

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Do one the following activities with your students after seeing *The Barber of Seville*.

### Activity #1: "The Telephone Game"

Don Basilio sings an aria about rumors and the speed at which they spread. Play a game of "Telephone" in your class to explore this idea. Sit in a circle and whisper a simple sentence into the ear of the person next to you. Make sure no one else hears it! The next person whispers what they heard to the person seated next to them. This continues around the circle (or down the line, if you prefer) until the last player says what they heard out loud. How did the sentence change? What does this say about how rumors spread and change?

### Activity #2: The History of Barbers

Throughout history, barbers have done much more than administer a shave and a haircut. Research the role of the barber from Egyptian culture to the modern day. How many different jobs is the barber's role now split into?

### Activity #3: The Five C's

**CHARACTERS:** Were they interesting? Believable? Are their actions, words, and thoughts consistent?  
**CONFLICT:** What conflicts were established? How were they resolved?  
**CLIMAX:** How did the conflict lead to the climax of the opera?  
**CONCLUSION:** What is the conclusion of the opera? Was it consistent? Satisfying? Believable?  
**CONTEXT:** What are the historical, physical, and emotional settings? What about the sets and costumes?

Using the Five C's, have your students respond to the following:

- Re-tell the story of *The Barber of Seville*.
- What were some of the recurring themes in the opera?
- If you were the stage director, would you have done something differently? Why?
- What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
- What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

This study guide was compiled from the following sources:

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*Smart and Soulful Music*  
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## The Barber of Seville

### EDUCATIONAL STUDY GUIDE



## THE BASICS

The Barber of Seville (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*)  
Premiered on February 20, 1816, at the Teatro Argentina in Rome, Italy  
Music: Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)  
Libretto: Cesare Sterbini (1784-1831)  
Based on Pierre Beaumarchais's play *Le Barbier de Séville*

## CHARACTERS

| Name        | Description                 | Voice Type               | Pronunciation  |
|-------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Figaro      | A barber                    | Baritone                 | FEE-gah-roh    |
| Rosina      | Bartolo's young ward        | Mezzo Soprano or Soprano | roh-ZEE-nah    |
| Almaviva    | A count                     | Tenor                    | al-mah-VEE-vah |
| Bartolo     | A doctor, Rosina's guardian | Bass                     | BAR-toh-loh    |
| Don Basilio | A music teacher             | Bass                     | bah-ZEE-lee-oh |
| Berta       | A servant to Bartolo        | Mezzo Soprano            | BER-tah        |
| Fiorello    | A servant to Almaviva       | Bass                     | fee-oh-REL-loh |
| Ambrogio    | A servant to Bartolo        | Silent                   | ahm-BROH-joh   |
| The Officer |                             | Silent                   |                |

## SYNOPSIS

### Act I

Count Almaviva serenades Rosina, who lives in a house with her elderly guardian, Dr. Bartolo. Figaro the barber enters, boasting of his many talents, and recognizes the Count. Almaviva offers Figaro a reward if he can arrange a meeting between him and Rosina. Almaviva—pretending to be a poor student named Lindoro—sings another melody, telling Rosina he has no wealth and can offer only love. Figaro suggests to Almaviva that he should disguise himself as a soldier to gain entry into Bartolo's home. Inside Bartolo's home, Rosina, determined to be united with her suitor, has written a love letter to "Lindoro." Figaro enters and conceals himself when Bartolo enters with his accomplice, the singing teacher Don Basilio. Basilio warns him of Almaviva's intentions towards Rosina and Bartolo replies that he himself wants to marry his ward and gain her dowry. Figaro approaches to tell Rosina that Lindoro is in love with her, and that he will arrange a meeting between them. When Figaro departs, Bartolo accuses Rosina of trying to deceive him. Almaviva enters, disguised as a drunken soldier, and gives Rosina a note. Bartolo demands to see it, and Rosina hands him last week's laundry list instead. Bartolo angrily protests at the presence of a drunken soldier and a platoon of troops arrives to arrest Almaviva. However, when Almaviva secretly reveals his true name and title to the officer in charge, he is immediately released.

