

FEW SUBJECTS HAVE FASCINATED ARTISTS, WRITERS, AND COMPOSERS more than the biblical tale of the princess Salome, her stepfather Herod, and the captive prophet John the Baptist. And few works have caused as much uproar—among critics and audience members alike—as Oscar Wilde’s 1893 French play *Salomé*, the basis of German composer Richard Strauss’s equally controversial opera. Alternately praised for its musical inventiveness and scorned for its moral depravity when it premiered in 1905, *Salome* is now a cornerstone of the modern operatic canon, a rare repertory mainstay still capable of provoking uncomfortable questions about desire, power, and violence.

The opera returns to the Met this season in its first new production in 20 years. In his Met debut, German director Claus Guth gives the biblical story a psychologically perceptive Victorian-era setting rich in symbolism and subtle shades of darkness and light. Guth’s vision invites audiences directly into the subterranean chamber where the prophet Jochanaan languishes and where Salome—steadfast and cunning—discovers both the object of her obsession and the opportunity to challenge her stepfather’s power.

This guide approaches *Salome* as a complex work that encourages the consideration of pressing questions about political power, cultural controversy, and the social contexts in which art is made and consumed. The materials on the following pages will enable students and educators to engage with the historical background of both Wilde’s play and Strauss’s opera, visual representations of the Salome legend, the history of *Salome* at the Met, censorship in contemporary culture, and Strauss’s extraordinary musical language. In so doing, they will approach a deeper understanding of why *Salome* was—and perhaps still is—a shock.



VAN DEN HEEVER

DEYOUNG

SIEGEL

BUSZEWSKI

MATTEI

THE WORK

An opera in one act, sung in German

Music by Richard Strauss

Libretto adapted by the composer, based on Hedwig Lachmann’s translation of Oscar Wilde’s play

First performed December 9, 1905, at Dresden Court Opera, Dresden, Germany

PRODUCTION

Claus Guth Production

Etienne Pluss Set Designer

Ursula Kudrna Costume Designer

Olaf Freese Lighting Designer

rocafilm / Roland Horvath
Projection Designer

Sommer Ulrickson Choreographer

Yvonne Gebauer Dramaturg

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD

May 17, 2025

Encore May 21, 2025

Elza van den Heever Salome

Michelle DeYoung Herodias

Gerhard Siegel Herod

Piotr Buszewski Narraboth

Peter Mattei Jochanaan

Yannick Nézet-Séguin Conductor

Production a gift of the Berry Charitable Foundation and Daisy M. Soros

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Salome 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 *Salome* 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.

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

WHO'S WHO IN SALOME

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Salome A princess	ZAH-loh-may	soprano	The daughter of Herodias and stepdaughter of Herod, Salome knows what she wants and how to get it. When she becomes spellbound by the captive prophet Jochanaan, her desire leads to the dramatic upheaval of the opera.
Jochanaan A prophet	yo-KHA-nah-ahn	baritone	After criticizing Herod's marriage to Herodias as incestuous, the prophet Jochanaan (or John the Baptist) is imprisoned in a cellar. Heralding the coming of the Messiah, he refuses to acknowledge Salome and urges her to repent.
Herod Tetrarch of Judea	HEH-rohd	tenor	A lavish Roman ruler, Herod is politically powerful but feeble-minded: He waffles in the presence of Jochanaan, bickers with Herodias, and leers at Salome without considering the consequences.
Herodias Wife of Herod	heh-ROHD-ee-ahs	mezzo-soprano	Salome's mother, formerly wed to Herod's brother, Herodias demands her husband kill Jochanaan—who deems her wicked—and urges Salome not to entertain Herod's requests.
Narraboth Captain of the guard	NAH-ra-boht	tenor	A young Syrian in Herod's command, Narraboth is taken with Salome and vulnerable to her powers of persuasion—ultimately letting her see Jochanaan against Herod's orders.

Synopsis

At King Herod's palace, the young captain Narraboth admires the beautiful princess Salome, who sits at the banquet table with her stepfather, Herod, and his court. A page warns Narraboth that something terrible might happen if he continues to stare at the princess, but Narraboth won't listen. The voice of Jochanaan is heard from the cellar, where he is kept prisoner, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. Two soldiers comment on the prophet's kindness and Herod's fear of him.

Suddenly Salome appears, disgusted with Herod's advances toward her and bored by his guests. Jochanaan's voice is heard again, cursing the sinful life of Salome's mother, Herodias. Salome asks about the prophet. The soldiers refuse to allow her to speak with him, but Narraboth, unable to resist her, allows Salome to descend into the cellar. At first terrified by the sight of the holy man, Salome quickly becomes fascinated by his appearance, begging him to let her touch his hair, then his skin, and finally his lips. Jochanaan forcefully rejects her. Narraboth, who can't bear Salome's desire for another man, stabs himself. Salome, not noticing him and beside herself with excitement, continues to beg for Jochanaan's kiss. The prophet tells her to save herself by seeking Christ and curses Salome as she returns to the palace above.

