

HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO FOR LOVE? WOULD YOU TRAVEL HALFWAY around the world? Would you forsake your fear of suffering? Would you return from the brink of death, or transform into another being? *Florencia en el Amazonas* by Daniel Catán, one of the most prominent composers of Spanish-language opera of his generation, tells the enchanting story of a Brazilian opera diva who returns to her homeland to perform at the legendary opera house of Manaus—and to search for her lost lover, who has vanished into the jungle. Along the way, we meet a motley crew of characters aboard the steamship *El Dorado*, all faced with the crises and comforts of romantic love, the pitfalls of professional life, and the transcendent power of nature.

This work, with a libretto by Mexican writer Marcela Fuentes-Berain and inspired by the magical realism of Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez, is the first Spanish-language opera to grace the stage of the Metropolitan Opera in almost a century. In the spellbinding new production directed by Mary Zimmerman and conducted by Met Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin, vivid costumes, glowing projections and lighting design, and spectacular puppetry bring to life the mysterious and magical realm of the Amazon. “I wanted to put the emphasis on the landscape and the sky—the gorgeous setting of the Amazon,” Zimmerman remarks. “Another thing that’s present in the production is the flora and fauna of the Amazon, which is all exaggerated. There are exaggerated takes on water lilies, and there’s a heron and a hummingbird and butterflies. We have dancers and actors as those creatures, but we also have some puppet evocations as well, which heighten everything in terms of color.” Soprano Ailyn Pérez stars as the opera diva Florencia Grimaldi, alongside a distinguished ensemble of artists, including soprano Gabriella Reyes as the journalist Rosalba, bass-baritone Greer Grimsley as the ship’s captain, and baritone Mattia Olivieri as the mystical, shape-shifting Riolo.

This guide approaches *Florencia en el Amazonas* as a window onto the world of Daniel Catán’s varied compositional output and the flora and fauna of the Amazon that provide the opera’s setting. Along the way, students will have the opportunity to explore the history of opera in Mexico and Latin America, the tenets of magical realism, and the narrative elements driving the passengers aboard the *El Dorado*—whether they reach their final destination or not.



PÉREZ

REYES

HERRERA

CHANG

CHIOLDI

GRIMSLEY

THE WORK

An opera in two acts, sung in Spanish

Music by Daniel Catán

Libretto by Marcela Fuentes-Barain

First performed October 25, 1996, at Houston Grand Opera

PRODUCTION

Mary Zimmerman Production

Riccardo Hernandez Set Designer

Ana Kuzmanic Costume Designer

T.J. Gerckens Lighting Designer

S. Katy Tucker Projection Designer

Alex Sanchez Choreographer

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD

December 9, 2023

Ailyn Pérez Florencia

Gabriella Reyes Rosalba

Nancy Fabiola Herrera Paula

Mario Chang Arcadio

Michael Chioldi Alvaro

Mattia Olivieri Riolo

Greer Grimsley Captain

Yannick Nézet-Séguin Conductor

Production a gift of The Sybil B. Harrington Endowment Fund

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Part of the Neubauer Family Foundation New Works Initiative

Florencia en el Amazonas Educator Guide
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The Metropolitan Opera Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera regardless of their prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with the opera. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students explore *Florencia en el Amazonas* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that they will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCING THE OPERA

WHO'S WHO IN FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS: An introduction to the opera's main characters

THE STORY AND SOURCE: A synopsis for young readers, alongside information about the opera's literary forebears

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

TIMELINES: One or more timelines connecting the opera to events in world history

DEEP DIVES: Interdisciplinary essays providing additional insights

FUN FACTS: Entertaining tidbits about *Florencia en el Amazonas*

OPERA IN THE CLASSROOM

ACTIVE EXPLORATION: Hands-on activities connecting the opera to topics in music, the humanities, STEM, and the arts

CRITICAL INQUIRIES: Questions and thought experiments designed to foster careful thinking

HANDOUTS: Classroom-ready worksheets that support the activities in this guide

To access this guide online, including any audio selections and handouts, visit metopera.org/florenciaguide.

WHO'S WHO IN *FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Florencia Grimaldi A legendary opera diva	floh-REN-see-yah	soprano	Florencia has achieved great fame as a singer, but she hasn't returned to her native South America for 20 years. She boards the <i>El Dorado</i> with plans to sing at the opera house in Manaus, Brazil, and seek her long-lost lover Cristobal. Traveling incognito and weary of fame, Florencia aims to recover her true self apart from the myth her name carries.
Riolobo A mystical, shape-shifting character	ree-oh-LOH-boh	bass-baritone	Appearing as an angel, a river spirit, a harbinger of death, and a waiter, Riolobo interacts with each of the passengers on the <i>El Dorado</i> and guides them on their journeys—both literal and emotional.
Rosalba A young journalist	roh-SAL-bah	soprano	Rosalba has spent two years writing a book about the legendary opera singer Florencia Grimaldi. She hopes to catch Florencia's performance in Manaus but has no idea that Florencia is also aboard the <i>El Dorado</i> . She also has no idea that she will meet Arcadio, the captain's nephew, and confront her fears of romantic love.
Paula Alvaro's wife	POW-lah	mezzo-soprano	Paula, a middle-aged woman, is in an unhappy marriage with Alvaro. They hope that their trip on the <i>El Dorado</i> to see Florencia perform in Manaus will rekindle their romance. They bicker constantly, but when Alvaro disappears into the river during a storm, Paula realizes how she has let her own pride and anger get in the way of their love.
Alvaro Paula's husband	AL-vah-roh	baritone	An unhappy husband to Paula, Alvaro almost completely disregards her wishes. When a storm strikes the <i>El Dorado</i> , he has an opportunity to be selfless. While pushing a log away from the boat, he falls into the river. Riolobo eventually brings him back from the dead, and he reunites with Paula.
Arcadio The captain's nephew	ar-KAH-dee-oh	tenor	Arcadio feels condemned to a life of wandering and purposelessness. When he meets Rosalba and takes the helm of the ship during a turbulent storm, he realizes his own potential and resolves to pursue his dream—buoyed by his newfound love for Rosalba.
The Captain Captain of the <i>El Dorado</i>		bass	The captain of the <i>El Dorado</i> is content with his life. Throughout the journey, he looks out for all his passengers—giving advice to Arcadio, providing clues about Cristobal's whereabouts to Florencia, calling to Riolobo for protection, redirecting the ship after it runs aground, and keeping everyone onboard to prevent the spread of cholera once they arrive.

Synopsis

ACT I: *The El Dorado, a steamboat sailing down the Amazon from Leticia, Colombia, to Manaus, Brazil, in the early 1900s.* Florencia Grimaldi, a famous opera diva, arrives incognito to board the *El Dorado*. As passengers reach the dock, vendors offer various goods, fruits, elixirs, and liquor. Riolobo, a shape-shifting mystical figure, announces Florencia's arrival and her plan to sing at the reopening of the opera house in Manaus—her first performance in South America in two decades. He then introduces the other passengers one by one: the captain, who relishes life (and is rewarded in return); Arcadio, the captain's nephew, cursed to be dissatisfied with his lot; Rosalba, a young journalist writing a biography of Florencia; and Paula and Alvaro, a middle-aged married couple on the rocks. As the captain announces all aboard and the ship begins to pull away, Florencia realizes she has missed the embarkment and runs towards the boat. She takes Riolobo's hand and jumps on board just as it departs.

