

## Opera by Children Background

### Background:

- Opera by Children is partially funded by the State Office of Education POPS program... Professional Organizations Providing Services in the schools. We receive about 1/3 of our yearly budget through that means. The rest is from private foundations and individuals giving to Utah Festival Opera Company for education.
- All of our services are provided free of charge to teachers and schools within the State of Utah. Outside the state of Utah we request a \$500 fee for the Music Mentor—if we have the personnel to cover additional classes beyond those in Utah. Consultation via telephone and email is always available at no charge for any stage of the opera process.
- Currently 180 teachers throughout Utah, Washington, Idaho, Nevada and California are participating in Opera by Children.
- This is a *teacher-mentoring* program that over time prepares teachers to assume nearly all of the teaching processes.
- Teachers may earn recertification points or two USOE Workshop Credits (CACTUS) OR may register for Two USU Continuing Education credits.

### Purpose:

1. To teach teachers how to empower children to think for themselves through the opera-writing process—just a new approach to an age-old ideal of positive affirmation. We use the philosophy of Trust, Risk, Affirmation and Growth (TRAG) as the basis for everything we do applied through these three rules:

**1-No one gets hurt 2-Everyone participates 3-It is entirely the student's work**

2. To give teachers a tool (Opera by Children) that they may use in countless ways, but our favorite way is *integrated across the curriculum*. The most successful teachers help the class select a subject from Science, Social Studies, Health, to Math in order to write an opera story based on something they are studying. It is very neat to see what happens! Children never forget what they sing, and they have sung everything from the size and weight of the Statue of Liberty to the geology of Utah. (As in, “The Statue of Liberty Goes on a Diet” and “The Utah Rock Opera.”)

3. To instruct teachers in how to become creative process facilitators

Participation and Services for Utah Teachers: (If you are outside the state of Utah, contact Susan Ames [ames@ufoc.org](mailto:ames@ufoc.org) for possible assistance with various steps in the process)

1. A teacher must attend a training that prepares him/her for participation.
2. After the workshop, the teacher is included on our roster for the ensuing school year.
3. Utah Festival Opera – Opera by Children contracts with mentors whom we have trained to assist each new teacher with:
4. Writing an original story and libretto with the class. See:  
<http://operabychildren.org/training/manual.html>

- Setting the libretto to music ( created by the children, but scored and recorded by a music mentor)
- Creating sets and scenery
- Staging and preparing for performance

**The process takes time. It cannot be accomplished in less than three months and still meet all the desired outcomes:** The story writing begins as soon as school is underway. Music happens about 6 to 8 weeks later, when the story and libretto are complete. Creation of scenery can take place at the teacher's discretion - when they are ready. Rehearsals with assistance for staging usually occur in the early spring with a performance in April or May. THAT is the desirable approximate schedule for perfect results. It makes it possible for the opera to be included as a small part of the day several days a week spread over nearly the entire school year.

Individual teachers control when they are able to take the time to invite mentors for the initial phases of the opera ... i.e. story, libretto, music, art, staging. Each visit takes approximately 45 minutes to an hour (depending on the class size, age, and abilities.) Mentors make as many visits as teachers need but as few as possible so that the teacher may assume rightful control.

#### Basic Steps:

- The teacher introduces opera to the group using correct terminology, shows the Opera Highlights DVD, and begins singing with the class. The teacher determines what type of opera the class should create, i.e. completely original from new ideas, original based on folktale and fairytale stories, or based on a core curriculum such as history, science, or math.
- A drama mentor comes to help the group begin their five sentence story.
- The teacher continues to work with the class until the story is complete.
- The drama mentor returns to assist the class in changing the story into a libretto (words the characters will sing and act out).
- The teacher continues working with the class until the libretto is complete.
- The music mentor assists the class in creating melodies for their libretto.
- Teacher facilitates the class in creating designs for the scenery and costumes
- Art mentor visits the class to retrieve ideas for their opera scenery and to help create a plan for art day.
- Teacher gathers all the materials required for a successful art day
- Art mentor comes and helps the class to create scenery: a great Art day!
- Music mentor returns the music.
- Teacher assists the class in learning the opera
- Teacher facilitates auditions—group casts the opera
- Drama mentor comes to help stage the opera
- Teacher helps them to continue staging the opera
- Drama mentor returns to assist with staging
- Class continues to practice the opera
- Drama mentor returns for a dress rehearsal to help with any final adjustments the class may need
- Teacher and students put together a performance evening and they perform.