Herod appears from the palace, looking for the princess and commenting on the strange look of the moon. When he slips in Narraboth's blood, he suddenly panics and begins to hallucinate. Herodias angrily dismisses his fantasies and asks him to go back inside with her, but Herod's attentions are now focused on Salome. He offers her food and wine, but she rejects his advances. From the cellar, Jochanaan resumes his tirades against Herodias, who demands that Herod turn the prophet over to the Jews. Herod refuses, maintaining that Jochanaan is a holy man and has seen God.





A scene from *Salome*
PHOTO: MONIKA RITTERSHAUS

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Salome is rife with color symbolism: the white moon in the sky, Narraboth's red blood on the ground. Salome herself is obsessed with Jochanaan's pale skin, black hair, and red lips. The Met's new production of *Salome*, directed by Claus Guth, also plays with light, shadow, and color in significant ways. How should we approach the color palette of this work? How do darkness and light relate to each other? How are these ideas or images conveyed musically? What might these colors mean?

His words spark an argument among a group of Jews concerning the true nature of God, and two Nazarenes discuss the miracles of Jesus. As Jochanaan continues to accuse her, Herodias demands that he be silenced.

Herod asks Salome to dance for him. She refuses, but when he promises to give her anything she wants, she agrees once she has made him swear to keep his word. Ignoring her mother's pleas, Salome dances for Herod. The delighted king wants to know what reward she would like, and she innocently asks for the head of Jochanaan on a silver platter. Horrified, the king refuses, and Herodias laughs approvingly at Salome's choice. Herod offers other rewards, but Salome insists and reminds Herod of his oath. The king finally gives in. As the executioner descends into the cellar, the princess anxiously and impatiently awaits her prize. When the prophet's head is brought to her, she passionately addresses Jochanaan as if he were still alive and finally kisses his lips. The terrified Herod, outraged and disgusted at Salome's behavior, orders the soldiers to kill her.

The Play *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde

Salomé is unique among playwright Oscar Wilde's oeuvre for being his only work penned in another language. An Irishman who otherwise wrote exclusively in English, Wilde was partly inspired by Maurice Maeterlinck, a Belgian playwright of Flemish descent, to produce something in French. In adapting the biblical narrative of Herod, Salome (who goes unnamed in the Bible), and the execution of John the Baptist, Wilde was inspired by several previous works. Principal among them was French writer Gustave Flaubert's novella *Hérodias* (1877), which Wilde encountered while studying at the University of Oxford with Walter Pater, the eminent Victorian literary critic. Other possible sources of influence include Joris-Karl Huysmans's 1884 novel *À Rebours*, which includes descriptions of Gustave Moreau's paintings *Salome Dancing Before Herod* (1876), *Tattooed Salome* (1874), and *The Apparition* (1876); Stéphane Mallarmé's verse poem *Hérodiade* (1864–98); and Jules Laforgue's parodic *Moralités Légendaires* (1887), which comprises a section on Salome.

Wilde drafted the play between October 1891 and January 1892, after which he entrusted the manuscript to four peers (Stuart Merrill, Adolphe Retté, Marcel Schwob, and Pierre Louÿs) whom he charged with correcting his French and making suggestions for revision. Ultimately, the playwright rejected their edits, preferring to retain the strangeness of his idiosyncratic French style.

Later in 1892, famed French actress Sarah Bernhardt planned to stage the play—with her starring in the title role—at the Royal English Opera House in London, but the production was canceled by official censors due to a longstanding prohibition on portraying biblical characters on stage. *Salomé* was finally published simultaneously in Paris and London in 1893. The following year, an English translation was published in London and Boston. The translation was undertaken by none other than Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde's secret lover whose father sparked the controversy that would ultimately lead to the author's conviction of "gross indecency" and subsequent imprisonment.

