

TRUE TO ITS BIBLICAL INSPIRATION, *NABUCCO* IS AN OPERA OF unapologetically epic proportions: rulers challenge their gods, love struggles against empire, and religious revelation goes hand in hand with divine retribution. Verdi's inspired treatment of the Israelites' enslavement and the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's dramatic conversion to Judaism captivated audiences, made the young composer famous, and gave voice to a simmering Italian nationalism that was soon to explode with incendiary force. The opera's most famous number, the chorus of the Hebrew slaves "Va, pensiero," became the unofficial anthem of the Italian independence movement, and the score is filled with musical ideas showing Verdi's ability to innovate operatic convention in the service of character development and psychological depth. Foreshadowing his mature works, *Nabucco* shows us the young composer as he is beginning to understand the full scope and power of his artistic vision.

The Met's production, directed by Elijah Moshinsky and first seen in 2001, remains faithful to the biblical setting, bringing the grandeur of ancient Jerusalem and Babylon to life. John Napier's sets provide the backdrop, illustrating the plight of characters struggling against the might of an empire, the power of a vengeful god, and the seeming inevitability of historical events.

This guide is intended to help your students appreciate *Nabucco*, which stars the legendary Plácido Domingo in the title role, and its relationship to the political context of Verdi's own time as well as the opera's resonance across the centuries. In discovering *Nabucco's* importance to the Italian Risorgimento movement, students will explore the phenomenon of art as political allegory and consider examples from other historical events explored in school curricula. They will also study Verdi's musical craft in creating some of the most dramatic and highly charged music in Italian opera. The activities on the following pages are designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of this *Live in HD* transmission. This guide will also align with key strands of the Common Core Standards.



MONASTYRSKA

BARTON

THOMAS

DOMINGO

BELOSSELSKIY

THE WORK: *NABUCCO*

An opera in four acts, sung in Italian

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Temistocle Solera

Based on biblical sources and the play *Nabuchodonosor* by Auguste Anicet-Bourgeois and Francis Cornu

First performed March 9, 1842
at La Scala, Milan, Italy

PRODUCTION

James Levine, Conductor

Elijah Moshinsky, Production

John Napier, Set Designer

Andreane Neofitou, Costume Designer

Howard Harrison, Lighting Designer

STARRING

(In order of vocal appearance):

Dmitry Belosselskiy
ZACCARIA (bass)

Russell Thomas
ISMAELE (tenor)

Jamie Barton
FENENA (soprano)

Liudmyla Monastyrska
ABIGAILLE (soprano)

Plácido Domingo
NABUCCO (baritone)

Production a gift of Bill Rollnick and Nancy Ellison Rollnick

Major funding from Mr. and Mrs. Ezra K. Zilkha, Mercedes and Sid Bass, and Mr. and Mrs. Paul M. Montrone

Additional funding from Gilbert S. Kahn and John J. Noffo Kahn, The Eleanor Naylor Dana Charitable Trust, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Revival a gift of the Estate of Francine Berry.

This guide includes five sections with two types of classroom activities.

- **THE SOURCE, THE STORY, WHO'S WHO IN NABUCCO, AND A TIMELINE**
- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:** Two activities designed to align with and support various Common Core Standard strands used in ELA, History/Social Studies, and Music curricula
- **PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:** Two activities to be used during *The Met: Live in HD* transmission, highlighting specific aspects of this production
- **POST-SHOW DISCUSSION:** A wrap-up activity, integrating the *Live in HD* experience into the students' understanding of the performing arts and the humanities
- **STUDENT RESOURCE PAGES:** Classroom-ready worksheets supporting the activities in the guide

The activities in this guide will focus on several aspects of *Nabucco*:

- The historical context of the opera's setting
- The story's resonance with various historical moments as well as current events
- The power of Verdi's opera as political allegory
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists.

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Nabucco*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds and seeks to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

SUMMARY Nabucco, King of Babylon, leads an army to Jerusalem, determined to conquer the city and enslave the Israelites. Abigaille, Nabucco’s daughter, arrives just before the approaching army and offers to save the Israelites—but only if Ismaele, nephew of Jerusalem’s king, will return her love. He refuses, for he is already in love with Abigaille’s sister Fenena, who is being held hostage by the Israelites and has converted to Judaism. Abigaille swears vengeance as Nabucco arrives and orders the Temple of Solomon burned to the ground.

Back in Babylon, Abigaille discovers she is not actually Nabucco’s true daughter, but instead the daughter of slaves. Worried that someone will find out and keep her from ruling Babylon, she plans to steal the throne from Nabucco and Fenena. Just after she declares herself queen, Nabucco enters, and, furious at her treachery, proclaims himself not only king but god. At this, he is struck by a thunderbolt and driven insane. With no one in her way, Abigaille orders the execution of the Israelites, including Fenena. Desperate to save his daughter, Nabucco prays to the God of Israel, promising to convert the entire Babylonian empire to Judaism. His prayers are answered: Nabucco’s sanity is restored and he arrives just in time to stop the execution of Fenena and the Israelites. Abigaille, full of remorse, poisons herself and Nabucco frees the Israelites.

THE SOURCES *Nabucco* combines historical fact, passages from the Bible, and the invention of Verdi and his librettist, Temistocle Solera. The text takes many liberties with biblical history, and with the exception of the title role the characters are fictional creations. But the overall story stays close to events as related in Jewish scriptures (primarily Jeremiah, the Second Book of Kings, the Second Book of Chronicles, Daniel, and the Psalms). The story of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian captivity of the Israelites was well known in Verdi’s time and had been adapted for the stage by other artists. Antonio Cortese’s ballet *Nabuccodonosor*, presented at La Scala in 1838, bears many structural similarities to Verdi’s opera, and an 1836 French play of the same title was another source. (In fact, *Nabucco* was so similar to this play that the opera’s producer was charged a royalty fee when Verdi’s work premiered in Paris.)



VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO

the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO

the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto (Italian “mezzo” = middle, medium)

CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice, also called an alto

COUNTERTENOR

a male singing voice whose vocal range is equivalent to that of a contralto, mezzo-soprano, or (less frequently) a soprano, usually through use of falsetto

TENOR

the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

BARITONE

the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

BASS

the lowest male voice

SYNOPSIS

ACT I *The Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem* The Israelites hide in their temple and pray that Nabucco, King of Babylon, and his fearsome army will spare them. The Israelites' high priest, Zaccaria, enters with a hostage, Fenena, who is Nabucco's daughter. After reassuring his people that their prayers will be answered, Zaccaria and the worshippers leave Fenena alone with Ismaele, the nephew of Jerusalem's king. The two profess their love for each other as Abigaille, another daughter of Nabucco—and Fenena's sister—enters the temple. Abigaille also loves Ismaele and tells him that she will save the Israelites if he will only return her love. Ismaele refuses; his love belongs to Fenena. Abigaille flies into a rage just as the Israelites stream back into the temple, pursued by Nabucco and his army. Zaccaria threatens to kill Fenena, but Ismaele saves her from harm. Nabucco orders the temple burned to the ground, and the defeated Israelites are taken to Babylon as slaves.

ACT II **SCENE I:** *Nabucco's palace in Babylon* Abigaille has discovered a secret document proving she is not truly the daughter of the king, but the child of slaves. Afraid that her sister Fenena will inherit Nabucco's throne, she promises to destroy both father and daughter. The High Priest of Baal (a Babylonian god) enters and the two make plans to steal the crown from Nabucco and Fenena.