Once aboard, Rosalba approaches Florencia, still in disguise. Florencia recounts how she scorned her former lover, Cristobal, to advance her career as a performer. She regrets having forsaken her homeland and has returned at last to rediscover her true self. In the engine room of the ship, Arcadio and the captain check the steam valves. Arcadio, distracted by his own feelings of inadequacy, asks his uncle for guidance. Later, Arcadio and Rosalba meet on deck. Rosalba accidentally drops her notebook over the side of the boat. She reaches for it, despairing that she has lost two years of work, but Arcadio holds her back and retrieves the notebook. When Rosalba tells him she is writing a book about Florencia, Arcadio confesses he feels that he has wasted his life. Paula and Alvaro appear on the deck, dressed elegantly to dine, and immediately begin to bicker. Alvaro orders wine, Champagne, and marinated iguana despite Paula's revulsion at the dish. She throws her wedding ring into the Champagne bottle, and he follows suit. As they confess their inability to forgive one another, Alvaro throws the bottle overboard.

The next morning, Florencia emerges from her cabin and talks with the captain. He recalls encountering a young butterfly hunter, Cristobal Ribeiro da Silva, who went in search of the rare "emerald muse" and was lost in the jungle. Realizing the butterfly hunter is her former love, Florencia faints. The captain wakes her and she retires to her cabin. That afternoon, Arcadio, Rosalba, Paula, and Alvaro play cards on deck. Split into teams of two, Arcadio and Rosalba—sensing their romance bloom—defeat Paula and Alvaro, who continue to argue. At the helm of the ship, the captain feels red rain fall on his uniform. He calls for Riolobo as the current grows stronger and asks Rosalba to fetch Arcadio. Thunder and lightning strike as Paula and Alvaro appear, both sick from the storm. Florencia, too, surfaces. As the storm heightens, the passengers confess their deepest wishes: Rosalba, to meet Florencia and interview her; Florencia, to find Cristobal; Paula and Alvaro, to remain by each other's side. Arcadio finally arrives and confesses his love to Rosalba. Meanwhile, Alvaro offers to help push a log away



Costume sketch by Ana Kuzmanic for Florencia's first appearance on the dock

from the ship and falls into the river. A lightning bolt strikes the captain, and he falls unconscious. Riolobo appears as a winged creature hovering above the river. He begs the river to have mercy, summoning the chorus to echo his call. While the storm rages on, Arcadio takes the helm of the ship as it runs adrift.

ACT II: *The disabled ship, beached by the side of the river, is covered by a large mosquito net.* In her cabin, Florencia wonders whether she is alive or dead. She calls out to Cristobal, striking her mirror; it shatters and cuts her hand. Having confirmed that she is indeed alive, she resolves to find Cristobal. Arcadio and Rosalba, on opposite sides of the boat, are relieved to find each other safe and sound. They express feelings for each other but refuse to become lovers, fearing they would suffer too much, and part ways. Paula emerges, searching for Alvaro on the riverbank and wondering how she can live without him.

The *El Dorado* sets off again on its journey. Riolobo appears, thanking the river spirits for not destroying the ship. The captain returns, impressed by how well Arcadio handled the boat during the storm. Arcadio feels ill and attributes it to seasickness,

A scene from Act II during technical rehearsals at the Met



but the captain thinks he is merely lovesick. He gives Arcadio an amulet. Rosalba, Florencia, and Paula reappear. Just as Paula prepares to report that Alvaro is gone, he reemerges, to everyone's shock. He tells them that he died in the storm but was resurrected by Paula's voice, which Riobobo confirms. Rosalba, meanwhile, finds her notebook destroyed and laments losing her work. Florencia comforts her, revealing that the singer she admires so deeply only became a great performer after falling in love. Rosalba counters that the diva Grimaldi is a free woman who never succumbed to love. Florencia encourages Rosalba to let love overcome her; only then will she become a great writer. Rosalba realizes Florencia's true identity, and they embrace. The captain emerges, announcing the ship's arrival in Manaus.

Arcadio tells Rosalba that they will arrive in time to see Florencia perform, and she kisses him. They swear to love each other without fear. Meanwhile, Paula and Alvaro recommit to each other. Riobobo suddenly appears, announcing that cholera has overtaken Manaus. The captain reassures the passengers that they will be safe from the disease if they quarantine onboard. Florencia realizes she will not be able to perform at the opera house and exits in despair. Coffins from the city float down the river. Florencia appears once more on the deck, singing out for Cristobal. Determined not to lose him again, she transforms into a butterfly and goes in search of her lost love.



The Work of Gabriel García Márquez

After seeing a production of Daniel Catán's second opera *La Hija de Rappaccini* (*Rappaccini's Daughter*), Colombian author and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014) expressed interest in writing a libretto for the composer. Ultimately, the job fell to his student, Marcela Fuentes-Berain, who based the work on the magical-realist worlds found across her mentor's oeuvre. The resulting opera, *Florencia en el Amazonas*, is original and not based on any single García Márquez work, but it does share certain aspects of plot and setting with his novel *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (*Love in the Time of Cholera*, 1985).

The novel, which takes place in an unnamed port city in Colombia between the 1880s and 1930s, chronicles the lives of Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza over several decades. The two first meet as teenagers and fall in love, but Fermina's father Lorenzo—a conman who disguises himself as a wealthy entrepreneur—explicitly forbids their courtship and takes his daughter to live in another city. Florentino and Fermina, however, continue to write each other letters; they are aided by Fermina's aunt, Escolástica, who helped raise the young Fermina after her mother's death. When Lorenzo learns of the clandestine correspondence, he banishes his sister for her complicity in Fermina and Florentino's romance.

Fermina later marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino, a renowned physician from a noble family dedicated to the eradication of cholera—a disease from which his own father, also a doctor, died. They have two children and remain together until Juvenal dies after falling off a ladder while attempting to reach his pet parrot in a mango tree. After this accident, Florentino once again confesses his love for Fermina and maintains that he has remained faithful to her. (In truth, he has had hundreds of affairs.) Still, the two former lovebirds decide to spend their remaining days together as a couple. At the end of the novel, they take a steamship cruise headed for La Dorada, Colombia—a winding journey that allows them to rekindle their relationship.

Several aspects of *Love in the Time of Cholera* manifest in Catán's opera, foremost among them the transformative power of love. In *Florencia* and Cristobal's story we see a reflection of Florentino and Fermina's lost-and-found romance. The decades-long scope of García Márquez's narrative also tells of young lovers and bickering married couples—both appearing in *Florencia* as Rosalba and Arcadio and Paula and Alvaro, respectively. Other details from the novel also have their analogues in the opera. The steamship cruise provides the broader setting for *Florencia*; the destination of La Dorada perhaps supplies the name of Catán's boat, *El Dorado*; the novel prominently features the steamship captain Diego Samaritano, likely the model for the captain; Juvenal's accidental death falling out of a mango tree roughly approximates Alvaro's (temporary) death after he pushes a tree limb away from the boat; and the decision to quarantine onboard and avoid disembarking also occurs in the novel, though for quite different reasons. One of the opera's final images, which sees coffins from Manaus floating down the Amazon, corresponds precisely to a scene where cholera-infected corpses fill the river's waters.



