a bad guy (like a witch), a seductress, or a young man or boy. When the mezzo plays a male character, she will be dressed in men's clothes. This is called a **pants** or **trouser role**. This convention became popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century as a woman's voice is stronger than a boy's voice.

**Alto**, also called **contralto**, is the lowest female voice. The alto often plays an old woman, who can either be wise and good or an old witch.

The **tenor** is the highest male voice and is usually the hero of the opera and generally in love with the soprano.

**Baritone** is the next lowest, or middle, male voice. The baritone is often a villain but can sometimes be a hero who sacrifices himself for the tenor and/or soprano. In a comedy, the baritone is usually the one pulling all kinds of pranks. The baritone is often in love with the soprano but usually loses her to the tenor.

The **bass** has the lowest male voice. He very often plays a wise old man or sometimes a comic character (**basso buffa**). **Basso profundo** describes the lowest bass voice.

**Supernumeraries** or "**supers**," appear on stage in costume in non-singing and non-speaking roles.

The **orchestra** is the group of instrumentalists who accompany the singers. They play under the stage in the orchestra pit where they will be less likely to overpower the singers and detract from the physical action on stage. Even though the orchestra is not on stage, the instrumentalists are equal partners with the singers in performing an opera.

The **chorus** is a group of singers who function as a unit on stage. Choruses can be for mixed voices, men only, women only, or children. They are usually featured in crowd scenes where they can represent townspeople, soldiers, pilgrims, etc.

**Dancers** are often included in an opera. They are usually part of large crowd scenes but can be featured in solo roles as well. Many operas include a short ballet.

### ***The folks behind the scenes - opera production***

Where do you start if you want to put on a production of an opera? Usually the General Director, Artistic Director or Music Director will pick the repertoire, or what operas will be performed. The performance is conceived by the **Production Team**, which consists of the Music Director/Conductor, Stage Director, Choreographer, Scene Designer, Costume Designer, Prop Master, Lighting Designer and Technical Director. These people meet frequently to trade ideas and work together to ensure a cohesive interpretation of the piece from a visual, dramatic and musical standpoint.

The **Stage Director** (sometimes simply called the director) is responsible for the overall look or concept of the production. The director determines how the opera will be interpreted and tells everyone on stage when and where to move, creating "stage pictures" that enhance the story.

The **Choreographer** designs the movement for the dancers.

The **Costume Designer** designs and creates the clothes singers wear to reflect aspects of the character played by the singer and their significance in the story.

The **Scene Designer** creates the visual background and set pieces for the opera. He or she creates a small scale model of the set and detailed blueprints which serve as the "instructions" for building the set. They also work closely with the prop master on hand props, furniture and set decoration.

The **Lighting Designer** creates a lighting plan that emphasizes the drama of the moment. Lighting design is an important visual element that contributes to the ambience of the stage setting and affects the appearance of people, costumes and props on stage.

The **Technical Director** supervises everyone who is implementing the concepts of the designers. He or she works with carpenters, painters, electricians, sound designers and stagehands and oversees the building of sets and props and hanging of lights.

The **Stage Manager** coordinates the visual elements of a show during the performance. He or she is responsible for calling all the cues in the performance for the cast and crew. This means the stage manager warns the cast and crew when acts are about to begin and end, tells the conductor when to start, cues cast members for entrances, and follows hundreds of detailed notes in the score to tell the crew when to change lighting, scenery, sound effects, and raise or lower the curtain.

The **Crew** works behind the scenes and is responsible for setting up and running all of the equipment for a performance, including changing sets, placing and maintaining props, operating the lights, opening and closing the curtains, operating trap doors, sound effects, and assisting performers with costumes and makeup.

### ***What makes an opera?***

**Opera** is a **musical** form. The **orchestra** provides the overriding musical texture, while the **singers** are featured as soloists.

The **overture** is a piece of music played by the orchestra to begin the opera. It usually, but not always, contains some of the musical themes from the opera and sets the mood for what the audience is about to see.

**Recitative**, pronounced re-chi-ta-TEEV, is sung dialogue that propels the action of the story. The singing is generally faster with a rhythm more like regular speech.

An **aria** is an extended musical passage sung as a solo (by one person). It is often very lyrical and accompanied by the orchestra, conveying the emotions of the character at a particular point in the story. The action usually stops while an aria is sung.

A **duet** is an extended musical passage for two singers, a **trio** is sung by three singers, a **quartet** is a piece for four singers, and so on.

An **ensemble** is an extended musical passage for four or more singers. Very often each performer in an ensemble is singing different words and different musical lines.

**Choral** scenes usually feature the principal and secondary cast members with the chorus. The sheer number of voices on stage is usually reserved for moments of high drama and spectacle. Dancers might also be featured in a big choral scene.

The **finale** is the last number in an act. It usually involves many singers and is very dramatic.

Operas are often performed in a **different language**, usually the language in which they were originally written. Even if you cannot understand the language, you can usually get a good idea of what is happening from the **music** and the **actions** of the characters.

**Supertitles** or **surtitles** are the translation of the words of an opera projected above the stage at the same time the character(s) on stage is singing them. Even if an opera is performed in English, supertitles are often used to help the audience follow the story.

## ***Other opera terms and fun things to know!***

**Bel canto**, literally “beautiful singing,” describes the musical style of an opera that is lyrical and often very flowery.