### Act II

Inside Bartolo's home, Almaviva appears in the disguise of a music teacher, substituting for the supposedly ill Basilio. The suspicious Bartolo refuses to leave the room during the singing lesson, but Almaviva and Rosina succeed in exchanging words of endearment. When Basilio arrives in fine health, he is bribed by Almaviva to leave. While Figaro is shaving Bartolo, the lovers plan their elopement. They are, however, overheard by Bartolo, who is furious at their deception. He throws Figaro and Almaviva out of his home, and sends for a notary so he can marry Rosina without delay. In the evening, Almaviva and Figaro return to Bartolo's home. Almaviva sneaks inside and reveals his true identity to the astonished Rosina. The notary arrives with a marriage contract and, at Figaro's instruction, enters Almaviva's name on the contract in place of Bartolo's. Bartolo enters to find Rosina and Almaviva married, but is consoled when Almaviva allows him to keep her dowry.

## WHAT IS RECITATIVE?

The sung portions of operas can be broken into three types of music: arias (solo songs), ensembles (duets, trios, quartets, choruses, etc.), and recitatives. Recitatives are related to speech or recitation, and unlike arias or ensembles which often stretch out words or phrases for dramatic effect, recitatives follow the rhythm of natural speech. The main purpose of them is to quickly advance the plot of the story.

### There are two kinds of recitative:

**Secco (dry) Recitative** – the singer delivers the words on pitch and a continuo (keyboard) player changes the harmonies underneath the recitative.

Example: "Date lor mezzo scudo" from Rossini's *Cinderella (La Cenerentola)*

**Accompanied Recitative** – the singer still delivers the words on pitch, but is instead accompanied by the orchestra. Often the orchestra and the singer will trade short phrases. The orchestra will usually reflect the meaning of the text.

Example: "Hai già vinta la causa!" from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro (Le nozze di Figaro)*

Check out Leonard Bernstein's video "What is a Recitative?": <https://youtu.be/IDq4KqP7Pxs>

## LISTENING GUIDE

### Sinfonia (Overture)

- The overture is an introductory piece of music that gets the audience's attention and sets up the energy of the story you are about to see and hear.
- Typical structure of a Rossini overture: slow introduction -> quick main section -> modulation -> repeat of the quick main section.
- Rossini Crescendo – a gradual increase of volume and intensity by slowly adding more wind and percussion instruments leading to an explosion of sound.
- Recycling of music: Rossini often composed so much music all the time and often waited until the last minute to write the overture. For *The Barber of Seville* he decided to use an overture he had used for two previous operas. But somehow, it still works perfectly!

### Act 1, Cavatina: "Largo al factotum della città" ("I'm the factotum of the city")

- In this aria, Figaro, who is the barber of Seville, introduces himself to the audience and lists all the skills he has as a barber.
- We call this a patter song. It features a lot of words that have to be sung at quick tempo. Patter songs are often intended to be funny and to show off the skills of the singer.
- This is a baritone voice singing this aria. How would you describe the sound of their voice?

### Act 1, Cavatina: "Una voce poco fa qui nel cor mi risuonò" ("A voice echoes here in my heart")

- Rosina has finished writing a letter to her mysterious lover Lindoro expressing her undying love. She tells us that she will not let anyone get in her way, even if she has to be mean!
- This aria is in the standard *Cavatina-Cabaletta* structure, meaning that the first section is slower, followed by a faster section.
- Rosina sings a lot of coloratura passages in this aria. Coloratura refers to singing more than one note per syllable, often with lots of quick scales going up and down.
- This is a mezzo-soprano voice singing this aria. How would you describe the sound of their voice?
  - Note, in the NOOA production, Rosina will be performed by a soprano, a higher voice.

### Act 2, Interlude: "Temporale" ("Thunderstorm")

- Many times in opera, or any other piece of theatre, we have to represent the passage of time in creative ways. Here, Rossini crafted an orchestral interlude before the final scene in the form of a musical thunderstorm.
- Listen for the different instruments and discuss what you parts of a thunderstorm you think they represent.

### Act 2, Terzetto (Trio): "Zitti, ziti, piano, piano" ("Not a sound, quiet")

- Lindoro reveals his true identity as the Count to Rosina, while Figaro urges them to quickly escape.
- This scene offers up a lot of humor. They are singing about trying to be quiet and escape, but yet they keep singing and delaying their exit, and often end up singing quite loudly. We would call this comedic irony – the characters are saying one thing but doing the opposite for a humorous effect.
- This is a trio of voices – Rosina (mezzo-soprano), the Count (tenor), and Figaro (baritone). Since the song is so short, listen to it three times, paying attention to a different singer each time.

### Spotify Playlist for Recitative examples and Listening Guide examples:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3Sikj5GqNluQJup8DLJuuM?si=7af95f6fd651438a>