The Creation of *Florencia en el Amazonas*

1949 Daniel Catán is born on April 3 in Mexico City to a family of Russian and Sephardic Jewish heritage. As a child, Catán's mother encourages him to take piano lessons, and his father introduces him to Cuban music, especially boleros and son.

1963 As a teenager, Catán moves to England to attend boarding school. He continues studying piano, winning several local competitions, and encounters opera for the first time.

1970 Catán earns bachelor's degrees in philosophy from the University of Sussex and in music from the University of Southampton.

1977 Catán earns a PhD in music composition and theory from Princeton University, where he studies with American composer and music theorist Milton Babbitt. He returns to Mexico to work as an administrator at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, where he also founds and conducts a small chamber orchestra.

1979 Catán's first chamber opera *Encuentro en el Ocaso* (*Encounter at Dusk*), with a libretto by Carlos Montemayor, premieres at Teatro de la Ciudad in Mexico City.

1986 Catán is appointed composer-in-residence at Washington National Opera.

1987–89 Catán writes and revises his second opera, *La Hija de Rappaccini* (*Rappaccini's Daughter*), while traveling across Asia. He receives an award from the Japan Foundation to live in Tokyo, after which he travels to Indonesia, where he encounters the Balinese gamelan. Struggling to support himself as a composer, Catán returns to Mexico City and takes a job as loan officer at a local bank.

1991 With a libretto by Juan Tovar, *La Hija de Rappaccini*—based on the eponymous play by Mexican poet and collaborator Octavio Paz and the short story by American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne—premieres at Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Colombian author and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez attends a performance of the opera and subsequently offers to help Catán with a future work.

1994 Catán is the first Mexican composer to have an opera produced in the United States when San Diego Opera stages *La Hija de Rappaccini*. He also writes music for the telenovela *El vuelo del águila* (*The Flight of the Eagle*), about the life of Mexican president Porfirio Díaz.

1996 Catán's third opera, *Florencia en el Amazonas*, premieres at Houston Grand Opera. The first opera in Spanish to be commissioned by a major opera company in the United States, *Florencia*—with a libretto by Marcela Fuentes-Berain, a student of García Márquez—is a joint commission by Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, and Ópera de Colombia.

1998 Houston Grand Opera commissions *Las Bodas de Salsipuedes* (*Salsipuedes, a Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies*), Catán's fourth opera, with a libretto by Eliseo Alberto and Francisco Hinojosa. Catán wins the Plácido Domingo Award, which recognizes the achievements of Hispanic artists and their contributions to opera.

2000 Catán wins a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.



2003 *Florencia en el Amazonas* is performed on the stage of the Teatro Amazonas in Manaus, Brazil.

2004 *Las Bodas de Salsipuedes* premieres at Houston Grand Opera.

2006 *Florencia en el Amazonas* receives its European premiere at Theater Heidelberg in Germany.

2010 Catán's final completed opera, *Il Postino* (*The Postman*), premieres at LA Opera. The libretto is written by Catán himself, based on the novel *Ardiente paciencia* by Chilean writer Antonio Skármeta and the Italian film adaptation directed by Michael Radford. The role of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda is written specifically for tenor Plácido Domingo, a major champion of Catán's music.

2011 Catán dies of natural causes while working on his next opera, *Meet John Doe*, commissioned by the Sarah and Ernest Butler School of Music at the University of Texas at Austin, where he was composer-in-residence.

Opera in Mexico and Latin America

Although *Florencia en el Amazonas* is the first opera by a Latin American composer to be staged by the Met—and the first Spanish-language work in nearly 100 years—opera has been produced and performed in Latin America for more than three centuries. The first known opera to appear in Latin America was a work by Spanish composer Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco (1644–1728) called *La Púrpura de la Rosa* (*The Blood of the Rose*), which premiered on October 19, 1701, in Lima, Peru, to commemorate the 18th birthday of King Philip V of Spain. (Opera thus arrived in Latin America several decades before it appeared in what is now the United States, when the ballad opera *Flora* was performed in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1735.) The opera’s libretto was written by Spanish dramatist and poet Pedro Calderón de la Barca, who adapted his own work from a previous opera by composer Juan Hidalgo that premiered in Madrid around 1660.

Manuel de Zumaya’s *Partenope* (1711) was the next opera to be performed in Latin America—and the first known opera by a non-European composer. Zumaya was born in New Spain (comprising modern-day Mexico), worked as chapel master in both Mexico City and Oaxaca, and was commissioned by the Viceroy of New Spain to write operas in the Italian style. *Partenope* was a three-act work performed in either Italian or Spanish; extant copies of the libretto include the text in both languages. The opera’s score, however, is believed to be lost, though others by the composer have survived. Throughout this period, most operas were performed in private for royals, statesmen, and other officials, and it was not until 1763 and 1773 that opera was viewed publicly in Lima and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, respectively.

Italian opera predominated across Latin America in the 18th and 19th centuries. For many elites and audiences living in Spain’s New World territories, championing the Italian style was a means both to emulate high European culture and to rebuff Spanish influence. The works of Gioachino Rossini—composer of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816), *La Cenerentola* (1817), and *Armida* (1817), among many others—were especially popular. In Mexico, Italian opera was promoted by the likes of Spanish tenor and impresario Manuel García, and some Latin American composers even produced Italian operas that were well received in Europe, the Brazilian Antônio Carlos Gomes (1836–96) foremost



Viceroy Melchor Portocarrero Lasso de la Vega commissioned *La Púrpura de la Rosa*
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY, MEXICO CITY



Brazilian
composer Antônio
Carlos Gomes

among them. His operas *Il Guarany* (1870), *Fosca* (1873, rev. 1878), *Maria Tudor* (1879), and *Condor* (1891) all premiered at Teatro alla Scala in Milan.

In Mexico specifically, the composition of operas lullid until the nation gained independence from Spain in 1810. The post-independence period saw a wellspring of composers turn to opera: José María Bustamante, composer of *México Libre* (1821); Manuel Covarrubias, composer of *Reynaldo y Elina* (1838); Rafael Palacios, composer of *La Vendetta*; Luis Baca, composer of *Leonor* and *Giovanni di Castiglia* (both never staged); Cenobio Paniagua y Vásques, composer of *Catalina di Guisa* (1859) and *Pietro d'Avano* (1863); Aniceto Ortega del Villar, composer of *Guatimotzin* (1871); Melesio Morales, composer of *Romeo y Julieta* (1863), *Ildegonda* (1866), *Gino Corsini* (1877), *Cleopatra* (1891), and *Anita* (ca. 1903); and Felipe de Jesús Villanueva Gutiérrez, composer of *Keofar* (1892). Moving into the 20th century, the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) only stimulated the surge of Mexican opera, which continues unabated to this day.

FUN FACT

Speaking to the Mexican newspaper *Milenio*, star soprano Ailyn Pérez had this to say about performing the role of Florencia Grimaldi in Catán's opera at the Met:

"Será lo más especial artísticamente que me ha tocado en mi vida, en este mundo; encarnar a Florencia en el idioma de mis padres y en el escenario de la Met Opera va a llegar a una intensidad que ni yo misma sé como será. Me va a cambiar, será un privilegio." ("It will be artistically the most special thing to happen in my life, in the world; to embody Florencia in the language of my parents and on the stage of the Met Opera will bring an intensity that I can't imagine. It will change me, it will be a privilege.")