SCENE II: *Elsewhere in the palace* Zaccaria prays, asking that God help him convert the Babylonians to Judaism. Ismaele appears and is accused of betraying his fellow Israelites, but Zaccaria pardons him since he has converted Fenena to Judaism. Just then, Abigaille enters with the High Priest of Baal and declares herself queen of Babylon. As she is about to crown herself, Nabucco appears and, furious at her actions, proclaims himself a god. For this arrogance, a thunderbolt strikes him down, and Abigaille takes the crown for herself.

ACT III **SCENE I:** *The Hanging Gardens of Babylon* Now ruler of Babylon, Abigaille considers executing the Israelites. Nabucco enters and, in his crazed state, is easily tricked into signing the Israelites' death warrant. When he learns that Fenena will also be killed, Nabucco tries to find the document proving Abigaille is not his daughter and therefore cannot rule. Abigaille tears it to pieces in front of him, and despite Nabucco's pleas, refuses to spare Fenena.



SCENE II: *The banks of the Euphrates* Enslaved and in exile, the Israelites think longingly of their homeland. Zaccaria has a vision in which they are freed from captivity and defeat the Babylonians.

ACT IV SCENE I: *Nabucco's royal apartments* Nabucco watches helplessly from his locked room as Fenena and the Israelites are led to their death. In desperation, he prays to the God of Israel and promises to convert. His sanity miraculously restored, Nabucco leads his soldiers to save Fenena and take back his crown.

SCENE II: *The Hanging Gardens* Just as the Israelites are about to be executed, Nabucco enters and pardons them. Abigaille, overcome with guilt, poisons herself. She lives just long enough to give Fenena and Ismaele her blessing and to ask forgiveness from the God of Israel. Nabucco frees the Israelites, who join the Babylonians in praising the Lord.

WHO'S WHO IN NABUCCO

CHARACTER		PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Nabucco	King of Babylon	nah-BOO-koh	baritone	A fierce warrior and mighty king, Nabucco is brought to ruin by his unseemly pride. After declaring himself a god, he is driven mad until he begs forgiveness from the God of the Israelites.
Abigaille	A Babylonian princess, believed to be Nabucco's eldest daughter	ah-bee-gah-EE-leh	soprano	Lovesick and bitter, Abigaille is a warrior woman determined to inherit her father's throne. The revelation that she is not in fact Nabucco's true daughter but the child of slaves only strengthens her resolve to become ruler.
Zaccaria	High Priest of the Israelites	dzah-kah-REE-ah	bass	Steadfast and pious, Zaccaria urges the Israelites to keep faith in their God.
Ismaele	The nephew of Jerusalem's king	ees-mah-EH-leh	tenor	While being held hostage in the Babylonian court, Ismaele falls in love with Fenena. When he saves her life, his fellow Israelites accuse him of treason.
Fenena	Babylonian princess, Nabucco's youngest daughter	feh-NAY-nah	mezzo-soprano	Held hostage in Jerusalem, Fenena is deeply in love with Ismaele and converts to Judaism.
High Priest of Baal	The chief Babylonian religious official	bahl	bass	After learning of Fenena's conversion, the High Priest becomes a staunch supporter of Abigaille, plotting to overthrow the king.
Anna	Zaccaria's sister	AHN-nah	soprano	Anna defends Ismaele against accusations of treachery.
Abdallo	Babylonian soldier	ab-DAH-loh	tenor	Fiercely loyal to the king, Abdallo helps Nabucco reclaim his throne.



MARTY SOHL / METROPOLITAN OPERA



- 1813** Verdi is born just outside of Busseto, a market town in Northern Italy.
- 1818** Rossini's opera *Mosè in Egitto* premieres in Naples. It will be revived many times over the following years and will later influence the young Verdi in his choice of subject matter for *Nabucco*.
- 1832** Verdi moves to Milan to study composition.
- 1836** *Nabuchodonosor*, a French play by Auguste Anicet-Bourgeois and Francis Cornu premieres in Paris. It is later translated into Italian.
- 1838** Verdi's firstborn daughter, Virginia, dies. Later that year, Antonio Cortese's ballet *Nabuccodonosor* premieres at La Scala.
- 1839** Barely a month before the November premiere of Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, his second child, Ilicio, dies. The opera is a moderate success and establishes the collaboration between Verdi and Temistocle Solera, who will later write the libretto for *Nabucco*.
- 1840** While Verdi is in the midst of composing his second opera, the comedy *Un Giorno di Regno*, his wife Margherita dies at age 26. Devastated by the loss of his family and the disastrous reception of the new opera, Verdi abandons composition, claiming he will never write music again.
- 1841** Verdi is convinced by Bartolomeo Merelli, impresario at La Scala, to embark on a new project, and begins setting Solera's libretto based on the biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar. *Nabucco* premieres on March 9 and is an immediate success, making the 28-year-old composer internationally famous.

1844 A group of Italian nationalists is executed while trying to free political prisoners and promote Italian independence. They are quickly adopted as martyrs for the cause of unified statehood; their deaths stir up rancor against the authorities, and support for the Italian independence movement strengthens across Europe.

1847 While in London, Verdi meets Giuseppe Mazzini, a leader of the Italian nationalist movement.

1859 The phrase “Viva Verdi” begins to appear across Italy as an acronym for “Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re d’Italia.” This pro-nationalist message expressed the desire for the King of Sardinia, Victor Emmanuele, (right), to be made king of a unified Italy.

1861 Italian unification is achieved and Victor Emmanuel II is declared King of Italy.

1874 A highly respected public figure, Verdi is elected to the Italian Senate, although he rarely engages in any of its activities.

1901 Verdi dies at the age of 87 after suffering a stroke. Thousands of mourners gather in the streets of Milan, and as part of the funeral celebrations, a young Arturo Toscanini conducts “Va, pensiero” with an ensemble of 800 singers.



Anno XXVI Milano, Lunedì-Martedì 28-29 Gennaio 1901 Num. 28
CORRIERE DELLA SERA
 PREZZO D'ABBONAMENTO: In tutta Italia centesimi 5 - Un numero arretrato centesimi 10
 PER SEMI AGLI ABBONATI: LA DOMENICA DEL CORRIERE LA LETTERA
 PREZZO DELLE INSEZIONI: (per ogni riga di 10 caratteri) 1.000 centesimi al giorno