**Bravo**, literally “brave” or “courageous,” is a form of applause when shouted by members of the audience at the end of an especially pleasing performance. Strictly speaking, bravo is for a single man, **brava** for a single woman and **bravi** for more than one performer.

**Cadenza** is a brilliant passage in an aria often improvised by the singer, usually in such a way as to best display his or her vocal talents. Cadenzas are virtuosic and rhythmically free.

**Coloratura** describes a voice that possesses unusual flexibility, able to sing many notes quickly over a wide range. This term is most often used to describe female voices, i.e. coloratura soprano or mezzo, but occasionally men will have this same ability.

The **concertmaster** or **concertmistress** is the first chair violinist who leads the orchestra in tuning at the beginning of each act and coordinates the strings section, deciding on the bowing so that all the bows move in unison.

**Div**a, literally “goddess,” refers to an important female opera star. The masculine form is **divo**.

**Leitmotiv**, “light-mo-teef,” is a short musical phrase associated with a particular character or event. These repeated musical themes can signal the entrance of a character, foreshadow an event, or help reveal what a character is feeling or thinking.

The **prima donna** is the leading female singer, or “first lady,” in an opera. Because of the way opera stars have behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding way. **Div**a can have the same connotation.

**Tempo** refers to how fast or slow the music is performed. The conductor reads the composer’s markings and sets the speed of the music.

An **understudy** is someone who learns a main role in an opera in case the lead can’t perform for some reason. This is also called a **cover**, i.e. Miss Trill is covering the role of Buttercup.



## **Appendix B: How to be a Good Audience for a live performance**

Unlike actors on your television, performers on the stage are aware of their audience and want very much to communicate their art to you and feel your appreciation in turn. In fact, by the time you arrive for a scheduled performance, many people (composers, singers, musicians, dancers, technicians, costume, set and lighting designers, etc.) have worked very hard to bring you their best efforts. In order to show respect for those efforts, every audience member must give the performance their full attention and avoid any behavior that interferes with anyone else doing the same. We have rules that help us accomplish this goal, and you should do your best to understand and follow them:

1. Turn off your cell phone, pager and anything else you have with you that might beep, ring, buzz or make any sort of noise during the performance.
2. No shoving or running.
3. No cameras or video recorders. Flashes are dangerous for performers and unapproved photos and videos violate copyright laws.
4. No hooting, whistling or yelling during the performance. The performance has begun when anyone on stage starts talking, singing or dancing, or when the orchestra starts playing. You are welcome to show your appreciation for the performance with applause at the end of the performance or sometimes at the end of a section or solo. You are also welcome to laugh if someone on stage is being intentionally funny.
5. No talking or whispering during the performance. You will have plenty of time to discuss your impressions at intermission or after the show.
6. No gum, candy or food in the theatre (it makes noise and sticky messes).
7. Use the bathroom before the show begins or at intermission, not during the performance.

## **Appendix C: Colorado Model Content Standards**

*En Mis Palabras* and the accompanying study materials support Colorado Model Content Standards in Music, Foreign Language, Reading and Writing, History, Geography, Theatre, Visual Arts, and Civics.

Watching and discussing the performance:

Music #4 and 5, Reading and Writing #4, Theatre #4 and 6, Visual Arts #4

STUDY MATERIALS:

Bienvenidos: Music #5

En Mis Palabras: Reading/Writing #1

El Poder de Nuestras Palabras – The Power of our Own Words:

Reading/Writing #2 and 4, Theatre #6

Drama, drama y más Drama, The Spanish Telenovela: History #4,

Reading/Writing #1, 2 and 4, Theatre # 2

La Canción de un Pajaro – Songbird – Rodolfo's Extended Metaphor Poem:

Reading/Writing #1, 2, 3, 4 and 6

Mexico, Colorado – an Investigation of Mexican Culture: Foreign Language

#2, Geography #4 and 6, History #3, Reading/Writing #1, 2 and 4, Civics #3

Dia de los Muertos: Reading/Writing #1, History #3 and 5, Geography #6

Estación de Inmigración – Immigration Station: Geography #6, History #3

and 5, Reading/Writing #1 and 4, Civics #3, Music #4 and 5

Opera Dictionary: Music #5, Reading/Writing #1 and 4

## **Appendix D: Central City Opera's Department of Education & Community Programs**

Central City Opera's Education and Community Programs bring opera, music, theater and MAGIC to thousands of students, families and adults each year through our travels around the region. Each year, Central City Opera presents some 200 touring programs - workshops for students and educators, school residencies, previews, concerts and classes for life-long learners reach the far corners of Colorado and into Wyoming and Nebraska.

As one of Colorado's oldest performing arts and historic preservation organizations, we take our responsibility to the people of the region very seriously. You have generously supported us for more than 75 years and we demonstrate our very heartfelt thanks in part by bringing programs to your communities.

*"How the West Was Sung was presented in the most amazing way. The music, costumes, dance and artwork were superb and engaging. The humor that was interwoven throughout the production was priceless! It made the adults laugh along with the students and that rarely happens with school assemblies. It is rare that so many of the state standards are met in one assembly. Your cast made eye contact with many students . . . they felt like they were part of the performance. What a gift!"*

- Jennifer Steele, 4th grade teacher, South Lakewood Elementary.

### **To find out more contact:**

Deborah Morrow – Director of Education & Community Programs  
303/292-6500, ext. 107  
[dmorrow@centralcityopera.org](mailto:dmorrow@centralcityopera.org)