Amazonian Opulence



CRITICAL INQUIRY

Like other famous operas—Puccini’s *Tosca* comes to mind—*Florencia en el Amazonas* features a famous opera singer as its protagonist. The passengers aboard the *El Dorado* are traveling to see Florencia Grimaldi perform at the opera house in Manaus, Brazil, and Grimaldi herself is returning to her homeland for the first time in two decades. What are the narrative and theatrical effects of this focus on opera? How does the story of *Florencia en el Amazonas* get us to reflect more broadly on its construction as an operatic work?

In Daniel Catán’s opera, the passengers aboard the steamboat *El Dorado* come from far and wide, but they all have the same destination: the opera house in Manaus. Although the events of the opera are completely fictional and often fantastical, this detail is not. There is an opera house in the city of Manaus, Brazil, in the heart of the Amazon rainforest. The Teatro Amazonas is one of two theaters built in the Brazilian Amazon in the late 19th century. The other, the Teatro da Paz, is in Belém, the gateway to the Amazon River.

It was during this period that Manaus experienced the “rubber boom,” when the extraction and commercialization of latex from rubber trees in the Amazon led to a huge influx of industry and investment in the region. Manaus, dubbed the “Paris of the Tropics,” became a major metropolitan area and cultural center; it was the first Brazilian city to have streetcars and the second to have electric lighting. This wave of modernization was also met with a desire to reflect European culture, which profoundly influenced the design and construction of the Manaus opera house.

Construction of the Teatro Amazonas began in 1884 and was modeled after the Palais Garnier in Paris by Italian architect Celestial S. Sacardim. The dome of the building features a giant mosaic composed of 36,000 glazed ceramic tiles from Alsace, and the inside boasts no fewer than 198 chandeliers, dozens of which are made of glass from Murano, Italy. The auditorium, which seats an audience of 700, looks up at a ceiling of decorative panels painted by Italian artist Domenico de Angelis that, while resembling an upward view of the Eiffel Tower, pay tribute to Brazilian opera composer Antônio Carlos Gomes. The theater’s ballroom, adorned with gold leaf and a floor of 12,000 interlocking wood panels, showcases a ceiling mural by de Angelis, in addition to a large painting of a scene from Gomes’s opera *Il Guarany* and a bust of the composer. The Brazilian artist Crispim do Amaral, meanwhile, decorated the theater’s curtain with an ornate painting representing the meeting of the Negro and Solimões rivers. The opera house opened in 1897 with a performance of Amilcare Ponchielli’s opera *La Gioconda* (1876).

The venue fell into disrepair in the 20th century but, after being designated a national historic landmark in 1966, was restored in 1974 and again in 1990. Regular performances resumed in 1997, and today the Teatro Amazonas is home to the renowned Amazonas Philharmonic. It also hosts the annual Festival Amazonas de Ópera, which has continued for 25 years. In 2023, the festival featured new works by contemporary Brazilian composers Francisco Mignone and João Guilherme Ripper alongside repertory staples by Gaetano Donizetti, Benjamin Britten, and Richard Wagner.

Got to Be (Magically) Real

Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas* is frequently described as being inspired by the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez. But what does this really mean? The phrase "magical realism" is a broad descriptor of a particular literary or artistic style. First used in 1925 by German art critic Franz Roh to explain post-Expressionist painting, the term has come to be associated largely, though not exclusively, with Latin American and Caribbean writers of the late 20th century. Many of these writers, like the Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez, were also associated with the so-called "Latin American boom," which saw novelists and poets from Peru (Mario Vargas Llosa), Argentina (Julio Cortázar), and Mexico (Carlos Fuentes), among others, gain newfound recognition on the literary world stage.

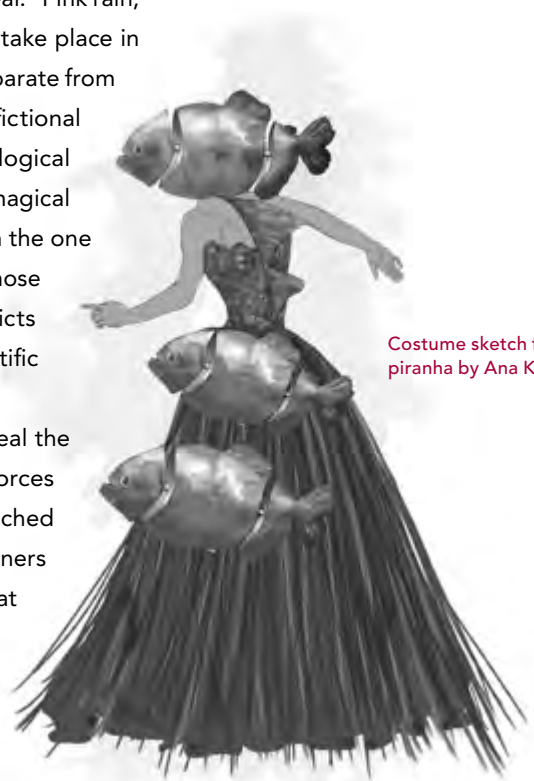
Important precursors include the Cuban novelist and musicologist Alejo Carpentier, who described his own 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*) as an example of what he dubbed "*lo real maravilloso*"—"the marvelous real." Carpentier intended to capture the incomprehensibility of Latin American and Caribbean history, especially its brutal violence, to outsiders. In this sense, "*lo real maravilloso*" has little to do with myth or fantasy, but instead suggests how the realities of life under and after colonialism are so extreme as to appear unreal to those who have not experienced or witnessed them firsthand.

Magical realism, however, describes a mode of expression that effectively dissolves the distinction between phenomena alternately deemed "real" or "unreal." Pink rain, shape-shifting spirits, people who transform into butterflies (all which take place in *Florencia*)—these events, figures, and objects are not understood as separate from everyday reality, or as an intrusion of some supernatural or science-fictional element. They occur in the world of the work without need for any logical explanation. For many writers from Latin America and the Caribbean, magical realism further expresses a political critique of Western colonialism. On the one hand, it attends to discrepant and even contrary historical experiences, those of the oppressed and the oppressor. On the other hand, it also contradicts and subverts Western knowledge systems based exclusively on scientific inquiry and secular reason.

Magical realism, especially in *Florencia en el Amazonas*, aims to reveal the larger forces that shape and transform the lives of its characters—forces whose mysterious power often cannot be understood by means of detached analysis or rational argument. In so doing, it prompts audiences and listeners to reinterrogate their relationships and experiences and to ponder what seemingly mundane moments in their own lives might be simply deemed magical.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

One of the main characters in *Florencia en el Amazonas* is the shapeshifting mystical figure Riolobo, whose name in English literally translates as "river wolf." Riolobo performs many functions aboard the *El Dorado*, from serving dinner to calming the storm that forces the steamship to run aground. What do you make of this character and its place in the opera? Is Riolobo a god, a spirit, or something else? What is its dramatic significance?



Costume sketch for a piranha by Ana Kuzmanic

MATERIALS

Handout

COMMON CORE**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6–11-12.1**

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Philosophical Chairs

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element is what happens next: Participants discuss their point of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussions.