LA MORTE DI GIUSEPPE VERDI

Una delle maggiori emozioni che potesse toccare al nostro paese, è accaduta: Giuseppe Verdi è morto.
 I suoi figli sono vicini al suo spirito di un uomo pieno di virtù e di fede, di un uomo che, al di là di ogni partito, ha sempre avuto un solo pensiero: il bene della patria.
 Il giorno precedente a quello della morte, il nostro grande uomo era stato eletto a un posto onorevole nel Senato del Regno.
 La notizia della morte di Verdi è stata accolta con dolore in tutta Italia, che oggi si prepara a un grande lutto.
LA VITA
 Giuseppe Verdi nacque il 10 ottobre 1813 a Roncole Verdi, in provincia di Mantova. Il padre era un falegname, e Giuseppe si dedicò alla musica sin da ragazzo.
 Nel 1830 si trasferì a Milano, dove si dedicò allo studio della musica e alla composizione. Nel 1838 compose il suo primo dramma lirico, "Oberto, il Conte di San Bonifacio".
 Nel 1844 compose "Il Corsario", e nel 1845 "I due Foscari". Nel 1847 compose "Macbeth", e nel 1850 "Il trovatore". Nel 1851 compose "La forza del destino", e nel 1852 "Il corsaro". Nel 1853 compose "Giovane Sordani", e nel 1854 "Il masnadiero". Nel 1855 compose "Aroldo il normanno", e nel 1857 "I due Foscari". Nel 1858 compose "Il conte di San Bonifacio", e nel 1859 "Il corsario". Nel 1860 compose "I due Foscari", e nel 1861 "Il masnadiero". Nel 1862 compose "Aroldo il normanno", e nel 1863 "I due Foscari". Nel 1864 compose "Il conte di San Bonifacio", e nel 1865 "Il corsario". Nel 1866 compose "I due Foscari", e nel 1867 "Il masnadiero". Nel 1868 compose "Aroldo il normanno", e nel 1869 "I due Foscari". Nel 1870 compose "Il conte di San Bonifacio", e nel 1871 "Il corsario". Nel 1872 compose "I due Foscari", e nel 1873 "Il masnadiero". Nel 1874 compose "Aroldo il normanno", e nel 1875 "I due Foscari". Nel 1876 compose "Il conte di San Bonifacio", e nel 1877 "Il corsario". Nel 1878 compose "I due Foscari", e nel 1879 "Il masnadiero". Nel 1880 compose "Aroldo il normanno", e nel 1881 "I due Foscari". Nel 1882 compose "Il conte di San Bonifacio", e nel 1883 "Il corsario". Nel 1884 compose "I due Foscari", e nel 1885 "Il masnadiero". Nel 1886 compose "Aroldo il normanno", e nel 1887 "I due Foscari". Nel 1888 compose "Il conte di San Bonifacio", e nel 1889 "Il corsario". Nel 1890 compose "I due Foscari", e nel 1891 "Il masnadiero". Nel 1892 compose "Aroldo il normanno", e nel 1893 "I due Foscari". Nel 1894 compose "Il conte di San Bonifacio", e nel 1895 "Il corsario". Nel 1896 compose "I due Foscari", e nel 1897 "Il masnadiero". Nel 1898 compose "Aroldo il normanno", e nel 1899 "I due Foscari". Nel 1900 compose "Il conte di San Bonifacio", e nel 1901 "Il corsario".

History and Social Studies

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *A Chorus Heard Around the World*, as well as the synopsis and the audio selections from *Nabucco* available online or on the accompanying CD. Students will also need access to the internet or a library.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

World History, European History, Ancient History, English/Language Arts, Classics, Theater, Poetry, Creative Writing, Ethics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To practice close reading and analysis in order to identify historical and literary themes found in *Nabucco's* libretto
- To make connections between different time periods and cultural contexts
- To create research-based adaptations of *Nabucco*
- To explore the power of art as political allegory

A Chorus Heard Around the World

The story of the Israelites' captivity in Babylon transcends time and culture. It has grown into a powerful representation of oppression throughout history and resonated with people struggling for freedom across the globe. Drawing on these themes, Verdi's opera *Nabucco* made the composer an icon of the Italian independence movement. Similarly, African Americans used the image of the enslaved Israelites singing by the waters of Babylon as they fought for freedom and equality. *Nabucco* and the story of the Babylonian captivity are remarkable examples of the power of art as political allegory. This activity invites students to consider the opera's themes as they relate to their own social studies curriculum.

Students will:

- Become familiar with the characters and plot of *Nabucco* and deepen their understanding of its political themes
- Make connections between the opera's setting, the historical context of its composition, and its resonance with later political conflicts
- Research several different time periods in history
- Develop original adaptations of *Nabucco* based on their research

STEPS

After close analysis of the libretto as well as the historical context of the opera's original setting, students will explore other moments in history that resonate with the themes of *Nabucco*. They will then conceive their own political context for the story, develop a research-based production concept, and create their own adaptation of Verdi's opera.

STEP 1: Begin by familiarizing your students with the action of the opera. Distribute the synopsis found in this guide and either read it aloud as a class or give your students a few minutes to read it individually. After they have a good grasp of the overarching narrative, students should turn to Part I of the *Chorus Heard Around the World* reproducible handouts found at the back of this guide. After reading the introductory paragraph titled "Historical Snapshot: The Babylonian Captivity," select students to either read aloud or perform the following three short scenes found on the reproducible handouts. The corresponding music is found on **Tracks 1, 2, and 3**.

STEP 2: After each scene is read, allow time for students to answer the questions on the corresponding handouts. You may also like to lead them in a discussion of the opera's themes, as revealed by the scenes that students have just read. Be sure to draw their attention to the relationship between the Historical Snapshot and the text of the libretto. You should also highlight the themes of an oppressed people yearning for freedom and how historical events shape interpersonal dramas. Wrap up the



conversation by asking students whether the events they just read could happen in any moment in history (including within the context of current events). Why or why not?

STEP 3: Explain that although Verdi's *Nabucco* is set in ancient Babylon, many societies over the centuries have felt a deep connection to the story. Instruct students to turn to Part II of their worksheet. Divide them into small groups and assign each group one of the two Historical Snapshots that explore thematically related events in history. Each group should read their assigned Snapshot, then answer the questions listed

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND NABUCCO

This activity directly supports the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.d

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1.c

Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

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.



Ancient Babylon's Ishtar Gate, in a reconstructed version at the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

The Real Nebuchadnezzar

The historical King Nebuchadnezzar II is best remembered for his appearances in the Bible. Reigning for more than 40 years (c. 604–562 BC), he was known not only for maintaining the vast Babylonian empire through near-constant military campaigns, but also as a prodigious builder of cities. Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon (located in modern-day Iraq) was a bustling metropolis of almost 200,000 people, stretching over three square miles. Traces of his building projects in the capital can still be seen today, and archeological evidence suggests that Babylon was overflowing with art and rich ornamentation. A reconstruction of the city's Ishtar Gate (built around 575 BC), including some of its original bricks, is housed in Berlin's Pergamon Museum.

FUN FACT The famed Hanging Gardens of Babylon, supposedly built by King Nebuchadnezzar II as a present for one of his wives, were among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Their exact location has never been discovered, but Verdi and his librettist Solera set several scenes of their opera in the legendary gardens.

below it. This preparatory reflection will help guide students in the final exercise of this activity as they design a production of *Nabucco* set in alternate time periods.

If time permits and your class has access to the internet or a library, this is an excellent opportunity for students to research one of the time periods in greater depth. One of the Snapshots may fit into your class's curriculum better than the others. In that case, feel free to bring in your own resources. If this is not possible, simply have them rely on the brief descriptions found on their sheet. The Historical Snapshots are included here for your convenience.

HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT: RISORGIMENTO, 1815–1871 Before 1861, Italy was not yet a single nation. For much of the 19th century, the country was made up of many divided kingdoms, duchies, republics, and states controlled by the Catholic Church. Napoleon had invaded Italy in 1796, and after his fall in 1815, the peninsula again split into an array of small, constantly fighting domains, most of them under the influence of other European powers—particularly the Habsburg Empire. Many Italians therefore lived under the control of foreign (and, according to many nationalists, “occupying”) governments. It was during this period, beginning around 1815, that the idea of a single, unified Italy arose, driven by a popular movement known as the Risorgimento, or “resurgence.” Its efforts eventually resulted in violent rebellion and armed struggle that lasted several decades. Giuseppe Verdi, a deeply political and patriotic man, finally saw his hopes for Italian unification fulfilled with the establishment of the fiercely desired Italian nation-state in 1861 and the full unification of the Italian peninsula in 1871. Several of his operas reflect his support for a unified, independent Italy. The chorus “Va, pensiero” from *Nabucco* remains the unofficial anthem of Italian national pride.

HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT: PRE-CIVIL WAR AMERICA, CA. 1850 *Nabucco*'s chorus of the Hebrew slaves is a dramatization of Psalm 137, one of the best-known and most beloved songs in the Bible. Beginning with the words “By the waters of Babylon/there we sat down and wept/when we remembered Zion,” this psalm has long been associated with the African-American struggle for freedom and equality. In perhaps its most famous usage, abolitionist Frederick Douglass quoted it in his 1852 speech “What is the Fourth of July to the Negro?” This fierce attack on the institution of slavery includes some of Douglass's most powerful writing. In the years before the American Civil War, he toured the country speaking to audiences about the evils of slavery and worked tirelessly to free the 3.2 million slaves living in the southern states.

After giving groups 10 minutes to prepare, have each report back and share their thoughts about how their assigned Historical Snapshots relate to the Babylonian Captivity and the action of *Nabucco*.

STEP 4: Depending on your preference, this next step can be done either in groups or individually. Now that students are familiar with the themes and plot of *Nabucco*, as well as how later movements and events in history can be interpreted through the lens of *Nabucco* and the Babylonian captivity, ask them to think about a new time period for their original opera. This can be specific to your curriculum, current events, or completely open to the students' imaginations. Insist that they be specific. Part III of the worksheet is designed to guide their thought process and refer them back to the text of the libretto, the themes they identified earlier, and the action as it progresses in *Nabucco*. Once they have had adequate time to conceive of a production in the setting of their choice, invite students share their work with the class and discuss.

STEP 5: This final step can be done in class or assigned as homework. Students will now write their own adaptation of *Nabucco* based on their work in class. Lead a short discussion with your students about Verdi and Solera's sources for the libretto (feel free to refer to the section of this guide preceding the synopsis for further details). Point out that Verdi and Solera depended on four general sources for their story: historical fact, the Bible, earlier theatrical adaptations of the story, and their own imaginations. Students must base their adaptations on material from these categories: one source must be historical fact(s), one source must be literary (such as a poem, play, song, or a work of fiction), and the other source must be their own imagination. They will then sketch out their own adaptation of *Nabucco* based on their three selected sources. Emphasize the importance of their chosen historical context, which must support and illuminate the themes and action of *Nabucco*. Students may use Part IV of the worksheet to organize their thoughts.

FOLLOW-UP: The final step of this exercise can be the beginning of a much larger, research-based project. Depending on how much time you are able to devote to this activity, students can conduct library-based research and write full librettos of new artworks based on *Nabucco*. This research could also inspire an art project in the form of a visual collage of materials from each of students' three sources of inspiration. Ideally, the project would culminate with a presentation and/or performance of their original adaptations.

Music

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *The Cry of the People*, as well as the synopsis and the audio selections from *Nabucco* available online or on the accompanying CD.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Music, English/Language Arts, Writing

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To introduce and/or reinforce knowledge of musical terminology
- To explore the close and unique relation of text and music in opera
- To listen to musical examples critically and become familiar with the music of *Nabucco*

The Cry of the People: Exploring Verdi's Choruses

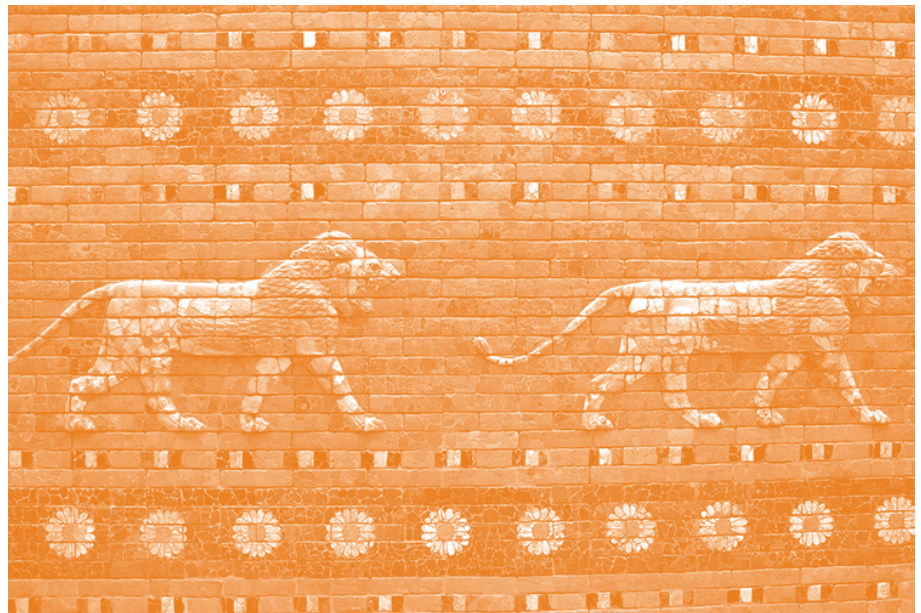
The use of a chorus in opera has its roots in ancient Greek drama, in which a group of performers would comment and reflect on the dramatic situation. Unlike its predecessor, a typical opera chorus—while also providing commentary—is included in the action on stage. In several of Verdi's operas, the chorus represents the voice of the common people, thus expressing the ideals, hopes, and afflictions of an entire nation. "Va, pensiero," Verdi's most well-known operatic chorus, portrays the burdens and dreams of the Israelite people during their enslavement by Nabucco. In the following lesson, students will:

- explore the narrative role of the opera chorus
- develop familiarity with Verdi's dramatic pacing
- relate some of Verdi's musical choices to the characters and plot of *Nabucco*

STEPS

The famous chorus "Va, pensiero" is a musical anthem for the enslaved Israelites in Verdi's opera, in which they lament their situation and evoke the beauties of their homeland. Students will learn how Verdi deploys the chorus in this important number and discuss the artistic choices the composer made, using musical terminology and engaging in musical analysis.

STEP 1: Begin class with an informal discussion of the performing forces required in an opera. Ask students to name all of the different performers they recall seeing as part of an opera. Answers may include vocal soloists, dancers, the orchestra, and the chorus. Depending on their level of experience with opera, students may not be as familiar with the operatic chorus. Explain that most composers have included musical numbers for several groups of voices in their works. Often the chorus represents a collective of people: peasants, courtiers, soldiers, etc.



STEP 2: Distribute copies of the *Ten Essential Musical Terms* found in this guide and take some time ensuring that students are familiar with the musical concepts behind them. Where applicable, you may want to demonstrate the meaning of these terms on the piano or on another instrument. Audio examples can be found on the CD at the back of this guide and are listed below.

TRACK	MUSICAL TERM
4	Cantabile
5	Chorus
6	Legato
7	Meter: Triple Meter
8	Meter: Duple Meter
9	Mode: Major
10	Mode: Minor
11	Tessitura: High
12	Tessitura: Low
13	Triplet
14	Unison

STEP 3: Now turn students' attention to the music of *Nabucco* by playing **Track 15** for them, first without introducing the plot or the text of the excerpt. Some students may recognize the melody, but most likely they won't know why it is familiar or where it comes from. Solicit students' reactions, encouraging them to use musical terms to describe what they hear in the excerpt. You may want to prompt them with some of the following questions:

- What is the meter of this work? (4/4)
- What is the tempo? (very slow, or largo)
- What are the performing forces? (chorus, mostly singing in unison, with orchestral accompaniment)
- What is the mode? (major)
- Are there any recurring rhythmic patterns? (the work contains many triplets)

Conclude the discussion by asking students what they think this chorus might be about. Are the characters happy? Sad? What are the musical indications that students are basing their opinions on? It will likely be necessary to play the audio excerpt several times.

STEP 4: It will be helpful now for students to know the basic outline of the opera's plot and at which point this musical number occurs. You may want to distribute the plot summary found at the beginning of this guide or alternatively provide your own short description. Students should understand that the opera deals with the destruction

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND NABUCCO

This activity directly supports the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

of Jerusalem and the Israelites' temple at the hands of the Babylonian king Nabucco (Nebuchadnezzar), and the Hebrew people's subsequent enslavement in Babylon. The original stage directions in the score indicate that the Israelites should be depicted in chains, and performing forced labor.

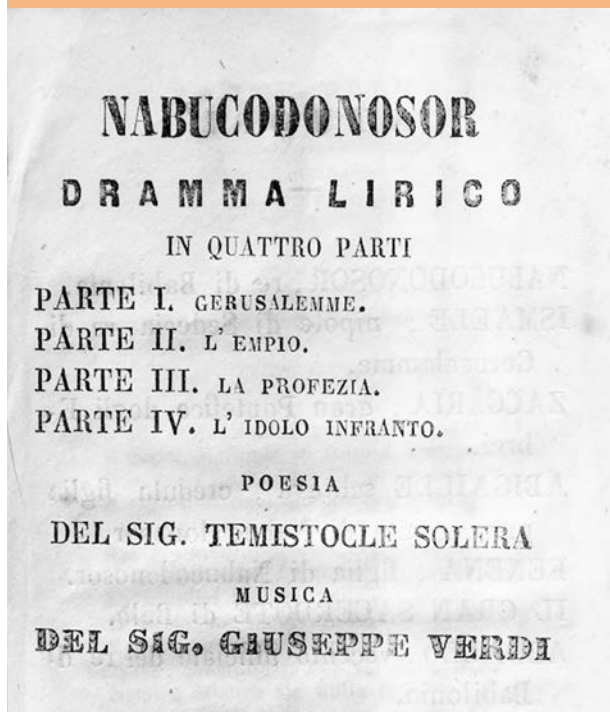
STEP 5: Now distribute the text and translation for the chorus and nominate a student or a group of students to read the English translation out loud. Next ask the group what kind of text they have just read. Is it a celebration? A lamentation? Both? Play the track for them again as they follow along to the text. Encourage students to develop

Nabucco's Origin Myth

The story behind the creation of *Nabucco* is a famous one. As recounted by the composer himself, Verdi initially rejected the project. Following the failure of his second opera, the comedy *Un Giorno di Regno*, and the sudden death of his young wife (on the heels of the loss of both their children), he had decided to renounce

opera composition altogether. His mind was changed only after the impresario of La Scala insisted Verdi take home Solera's *Nabucco* libretto. "I [Verdi] threw the manuscript on the table with a violent gesture, and stood staring at it. It had fallen open, and without realizing it I gazed at the page and read the line: *'Va, pensiero, sull' ali dorate'*... I read one passage, then another. Then, resolute in my determination never to compose again, I forced myself to close the book and go to bed. But *Nabucco* kept running through my mind, and I couldn't sleep."

This version of events, recorded almost four decades later by Verdi's publisher and friend Giulio Ricordi, probably contains more myth than fact. By then, "Va, pensiero," the chorus of the Hebrew slaves longing for their homeland, had become one of Verdi's most famous compositions and the unofficial anthem of Italian patriots. Verdi may well have exaggerated his initial connection to the text in order to emphasize the piece's then iconic and almost mystical status in Italian culture.



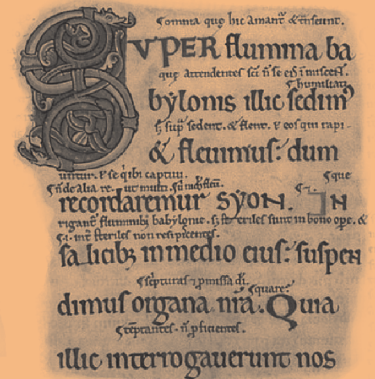
opinions about why Verdi chose to set this text for the chorus rather than an individual character, and why he made his specific musical choices on the mode, tempo, tessitura, and more. How did Verdi musically communicate the complicated emotions of the Israelites at this point in the opera's plot?

STEP 6: For a point of contrast, distribute the text and translation for “Immenso Jehovah,” another of the famous choral numbers in *Nabucco*. As students follow along to the libretto, play **Track 16**. Encourage students to comment on Verdi’s musical choices in this chorus. What are the similarities and differences between this number and “Va, pensiero”?

FOLLOW-UP: Explain that in Verdi’s lifetime, “Va, pensiero” was interpreted as a political statement in support of Italian unification. Due to some extent to the music’s tunefulness and accessibility, even to amateur singers, but also because of the chorus’s roots in the Bible and its evocative adaptation of Psalm 137, the melody became an anthem for oppressed people worldwide, a song of resistance, fortitude, and unified identity in the face of tyranny.

For a take-home exercise, ask students to identify a popular song they know that carries a message—overt or more veiled—related to nationalism, activism, patriotism, or a desire for some kind of social change. Can they think of a song that intends to inspire and embolden people to stand up for a cause, or challenge societal norms? As a homework assignment, they should write a brief essay on the song they have identified, demonstrating the cause the work describes, and the textual and musical elements the writer uses to depict the situation.

FUN FACT: The biblical Psalm 137, which begins “By the waters of Babylon/There we sat down and wept” and served as the inspiration for the chorus of the Hebrew slaves in *Nabucco*, has been set to music many times—by composers ranging from Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina in the 16th century to the 1970s reggae group The Melodians.



Psalm 137 from the Eadwine Psalter (mid-12th century).

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Supporting the Student Experience during *The Met: Live in HD Transmission*

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the Performance Activity reproducible handouts found in the back of this guide.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND NABUCCO

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3

Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities help students analyze different aspects of the experience and engage critically with the performance. They will consider the creative choices that have been made for the particular production they are watching and examine different aspects of the performance.

Each Performance Activity incorporates a reproducible sheet. Students should bring this activity sheet to the *Live in HD* transmission and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activities direct attention to details of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed.

For *Nabucco*, the first activity sheet, *Emoji of the Ancient World*, introduces students to Babylonian cuneiform and invites them to think critically about visual storytelling.

The second, basic activity sheet is called *My Highs & Lows*. It is meant to be collected, opera by opera, over the course of the season. This sheet serves to guide students toward a consistent set of objective observations, as well as to help them articulate their own opinions. It is designed to enrich the students' understanding of the art form as a whole. The ratings system encourages students to express their critique: use these ratings to spark discussions that require careful, critical thinking.

The Performance Activity reproducible handouts can be found in the back of this guide. On the next page, you'll find an activity created specifically for follow-up after the *Live in HD* transmission.

Confrontation and Conversion

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? The discussion offers an opportunity to apply the notes on students' *My Highs & Lows* sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production—in short, to see themselves as *Nabucco* experts.

At its heart, *Nabucco* is a story about two cultures confronting each other's beliefs and ultimately finding a way to honor the other's humanity. While it's easy to focus solely on the opera's high drama and over-the-top theatricality, *Nabucco* raises serious questions about the nature of this confrontation and conversion. Three of the opera's major characters undergo radical personal transformations: Nabucco, from fearsome warrior to infirm madman, to religious convert; Abigaille, from vengeful villainess to guilt-wracked penitent; and Fenena, from a member of her native religion to a convert, all in the name of love.