Each topic statement is deliberately open-ended yet ties into several of the themes present in *Florencia en el Amazonas*—including the quest for love, the tension of familial and romantic relationships, the presence of the supernatural in everyday reality, and the importance of fantasy. Offer students a brief overview of the opera's plot, setting, and context, and remind them how to build a safe space for productive conversation. Some of the topics might be confusing or hard—that's okay! As you and your students explore and learn about *Florencia en el Amazonas*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

A NOTE TO FACILITATORS: Between statements, provide some clarity as to why that particular statement was chosen. Explain to students where and how each particular theme shows up in the opera, or invite students to offer their own explanations.

STEP 1. INQUIRE

Distribute the included handout with guidelines and statements, making sure to review the rules of engagement as a group. Next, invite students to read one of the statements—out loud as a class, to themselves, or in small groups. As they read, they should ask themselves:

- Do I understand the statement?
 - If not, what questions might clarify it for me?
- What immediately comes to mind when I read the statement?
 - What is my initial reaction: Do I agree or disagree?
- What led me to that decision?
 - What opinions do I hold about this statement?
 - What life experiences may have led me to think this way?

STEP 2. RESPOND

Read the statements again out loud and ask students to commit to one side. They can agree or disagree, but there is no middle ground. (Many will not be completely comfortable committing to one side over the other—that's part of the game. It will help foster conversation and debate.)

STEP 3. DISCUSS

- Does anyone feel very strongly either way? Why or why not?
- Does anyone feel conflicted? Why or why not?
- Give voice to what you thought about in the first step:
 - What led me to make my decision?
 - What opinions do I hold with regard to this statement?
 - What life experience may have led me to think this way?
- What might you have not considered that others are now bringing up in the discussion?
- Did any new questions arise during the discussion?

As the conversation continues, students are free to change their minds or develop more nuanced perspectives.

Repeat steps 1 through 3 for each statement.

FUN FACT

At the end of *Florencia en el Amazonas*, the *El Dorado* passengers are forced to quarantine onboard due to a cholera outbreak in the city of Manaus, their final destination. Cholera is an infection of the small intestine that has caused seven pandemics in the last two centuries—the first six occurring between 1816 and 1923.



Happy (Butterfly) Hunting

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Biology, visual art, environmental studies, geography, creative writing.

MATERIALS

Handouts
Colored pencils or markers (optional)
Art supplies (optional)

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.2

Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CORE ARTS

VA:Cr2.1.1.a

Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design.

VA:Cr1.2.2.a

Make art or design with various materials and tools to explore personal interests, questions, and curiosity.

VA:Cr1.1.3.a

Elaborate on an imaginative idea.

Florencia en el Amazonas is, in part, a tale of lost love. The titular character, the opera diva Florencia Grimaldi, returns to South America not only to rediscover herself but also to search for the legendary butterfly hunter Cristobal, whom she abandoned to pursue her career. Knowing that Cristobal is lost in the jungle seeking the rare “emerald muse,” Florencia magically transforms into a butterfly at the opera’s conclusion in hopes of reuniting with him.

In this activity, students will explore the life cycles, behaviors, and characteristics of butterflies of the Amazon region who undergo their own magical transformations. They will then design and construct their own species of butterfly, like the “emerald muse,” enabling them to gain a deeper appreciation for the world of Catán’s opera and the many creatures—real and imagined—that inhabit it.

STEP 1. EXPLORE

If your students have not yet learned about butterflies and their life cycle, you can introduce the topic with some basic facts:

- Butterflies are a type of insect. (They have six legs.)
- Their bodies have three main parts: a head, a thorax, and an abdomen. (You can remind students that they have all three!)
- They have two antennae, which they use to smell.
- They have two wings made of scales, which they use to fly and sometimes hide from predators.

It might be helpful to note these points on the board or use an image of a butterfly to illustrate the different body parts. If you have time, you could also introduce students to the concept of a life cycle: A butterfly lays an egg, which grows into a caterpillar, which turns into a chrysalis (not a cocoon!), from which a butterfly emerges. An illustration or diagram might be especially helpful here.

Next, arrange the provided images of butterfly species native to the Amazon around your classroom—either laid out on tables, pinned on a clothesline, or hung on a wall. Then, distribute the included “Field Guide to Butterflies of the Amazon” to each student, which contains the same butterfly images with corresponding descriptions. Have students survey the species displayed across the room and try to match them to those in their field guide—using the wing patterns and colors as their only clues. Once they have identified a match, they should read the information about that species.

After each student has completed their field guide, invite a group discussion about the exercise. Ask:



- What was their favorite butterfly species? Why?
- What surprised them the most about these butterflies?
- Which wing pattern and/or color did they like the most? Which did they like the least?
- Can they see a relationship between a butterfly's attributes and its name?

STEP 2. CREATE

Now that students have learned about some butterfly species native to the Amazon, they can begin creating their own. Using the included handout, have students brainstorm the unique qualities of their newly discovered species. Depending on class size, you can have students complete this activity independently or in pairs or small groups.

While inventing their butterfly species, students will have to consider:

- Name
- Size
- Distinguishing features (e.g., color, pattern, shape, texture)
- Habitat (e.g., riverbank, meadow, forest)
- Diet (i.e., what it eats)
- Prey (i.e., what eats it)
- Magical power

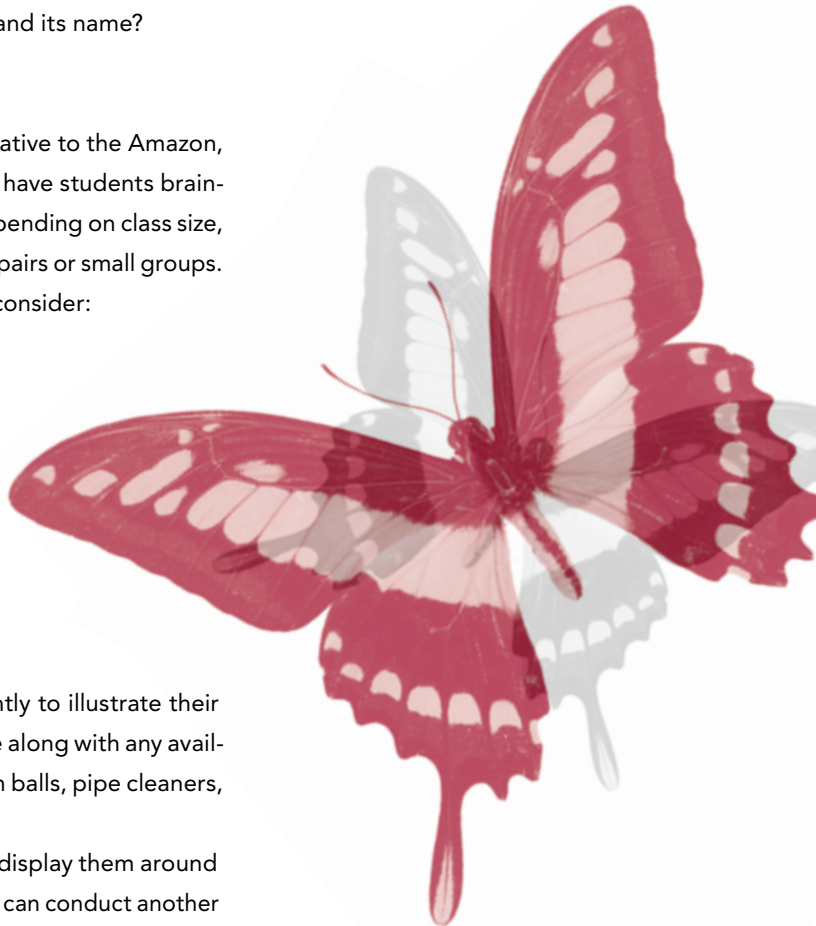
STEP 3. DESIGN

For this part of the activity, each student can work independently to illustrate their new butterfly species. Distribute the included butterfly template along with any available arts and crafts supplies—colored pencils or markers, cotton balls, pipe cleaners, acrylic gems, etc.