Introduce the themes of confrontation and conversion and lead your students in a discussion about the ways in which confronting another belief system can challenge and even change one's own way of thinking. Remind students that conversion can mean many things, and that they do not need to limit their thoughts to religious beliefs. Specifically:

- What does it mean to confront another belief system?
- What do you think brings about the conversions in *Nabucco*? Fear? Desperation? Love?



IN PREPARATION

This activity requires no preparation other than attendance at the *Live in HD* transmission of *Nabucco*.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To think deeply about the nature of religious or intellectual conversion
- To analyze the reasons behind the personal transformations of *Nabucco*'s characters
- To examine the ways in which conflict can be productive
- To consider how conflict and conversion have played a role in students' own lives

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND NABUCCO

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d

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.

- Can conversion, or a change of heart, occur without confrontation?
- Can confrontation and conflict be seen as a good thing? When and how?
- Do you think some of the characters' changes of heart are more authentic than others? Which ones and why?
- Have you experienced confrontation or conversion in your own life? What made you change your thinking?

To help students organize and articulate their views, invite them to think about a moment in their lives when they changed their mind about a deeply held belief. They also might think about a time they succeeded in changing someone else's mind. Instruct them to reflect on this situation as if it were a dramatic scene between two characters, keeping in mind the discussion above. How do people express themselves when they are in these situations? What makes someone change their mind? How can confrontation be expressed constructively?

For homework, you can have your students write out an imagined dramatic scene based on the above discussion. At your next class meeting, students can rehearse and perform their works.

Ten Essential Musical Terms

Cantabile A term of musical expression (literally “singable” in Italian) indicating that the music should be performed with lyricism and smooth connection between the notes.

Chorus A group of performers singing together with multiple voices per part. In opera, a composer may use a chorus to represent large groups of people, such as townspeople, soldiers or guests at a party. Some operas involve a great deal of singing for the chorus, others require very little. Their music can range from simple unison melodies to complex, multi-part singing with a high degree of rhythmic independence.

Libretto The text to an opera or staged musical drama. Literally “little book” in Italian, the word refers to the centuries-old practice of printing a small book with the text to an opera, which was available for sale prior to a performance. A related word, “librettist,” refers to the artist who creates the words for the composer to set musically, either adapting them from an existing source, or writing original material. Often a librettist would have completed his work before a composer would begin to set it to music, but there were also many composers and librettists who worked very closely together.

Legato The term legato comes from the Italian word for “to tie together.” It is used in music to describe a series of notes that are played or sung with smooth connection from one note to the next. It is the opposite of staccato, an articulation in which notes are played in a short, detached manner.

Meter Intricately tied to rhythm, meter refers to the organization of regularly repeating beats into groups and the hierarchy of stronger and weaker beats. Usually the first beat of a group—called “downbeat” because of its indication by a downward motion of the conductor’s hand—receives the strongest stress.

When the downbeat is followed by a single weak beat (ONE two ONE two ONE two, etc.), this pattern of two repeating beats is known as duple meter. Duple meter also encompasses groupings of four beats, in which case the first beat receives the strongest emphasis and the third beat receives a smaller stress (ONE two Three four).

When the strong beat is followed by two weak beats (ONE two three ONE two three ONE two three, etc.), the pattern is known as triple meter.

Mode Western music written since around 1600 has been built on two basic tonal principles: major and minor. Although the terms can be used to describe scales, intervals, harmonies, or keys, in their most basic application they refer to the overarching tonal organization of a composition, or its mode. Pieces in the major mode typically sound bright, cheery, or optimistic, while pieces in the minor mode may sound somber, plaintive, or sinister.

Tempo Literally meaning “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music. It is indicated in a score by a variety of conventional (often Italian) words—such as allegro, adagio, vivace, moderato, grave, largo, and many more—that not only provide direction on the composer’s desired rate of speed, but also carry associations of gesture and character. For instance, vivace indicates not only a brisk speed but also a lively spirit. Additional tempo markings may indicate when a composer asks for a section of music to be sped up (such as “accelerando”) or slowed down (such as “ritardando” or “rallentando”).

Tessitura/range An Italian word for “texture,” tessitura describes the particular range in relation to the instrument or voice that’s performing it—for instance, either high, middle, or low. The term “range” refers to the total span of a piece. It can be narrow or wide. Extremes in tessitura and range are difficult to perform.

Triplet A triplet is a rhythmic pattern of three notes in the space normally occupied by two. In duple time, the beat is normally subdivided in patterns of two—for instance, a quarter note would be comprised of two eighth notes of equal duration. Using triplets, a quarter note could also be subdivided into three eighth notes of equal duration, taking up exactly the same quarter-note space.

Unison The singing or playing of a group of performers at the same pitch and with the same rhythm. A unison melody may create a range of effects, from simple, folk-like artlessness to emotional unity.

**Excerpts taken from the
Metropolitan Opera broadcast of
February 26, 2005**

NABUCCO

Nikolai Putilin

ABIGAILLE

Maria Guleghina

ISMAELE

Gwyn Hughes Jones

FENENA

Wendy White

ZACCARIA

Paata Burchuladze

Conducted by
James Levine

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra
and Chorus

- 1 Confrontation (Act I, Final Scene)
- 2 Longing for Home (Act III, Scene 2)
- 3 Deliverance (Act IV, Scene 2)
- 4 Cantabile
- 5 Chorus
- 6 Legato
- 7 Meter: Triple Meter
- 8 Meter: Duple Meter
- 9 Mode: Major
- 10 Mode: Minor
- 11 Tessitura: High
- 12 Tessitura: Low
- 13 Triplet
- 14 Unison
- 15 "Va, pensiero"
- 16 "Immenso Jehovah"

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World

PART I Take a moment to read the below description of the historical context of *Nabucco*'s setting.

HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY, C.597 BC

The Babylonian captivity, or Babylonian exile, refers to a period of approximately 50 years during which large numbers of the Hebrew people were enslaved in Babylon following the sieges of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 and 587 BC. An event of central importance to Jewish identity, the episode is related in the biblical books of Jeremiah, 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Daniel, and the Psalms. The precise dates of the captivity as well as the exact number of deported Israelites are unclear, but archeological evidence suggests that some version of the events depicted in the Bible did occur. Recent scholarship posits that at least 25,000 people (representing a quarter of the Hebrew population) were deported to Babylon.

Now, think about how this historical context informs the three scenes on the following pages.

First Example: Confrontation

Act I, Final Scene

Nabucco has just entered the temple of the Israelites with his conquering army. Ismaele has rejected Abigaille because he loves Fenena, her sister.

TRACK 1

ABIGAILLE: Colei, che il solo mio ben contende,
sacra a vendetta forse cadrà!

That girl who wants to steal my man
will know my wrath!

ISMAELE, ANNA, ZACCARIA, HEBREWS, LEVITES:
Tu che a tuo senno de' regi il core
volgi, o gran Nume, soccorri a noi,
china lo sguardo su' figli tuoi,
che a rie catene s'apprestan già!

You who in your wisdom judge our hearts,
turn to us, come to our aid, Almighty God!
Look down upon your children,
who now prepare themselves for cruel chains!

NABUCCO: L'empia Sionne scorer dovrà!
In mar di sangue fra pianti e lai,
l'empia Sionne scorer dovrà!

Unholy Zion must fall!
Amid tears and groans, wicked Zion
must drown in a sea of blood!