Once all the butterfly designs have been completed, you can display them around the classroom alongside their written descriptions. Now, students can conduct another exploration by seeing what species their classmates have invented! After the whole class has had time to view and learn about each other's creations, bring them back for a group discussion about the exercise. Ask:

- What did they like about somebody else's butterfly?
- What patterns and/or colors did they find interesting?
- What magical powers were cool?
- Were there any similarities between some of the species?
- Were there any major differences between some species?

To conclude the lesson, you can compile all the designs and descriptions into a new "Field Guide to Butterflies" of your classroom. You can also bring copies of an empty field guide template to the screening of *Florencia en el Amazonas* and encourage students to list, draw, and describe all the animals they see in the opera.



Amazon Adventure

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

English, creative writing, game design, visual arts, social studies

MATERIALS

Synopsis
Handout
Pizza box or cardboard
Highlighters or colored markers
Recycled materials to create game board and pieces

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CORE ARTS

VA:Cr2.3.7.a

Apply visual organizational strategies to design and produce a work of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas.

VA:Cr3.1.8.a

Apply relevant criteria to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for a work of art or design in progress.

The journey embarked upon by passengers aboard the *El Dorado* is a bit of a game—one characterized by cooperation, survival, conflict, control, exploration, adventure, wit, quick thinking, and fast response. Students will dive into the magical world of *Florencia en el Amazonas* by creating a board game inspired by the voyage Florencia and her fellow passengers take.

Each passenger boards the steamboat with their own motives—some seek love, others wish to rekindle love, and still others hope to recover lost love. Full of anticipation for what they hope to discover, not a single passenger can imagine the turns their Amazon adventure will take. In this project-based activity, students will bring the story of *Florencia en el Amazonas* to life by creating a board game that mirrors the journey Florencia and her fellow passengers take as they wind through the Amazon jungle from Colombia to Brazil.

STEP 1. INQUIRE

Before diving into the plot of *Florencia en el Amazonas*, first have students brainstorm components of a great board game.

Ask students:

- What are your favorite board games to play? What specifically do you like about these games?
- Are all board games the same? What are some different types of gameplays associated with various board games?
- What makes a great board game?
- What frustrates you when you're playing a board game?
- How do board games tell stories?



STEP 2. REVIEW

Turn students' attention next to *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Describe to students that Florencia and her fellow passengers go on an adventure down the Amazon—the perfect backdrop for an epic board game.

Pass out a copy of the synopsis. Have students spend a few minutes marking the text of the synopsis. To help students better comprehend the plot, have students complete the following:

- **Number** (1, 2, 3) each paragraph of the synopsis.
- Circle any words indicating **who**, **where**, and **when**.
- Underline **what** is happening and **why** it's happening.
- Make **arrows** to clarify the actions of a character.
- Then, go back and **highlight** the following:
 - Where/When – Green
 - Who – Orange
 - What/Why – Yellow

STEP 3. DISCUSS

Divide students into pairs and have them brainstorm which components of the opera's story would lend themselves well to a board game. Ask students: If you were to distill *Florencia en el Amazonas* down to one thematic concept, what would it be (e.g., a game of cooperation, survival, fighting, control, exploration, adventure, wit, quick thinking, fast responses)?

STEP 4. INVESTIGATE

Share with students that games of all types (board games, video games, card games) follow a standard MDA approach—Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetics. Explain to students the following:

MECHANICS Key questions include: How do I play the game? What are the components/pieces of the game? What are the rules? How many rounds are there? How do I win?

DYNAMICS Key questions include: What are the natural consequences that occur when the mechanics of the game play out? What constraints do I have? What choices do I have? How will my choices affect others, and vice versa? How can I collaborate with others? Can others collaborate against me?

AESTHETICS Key questions include: What are the intended emotional responses to gameplay? How does the color scheme affect a player's experience? Is the game board creative and imaginative, transporting players to a different world and/or time?



Benito de Acosta, *Map of the Amazon River and Its Basin, 1638, published in Martín de Saavedra's Descubrimiento del Río Amazonas y sus dilatadas provincias, 1639*

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SPAIN

STEP 5. REFLECT

Consider classic racing games such as *Sorry*, *Trouble*, *Chutes and Ladders*, and *Candyland*. Pick one and complete an MDA analysis with your students together on the board. Then, have them choose a different board game and complete an MDA analysis on their own. Once students have completed the activity, have them share out loud.

STEP 6. DESIGN

Now, turn your attention to *Florencia en el Amazonas* and the projects students will complete. Students should create a board game that mirrors and/or expounds upon the journey Florencia and her fellow passengers take aboard the El Dorado. The board game must:

- Be playable.
- Have a clear set of rules outlined in a rulebook.
- Mirror, or expound upon, the narrative of the opera.
- Fit all components of the game inside of a pizza box.
- Show a clear and cohesive aesthetic.

Using the included handout, students must first complete an MDA outline of their game.

Then, students should complete a mood board with preliminary sketches of the board game map, character prototypes of pawns, cards and/or dice, typography, and color palate.

The components of the game should include the following:

PIZZA/CARDBOARD BOX

- Name of game
- Logo
- Tagline
- Number of players
- Approximate length of gameplay
- Recommended age of players
- Color palate that reflects the game inside

RULE BOOK

- Catchy intro
- Narrative overview
- List of components of the game inside the box
- Character bios
- How to win



- How to setup the game
- How to play (MOST IMPORTANT!)
- What regulates a "turn"
- Strategies to employ
- OPTIONAL: Scoring

GAMEBOARD

- Completed map on a gameboard with clear directions
- Characters/pawns
- Playing cards and/or dice

DIVING DEEPER

Have students take part in a gallery walk, playing their peers' games. As students are playing, they should be doing two things: completing an MDA outline of each game and identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in the game (including the gameboard, gameplay, and game box).

The Catán Collective

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

World music, visual art, world cultures, creative writing

MATERIALS

Audio tracks

Blank Paper

"The Creation of *Florencia en el Amazonas*" Timeline

Colored pencils or markers

Timer or stopwatch

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2

Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CORE ARTS

MU:Re8.1.6.a

Describe a personal interpretation of how creators' and performers' application of the elements of music and expressive qualities, within genres and cultural and historical context, convey expressive intent.

MU:Re7.2.7.a

Classify and explain how the elements of music and expressive qualities relate to the structure of contrasting pieces.

MU:Cn11.1.8.a

Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

The singable melodies and lush, romantic orchestral textures of Daniel Catán's operatic writing drew from what he called the "melting pot" of Caribbean culture and musical styles from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. He spent much of his life living and composing outside his birth country of Mexico and used the sights and sounds of his travels to inform his music. Throughout his 40-year career as a composer, Catán incorporated his Puccini-like tonal style into a variety of musical genres including chamber and orchestra works, pieces for voice and chorus, film scores, musical theater, ballet, and, most famously, opera.