FENENA: Padre, pietade, pietà!
Padre, pietade ti parli al core!
Vicina a morte per te già son!
Sugl'infelici scenda il perdono,
e tua figlia salva sarà!

Father, have pity—pity!
Father, let pity speak to your heart!
I am at the point of death now because of you!
Oh, pardon the victims of misfortune,
and your daughter will be saved!

NABUCCO: O vinti, il capo a terra!
Il vincitor son io.
Ben l'ho chiamato in guerra,
ma venne il vostro Dio?
Tema ha di me: resistermi,
stolti, chi mai potrà?

Bow before me, defeated slaves!
I am the conqueror.
I challenged your God in battle,
but did he come?
He is afraid of me; who in the whole wide world,
you fools, will be able to stop me?

NABUCCO

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

Name the Babylonian characters: _____

Name the Israelite characters: _____

Who seems to wield the most power in this scene? What gives them this power?

Who do you sympathize with in this scene? Why?

How does the setting of the opera and its placement in the Babylonian captivity (which you read about in the Historical Snapshot) reflect the situation in the scene above?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

Second Example: Longing for Home

Act III, Scene 2:

The Israelites rest from their forced labor.

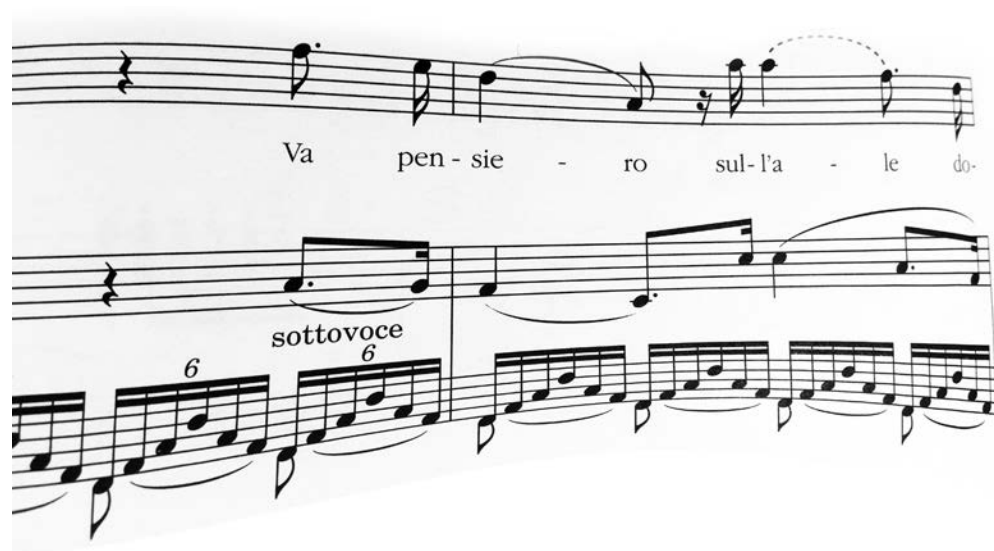
TRACK 2

HEBREWS: Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate;
va ti posa sui clivi, sui colli,
ove olezzano tepide e molli
l'aure dolci del suolo natal!
Del Giordano le rive saluta,
di Sionne le torri atterrate.
O mia patria sì bella e perduta!
O membranza sì cara e fatal!

Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati,
perché muta dal salice pendi?
Le memorie nel petto raccendi,
ci favella del tempo che fu!
O simile di Sòlima ai fati
traggi un suono di crudo lamento,
o t'ispiri il Signore un concerto
che ne infonda al patire virtù!

Fly, my thoughts, on wings of gold;
go settle upon the slopes and the hills,
where, soft and mild, the sweet airs
of my native land smell fragrant!
Greet the banks of the Jordan
and Zion's toppled towers.
Oh, my homeland, so lovely and so lost!
Oh memory, so dear and so dead!

Golden harp of the prophets of old,
why do you now hang silent upon the willow?
Rekindle the memories in our hearts,
and speak of times gone by!
Mindful of the fate of Solomon's temple,
Let me cry out with sad lamentation,
or else may the Lord strengthen me
to bear these sufferings!



NABUCCO

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

What are the Israelites longing for?

What does this text make you feel?

How does the setting of the opera and its placement in the Babylonian captivity (which you read about in the Historical Snapshot) reflect the situation in the scene above?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

Third Example: Deliverance

Act IV, Scene 2

Fenena, Zaccaria and the Israelites are about to be executed on Abigaille's orders.

TRACK 3

ZACCARIA: Và! la palma del martirio,
và, conquista, o giovinetta;
troppo lungo fu l'esiglio;
è tua patria il ciel!... t'affretta!

FENENA: O dischiuso è il firmamento!
Al Signor lo spirto anela...
Ei m'arride, e cento e cento
gaudi eterni a me disvela!
O splendor degl'astri, addio!
Me di luce irradia Iddio!
Già dal fral, che qui ne impiomba,
fugge l'alma e vola al ciel!

OFFSTAGE VOICES: Viva Nabucco!

HEBREWS: Qual grido è questo!

OFFSTAGE VOICES: Viva Nabucco!

HIGH PRIEST OF BAAL: Si compia il rito!

NABUCCO: (*entering with soldiers*)
Stolti, fermate! L'idol funesto,
guerrier, frangete qual polve al suol.
(*The idol falls all on its own and shatters.*)

HEBREWS: Divin prodigio!

NABUCCO: Ah torna Israello,
torna alle gioie del patrio suol!

Go, win the palm of martyrdom,
Go and win it, oh pure young maid!
You have been too long in exile.
Your home is in heaven! Hurry!

Oh, the sky has opened up!
My soul longs for the Lord...
He smiles upon me and reveals to me
hundreds and hundreds of joys everlasting!
Oh, splendor of the stars, farewell!
God floods me with His holy light!
From this mortal body that anchors us here,
my soul escapes already and soars to heaven!

Long live Nabucco!

What are they shouting?

Long live Nabucco!

Let us perform the ceremony!

Stop, unholy wretches! Soldiers, shatter
the baneful idol, like dust to the ground.

Divine miracle!

Oh, return once more, Israel,
Return to the delights of your native land!

NABUCCO

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

How does the setting of the opera and its placement in the Babylonian captivity (which you read about in the Historical Snapshot) reflect the situation in the scene above? Who has changed the most from the beginning of the opera? How? Why?

WRAP-UP QUESTION:

How does the historical context inform the scenes you just read? Can you imagine them happening in any other place or time? Why or why not?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

PART II: Read the snapshot assigned to your group.

HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT: RISORGIMENTO, 1815–1871 Before 1861, Italy was not yet a single nation. For much of the 19th century, the country was made up of many divided kingdoms, duchies, republics, and states controlled by the Catholic Church. Napoleon had invaded Italy in 1796, and after his fall in 1815, the peninsula again split into an array of small, constantly fighting domains, most of them under the influence of other European powers—particularly the Habsburg Empire. Many Italians therefore lived under the control of foreign (and, according to many nationalists, “occupying”) governments. It was during this period, beginning around 1815, that the idea of a single, unified Italy arose, driven by a popular movement known as the Risorgimento, or “resurgence.” Its efforts eventually resulted in violent rebellion and armed struggle that lasted several decades. Giuseppe Verdi, a deeply political and patriotic man, finally saw his hopes for Italian unification fulfilled with the establishment of the fiercely desired Italian nation-state in 1861 and the full unification of the Italian peninsula in 1871. Several of his operas reflect his support for a unified, independent Italy. The chorus “Va, pensiero” from *Nabucco* remains the unofficial anthem of Italian national pride.

HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT: PRE-CIVIL WAR AMERICA, CA. 1850 *Nabucco*’s chorus of the Hebrew slaves is a dramatization of Psalm 137, one of the best-known and most beloved songs in the Bible. Beginning with the words “By the waters of Babylon/there we sat down and wept/when we remembered Zion,” this psalm has long been associated with the African-American struggle for freedom and equality. In perhaps its most famous usage, abolitionist Frederick Douglass quoted it in his 1852 speech “What is the Fourth of July to the Negro?” This fierce attack on the institution of slavery includes some of Douglass’s most powerful writing. In the years before the American Civil War, he toured the country speaking to audiences about the evils of slavery and worked tirelessly to free the 3.2 million slaves living in the southern states.

How is your Historical Snapshot similar to the Babylonian captivity? How is it different?

Can you imagine the characters of *Nabucco* in the world of your snapshot? Why or why not?

If you had to set the opera in the world described by your snapshot, who would *Nabucco* be? Who would *Abigaille* be? *Zaccaria*? *Ismaele* and *Fenena*?

NABUCCO

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

PART III

Now reflect on how the Historical Snapshots you have read could be considered allegories or reflections of the situation of the Babylonian captivity. Next, think of another historical period you have learned about in class, or perhaps a situation taken from recent current events (events in Syria or the town of Ferguson, for example). If you could set the story of *Nabucco* in a historical period different from Ancient Babylon, what would it be? Why?

Once you have an idea you want to explore, let's get specific. Don't worry about every detail having a direct match in your new setting. The object of this exercise is to explore differences and similarities.

Who would Nabucco be in your new setting? Who would Abigail be? Zaccaria? Ismaele and Fenena?

How would you translate the first scene you read into your new context? Where would it take place? How would it be different? How would it be the same?

How would you translate the second scene you read into this new context? Where would it take place? How would it be different? How would it be the same?

How would you translate the third scene you read into this new context? Where would it take place? How would it be different? How would it be the same?

NABUCCO

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

PART IV

Now it's time for you to create an adaptation of Verdi's *Nabucco* set in the new historical period you've described above. Verdi and his librettist Temistocle Solera based their opera on four main sources: historical fact, biblical literature, earlier theatrical adaptations of the story, and their own imaginations. How can you use similar sources of inspiration to create your adaptation of *Nabucco*? Choose at least one historical fact (a specific date or historical event), one piece of literature (such as a poem, song lyrics, a character or situation from a work of fiction), and one invention of your own imagination, and begin developing your own interpretation of Verdi's opera.

There are several ways to get started. You can fill out the sheet below, start by re-writing the scenes from the beginning of the exercise, or both. If you have another idea for how to spark your imagination, you should feel free to use that method to get started.

My Historical Context is

Briefly describe how the action of *Nabucco* fits into your Historical Context.

Briefly describe how each of the characters fit into your Historical Context:

Nabucco

Abigaille

Zaccaria

Ismaele

Fenena

The Israelites

The Babylonians

NABUCCO

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Chorus Heard Round the World (CONT'D)

Now, think about your source materials.

What historical fact will you use as material for your adaptation?

What literary source (poem, song lyrics, movie character) will you use as material for your adaptation?

What will you create from your own imagination to use as material for your adaptation?

Now that you have thought through all the various parts, describe your vision for your adaptation of Verdi's *Nabucco*. If time permits, begin writing!

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

The Cry of the People: Exploring Verdi's Choruses

TRACK 15

HEBREWS: Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate;
va ti posa sui clivi, sui colli,
ove olezzano tepide e molli
l'aure dolci del suolo natal!
Del Giordano le rive saluta,
di Sionne le torri atterrate...
O mia patria sì bella e perduta!
O membranza sì cara e fatal!

Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati,
perché muta dal salice pendì?
Le memorie nel petto raccendi,
ci favella del tempo che fu!
O simile di Sòlima ai fati
traggi un suono di crudo lamento,
o t'ispiri il Signore un concerto
che ne infonda al patire virtù!

Fly, my thoughts, on wings of gold;
go settle upon the slopes and the hills,
where, soft and mild, the sweet airs
of my native land smell fragrant!
Greet the banks of the Jordan
and Zion's toppled towers.
Oh, my homeland, so lovely and so lost!
Oh memory, so dear and so dead!

Golden harp of the prophets of old,
why do you now hang silent upon the willow?
Rekindle the memories in our hearts,
and speak of times gone by!
Mindful of the fate of Solomon's temple,
Let me cry out with sad lamentation,
or else may the Lord strengthen me
to bear these sufferings!

TRACK 16

ALL: (kneeling): Immenso Jehovah,
chi non ti sente?
chi non è polvere
innanzi a te?
Tu spandi un'iride?
Tutto è ridente.
Tu vibri il fulmine?
L'uom più non è.

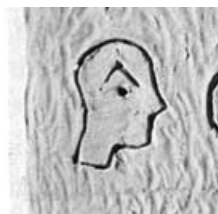
Great Jehovah
who has not felt your might?
Who is not as dust
in your sight?
Do you spread a rainbow across the sky?
You make all things beautiful.
Do you unleash the thunderbolt?
Man is nothing compared to you.

At the Met: *Emoji of the Ancient World*

Below is an example of Babylonian cuneiform. Cuneiform, in use for almost 3,000 years before alphabetic languages were created, was an ancient system of writing that used symbols to indicate meaning (much like modern Chinese characters). By the 6th century BC, when the action of *Nabucco* takes place, the text looked something like this:



An example of cuneiform from the sixth century BC, dating from the sixth century BC



Earlier symbols, however, more clearly resembled the objects they represented. For example, consider this character meaning “head,” dating from around 3,000 BC:

Using the above symbol as inspiration, invent your own cuneiform language. If you had to use symbols to explain to someone the basic plot of the first act of *Nabucco*, how would you do it? Draw them below.

What about the second act?

What about the whole opera? How would you use your invented cuneiform to summarize *Nabucco*?

Now, can you “translate” those symbols into what might be called modern cuneiform—emoji? How would you sum up the entirety of *Nabucco* using only this “modern day cuneiform”? Students might enjoy reviewing the series of “Opera Emoji,” available on the Facebook page of the Metropolitan Opera Guild.

Nabucco: My Highs & Lows

JANUARY 7, 2017

CONDUCTED BY JAMES LEVINE

REVIEWED BY _____

THE STARS	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
PLÁCIDO DOMINGO AS NABUCCO	*****	
LIUDMYLA MONASTYRSKA AS ABIGAILLE	*****	
RUSSELL THOMAS AS ISMAELE	*****	
JAMIE BARTON AS FENENA	*****	
DMITRY BELOSSELSKIY AS ZACCARIA	*****	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
THE ISRAELITES AWAIT THE APPROACHING BABYLONIAN ARMY MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FENENA AND ISMAELE ARE INTERRUPTED BY ABIGAILLE MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
NABUCCO ARRIVES MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ABIGAILLE FORMS A PLAN MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ZACCARIA'S PRAYER MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
A CORONATION MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
NABUCCO'S DESCENT INTO MADNESS MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ABIGAILLE TRICKS HER FATHER MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE ISRAELITES LAMENT THEIR LOST HOMELAND MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
NABUCCO REGAINS HIS WITS MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FENENA AND THE ISRAELITES ARE SAVED MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ALL PRAISE THE GOD OF THE ISRAELITES MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ABIGAILLE BEGS FORGIVENESS BEFORE DYING MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5