In this activity, students will explore several selections from Catán's output to create collaborative visual aids representing the composer's colorful compositional style. While listening to Catán's music across six different genres, they will contribute to a shared collection of words and images as varied and vital as the composer's work, enabling them to track the operatic soundscapes found in *Florencia en el Amazonas*.

STEP 1. WARM UP

Begin the activity with a meditative listening exercise. The purpose of this warm-up activity is to have students center their minds and prepare to listen closely to several of Catán's works spanning various compositional styles.

Begin by making sure that all personal devices (e.g., cell phones, tablets, laptops) are put away and silenced. Instruct students that if interruptions occur during this exercise (e.g., announcements, bells, students coming in and out), they should gently redirect their minds to their breathing and listening.

Have students find a comfortable place to be in the classroom; they can lie on the floor or find somewhere to sit. They should find a posture which allows them to access total body relaxation. If possible, dim the lights and ask students to refrain from talking or laughing. While listening to the selection, students should focus on breathing slowly and deeply and find at least one thing that they enjoy about the composition to share with the class.

Once everyone has found a comfortable place to settle and the room is quiet, play one of Catán's early compositions, *Encantamiento for Flute and Harp* (1989), which is greatly influenced by Catán's time of study in Tokyo, Japan. The piece and all others for this exercise are found via the "Music from the Archives" pages at danielcatan.com under the "Media" tab. The precise volume for each selection is listed in the handout.

After the piece has ended, encourage students to discuss their listening experience by considering the following questions:

- What did you notice about your body during the exercise?
- Where were you holding tension? Did the tension lessen as you relaxed and listened?
- Did the musical selection augment your relaxation or take away from it? Why?
- What did you notice about your breathing during the exercise?

- Was it difficult to turn off your mind and focus only on listening and breathing? Why or why not?
- What kind of mood do you think Catán was trying to create with this composition?

STEP 2. REVIEW

Once students are relaxed and focused, they are ready to learn more about Catán's life and work. Distribute the composer timeline included in this guide. Make sure students examine each point on the timeline and make note of Catán's personal and professional experiences. Students will refer back to this timeline shortly.

Next, move on to the included handout focusing on six compositions by Catán that students will explore in greater depth, emphasizing distinct musical genres. Invite students to examine the timeline and handout alongside each other, noting how Catán's development as a composer correlates with individual selections. Ask:

- Are there any major events from Catán's life that correspond to specific musical selections?
- What connections can you make between Catán's studies and travels and his musical output?

STEP 3. COLLABORATE

Now students will listen to six different musical works by Catán and create visual aids to represent what they hear and feel. Begin by dividing the class into three groups: writing, sketching, and coloring. (Students will switch to a new group with each selection, so each will get a chance to write, sketch, and color.)

Ask students to sit in a large circle, alternating members of each team (i.e., a writing person next to a sketching person next to a coloring person, etc.). Each student will need six blank sheets of paper and a writing implement depending on their assigned group: pens for writers, pencils for sketchers, and colored pencils or markers for colorers.

As you play each selection for the class, students will have 30 seconds to create a visual representation of what they hear. Writing group members will jot down words or phrases the music brings to mind, sketching group members will draw a picture of what they see in their mind as they listen, and coloring group members will use colors to create a vibrant and varied image. At the 30-second mark of each track, students should pass their papers counterclockwise around the circle. Then, play the next 30 seconds of each piece. Since additional students will add to the work completed before them on each sheet, they should make sure to leave room for their peers' contributions.

When students receive the paper that has been passed to them, they should work to augment their peers' creation by adding another element to it. For example, if

FUN FACT

Florencia en el Amazonas is the first Spanish-language opera at the Met in nearly 100 years. It was preceded by a 1926 performance of Manuel de Falla's *La Vida Breve* (1913)—programmed as part of a double bill with Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* (1914)—and the world premiere of Enrique Granados's *Goyescas* in 1913.



Composer Daniel Catán

a sketcher gets passed a sheet from a writer, they should let the words or phrases inspire their drawing. After 30 seconds, everyone in the circle will again pass their paper counterclockwise. Continue this process until the music selection is complete. Share each finished product with the group, taking note of commonalities and differences between each collective visual aid. Consider the following questions:

- What words or phrases were used to describe the selection? Did any of the language contradict itself as the piece developed?
- Were there any color themes present in the images? Why?
- Was it difficult to add on to work someone else had already begun? Why or why not?

Before moving on to the next selection, have everyone in the circle pass their implements clockwise. Now, each student will be part of a different group (writing, sketching, or coloring). Repeat the entire exercise for each of the six Catán pieces on the handout; students should begin each piece with a new blank sheet of paper.

STEP 4. REFLECT

By the time all six selections have been heard, the circle (and classroom!) will be filled with creative and colorful visual aids to represent each piece. Display them in the room and discuss commonalities and differences among them. At the end of class, students can each select a visual aid (or two) to bring home. Ask:

- What was your favorite part of this collective creative process?
- What did you learn about the selections by allowing others' interpretations to inform your work?
- Do you think this activity would work with other media like paint or clay?

DIVING DEEPER

By the conclusion of this activity, students should have deeper appreciation for important moments in Catán's life and work. For an additional take-home or in-class assignment, you can ask students to select one of the composer's quotations below and write a short response describing how it further helps them understand his compositional style, based either on one of the pieces explored in the activity or another composition of their choosing.

“I have inherited a very rich operatic tradition. In my work, I am proud to say, one can detect the enormous debt I owe to composers from Monteverdi to Berg. But perhaps the greatest of my debts is having learnt that the originality of an opera need not involve the rejection of our tradition—which would be like blindly embracing the condition of an orphan—but rather the profound assimilation of it, so as to achieve the closest union between a text and its music.”

“For me, comedy is a very serious matter. It has to joke about things that are otherwise difficult to discuss, and it must also reflect contemporary issues. A comedy in this century cannot be the same as it was in the 17th or 18th century. You have to draw a smile from the listener, and at the same time deliver a very serious message. That is what makes it so very challenging.”

“Writing music is for me a process of self-discovery and self-understanding. I am concerned, especially, with the nature of love. I believe that the experience of love is fleeting, fragile and interminable. I believe it is the only point where life and death intertwine. I identify the essence of music with these concerns, and it is through music that I try to capture them and understand them.”

“I was born in Mexico, but my earliest recollections are always accompanied by the sound of Cuban music. During the late 1940s and early 50s many Cuban musicians moved to New York and Mexico. Caribbean music became immensely popular. New dance halls opened every season and they regularly had a Caribbean band playing to dance-crazed couples. Not everybody could go to the clubs, of course, so radio stations and gramophone records solved the problem by taking the music into people’s homes and workplaces. It was impossible not to be influenced by this music and its contagious beauty. I have been a devotee of this music the whole of my life. Its rhythms and instrumentation have always fascinated me. But after studying it in detail, as I now have, I’ve become a huge admirer of it: the complexity and at the same time the precision with which it is composed are quite extraordinary. Writing this piece has been quite a challenge, but a very enjoyable one indeed. For a start, it has put me back in touch with music I love. And then, as if it wasn’t enough, it has taken me to clubs and dance halls on a regular basis in order to get those rhythms flowing naturally through my body as well as through my ears. What a treat! Who would have guessed that doing research could be so enjoyable! I sincerely hope you enjoy listening to this piece as much as I enjoyed writing it. And if you find your hands or feet beginning to twitch rhythmically without your permission, please do not stop them. I’ll be more than happy if that happens.”

Philosophical Chairs

Active listening, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue (even when we disagree about something) are learned skills. Everyone can learn them, and no one can perfect them without practice. Philosophical Chairs is designed to help us develop these skills while also learning about the opera.

You might find these statements challenging—and you might find it challenging to talk with someone who has a different answer from your own. That’s okay! Take your time with each statement, embrace uncertainty, and know that changing your mind when you learn new information is a sign of strength, not weakness. Before you begin your discussion, take some time to review the rules of engagement:

Be sure you understand the statement. If something is unclear, ask!

Face each other. Body language helps show that you’re listening carefully and respectfully.

Only one speaker at a time. Everyone will get their turn to speak.

Think before you speak. Be sure that what you’re going to say is what you really mean.

Summarize the previous person’s comments before adding your own.

Address ideas, not the person. Challenging ideas or statements is good only if we respect the individuality and inherent value of the person who expressed them.

Three before me. To make sure everyone’s voice is heard, you may not make another comment until three others have shared their thoughts.

The Statements

- Everyone has a disguise.
- Life revolves around relationships.
- Love conquers all.
- Flirting is harmless.
- Everyone only has one true love.
- True love never grows bitter.
- Troubled relationships can always be salvaged.
- All couples bicker.
- All spirits are dangerous.
- Whenever it rains, it pours.
- Tragedy is inevitable.
- Everyone goes through a personal metamorphosis.
- The ordinary is extraordinary.
- Reality is easy to distinguish from fantasy.
- Life is a fantasy.

Happy (Butterfly) Hunting



Happy (Butterfly) Hunting | Field Guide to Butterflies of the Amazon



Head-and-Shoulders Skipper (*Tarsoctenus papias*)

This butterfly is often seen together with swarms of army ants in the forest. It makes short, low flights, looking for droppings from ant-following birds. It lives in the forests of Brazil and feeds on bird droppings and nectar. Their wingspan is between one and two inches.



Orange-tipped Angled-Sulphur (*Anteos menippe*)

These butterflies can spread throughout urban areas, where the caterpillars feed on plants. The adults feed by visiting flowers. In the Amazon, large clusters of them are observed in riverbanks. They can be found in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. Their wingspan is slightly longer than three inches.



Thoas Swallowtail (*Papilio thoas*)

This species is seen in places with sunlight, including urban habitats, meadows, and the forest. It spends much time flying high, but flies lower to feed on flowers or damp sand. They can be found in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. Their wingspan is four to five inches.



Zebra Teaser (*Arawacus separata*)

This species is commonly seen on shrubs. It feeds on nectar but never takes it from flowers. It can live near people, on the edge of the forest, or in open areas. This species is usually found in Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. Their wingspan is about one inch.



Periander Metalmark (*Rhetus periander*)

This species of butterfly flies very fast. It can be observed when resting under sun, on the ground, or on low vegetation. It lives on the forest's edge and near riverbanks in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Suriname. It eats nectar and minerals. Their wingspan is about two inches.



Phlegia Metalmark (*Stalactis phlegia*)

This is a very common species. They inhabit open forests, meadows, and urban areas of Brazil, Suriname, and Venezuela. The caterpillars feed on plants, and the adults feed on nectar. Their wingspan is about one inch.



Menelaus (Blue) Morpho (*Morpho menelaus*)

This species is the largest butterfly in the Amazon, with a wingspan of five to eight inches. Adults feed on fruit on the ground, moist soil, and mud puddles. They live in the forests of Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.



Dirce Beauty (*Colobura dirce*)

These butterflies inhabit all types of environments—near people, forests, forest edges, and open spaces. It uses its natural camouflage to rest on the trunks of trees upside down. The caterpillars eat plants, and the adults eat rotting fruit. You can find them in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, and Venezuela. Their wingspan is about an inch and a half.



Tropical Buckeye (*Junonia evarete*)

This butterfly lives in different habitats such as mangroves, forest edges, urban gardens, open environments, riverbanks, and sunny savannahs. The caterpillars eat mangrove plants, and adults feed on nectar. They live in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Suriname, and Venezuela. The wingspan is two to two-and-a-half inches.

Happy (Butterfly) Hunting | Make Your Own Butterfly



Name:

Species:

Size:

Distinguishing features:

Habitat:

Diet:

Prey:

Magical power:

Amazon Adventure

Group Members: _____

Game Title: _____

MECHANICS	DYNAMICS	AESTHETICS

The Catán Collective

TYPE	WORK	DESCRIPTION
Chorus	<i>O, Pardon Me, Thou Bleeding Piece of Earth</i> (2006) [Volume 3, track 2]	Scored for TTBB chorus, piano, and timpani, this piece sets text from one of Mark Anthony's speeches in Shakespeare's <i>Julius Caesar</i> (1599).
Opera	<i>La Hija de Rappaccini</i> "Beatriz's aria" (1991) [<i>Rappaccini's Daughter</i> , Track 1]	When this work was staged by San Diego Opera in 1994, Catán became the first Mexican composer to have an opera produced by a major company in the United States.
TV	<i>El vuelo del águila</i> "Don Porfirio" (1994) [Volume 5, Track 1]	Catán composed music for this telenovela, which ran from 1994–95 and had 140 weekly episodes about the life of General Porfirio Díaz, who remained Mexico's president for more than 30 years.
Film	<i>I'm Losing You</i> "End Credits" (1998) [Volume 2, Track 23]	Catán composed the soundtrack for this film starring Rosanna Arquette and Frank Langella, which tells the story of a dysfunctional, wealthy Los Angeles family dealing with the cancer diagnosis of the family patriarch.
Theater	<i>Antonieta: A Musical</i> "Now That I Have Found You" (1992) [Volume 11, Track 5]	With a scenario and libretto by Catán and Francisco Segovia, this musical was not orchestrated and only scored for voice and piano.
Instrumental	<i>Caribbean Airs</i> "I. Ritmico" (2007) [Volume 1, Track 1]	In this movement from <i>Caribbean Airs</i> , which features Afro-Cuban rhythms and brings a distinctly dance-hall feel to the symphonic orchestra, Catán combines memorable melodies and subtle rhythmic patterns to enliven to complicated percussion solos.

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

Opera Review: *Florencia en el Amazonas*

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *Florencia en el Amazonas*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about the opera and this performance at the Met!

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Riolobo introduces each character as they board the <i>El Dorado</i> . MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Florencia recalls her reasons for leaving, and returning to, her homeland. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The captain and Arcadio discuss their lives as they check engine steam valves. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Arcadio and Rosalba meet on the boat deck. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Paula and Alvaro dine on the boat deck. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Florencia and the captain meet on the deck. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Rosalba, Arcadio, Paula, and Alvaro play cards on the deck. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
A storm erupts. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Riolobo calls for mercy. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Arcadio takes the helm of the ship. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Florencia emerges from her cabin. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Arcadio and Rosalba search for each other on deck. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Paula looks for Alvaro on the riverbank. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The <i>El Dorado</i> sets off again. The captain and Alvaro return to the ship. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Rosalba realizes Florencia’s true identity. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The ship arrives at Manaus, but a cholera outbreak prevents them from disembarking. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