According to Wilde, *Salomé* was written with music in mind. In the long letter he



Aubrey Beardsley's design for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, 1894

PHOTOGRAPH AND TEXT BY SIMON COOKE
VICTORIANWEB.ORG/ART/DESIGN/BOOKS/193.HTML

Portrait photograph of Wilde by Napoleon Sarony, 1882

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Opposite page: A lobby card for the 1922 silent film of *Salome*, produced by and starring celebrated Russian actress Alla Nazimova

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FUN FACT

Strauss's libretto for *Salome* was adapted almost directly from a German translation of Wilde's play by Hedwig Lachmann, whose husband Gustav Landauer was a prominent socialist-anarchist philosopher. One of Lachmann and Landauer's grandchildren was none other than Mike Nichols, born Mikhail Igor Peschkowsky, the eminent American director behind classic films like *The Graduate* (1967) and *The Birdcage* (1996) and winner of six Tony Awards for his work on Broadway.

wrote to Douglas from prison, *De Profundis*, he described the play as "like a piece of music" whose "refrains" and "recurring motifs ... bind it together as a ballad." Inspired by the style of Maeterlinck, Wilde incorporates several repeated words and phrases (e.g., "I will kiss your mouth, lokanaan") that create an atmosphere of impending doom. Composer Richard Strauss crafted the libretto from Hedwig Lachmann's German translation of the play, condensing specific scenes but leaving the text largely untouched. Several miscellaneous characters in the play—Tigellinus, a Pharisee, a Sadducee, a Nubian, and Manasseh and Ozias—do not appear in the opera. Strauss also shortened several of Herod's speeches, particularly when he is cataloging the precious gifts he could offer Salome in place of Jochanaan's severed head, and heated arguments between Herod and Herodias that provide exposition on the circumstances of their marriage. And lastly, in Wilde's play, Narraboth is referred to simply as "a young Syrian."

The Creation of *Salome*

4 B.C.E. Herod Antipas is recognized as tetrarch by Caesar Augustus. Antipas rules Galilee and Perea as a client state of the Roman Empire.

30 C.E. John the Baptist is executed by Herod Antipas.

1854 Oscar Wilde is born in Dublin, Ireland. His mother, Jane Francesca Agnes Elgee, is an Anglo-Irish poet who publishes under the pseudonym Speranza. His brother, Willie Wilde, also becomes a poet and journalist.

1864 Richard Strauss is born in Munich in the Kingdom of Bavaria on June 11. He is the older of two children born to the principal horn player at the Court Opera in Munich and the daughter of a wealthy brewer. Strauss's father Franz oversees his early musical training.

1874 Wilde graduates from Trinity College Dublin with a degree in classics.

1878 Wilde graduates from Magdalen College of the University of Oxford with another degree in classics. While at Oxford, he is introduced to French writer Gustave Flaubert's novella *Hérodias*, which later sparks his interest in the story of Salome.

1881 Wilde completes his first collection of poetry.

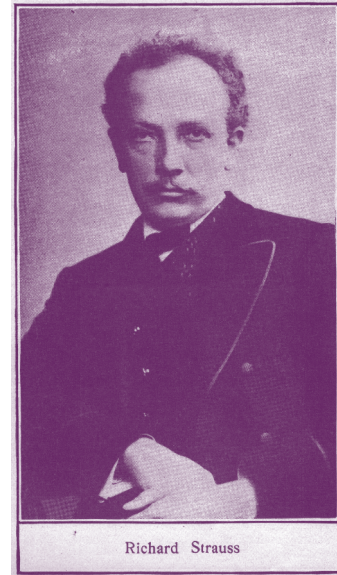
1882 Strauss enrolls at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.

Wilde goes on a lecture tour of the United States, delivering 141 lectures over the course 11 months and cementing his reputation as the leading champion of aestheticism and dandyism.

1884 Wilde marries Constance Lloyd, an Irish writer. They go on to have two sons.

1885 Strauss is appointed assistant to the great conductor Hans von Bülow in Meiningen. While in Meiningen, Strauss also makes the acquaintance of Alexander Ritter. An important aesthetic mentor, Ritter introduces Strauss to "music of the future," a musical movement headed by Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt that prioritizes new musical forms (such as tone poems) and the storytelling potential of music.

1886 Strauss returns to Munich to take up a post as the third conductor of the Bavarian State Opera. During his time in Munich, he composes a number of important early works, including several tone poems.



Richard Strauss

1889 Strauss is appointed Kapellmeister to the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. In the summer, he serves as the assistant conductor at the Bayreuth Festival, a music festival devoted entirely to the performance of Wagner's works.

1890 Wilde publishes his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

1892 Wilde's comedy *Lady Windermere's Fan* premieres in London.

French actress Sarah Bernhardt accepts Wilde's new play *Salomé*, written in French, for production at the Royal English Opera House in London, but official censors do not approve the work for public performance due to a ban on representing biblical characters on stage.

1893 Wilde's play *Salomé* is published simultaneously in Paris and London.

1894 An English translation of Wilde's play by Lord Alfred Douglas—the playwright's friend and secret lover—is published in London and Boston.

The premiere of Strauss's first opera, *Guntram*, takes place in Weimar in May. In the summer, Strauss makes his conducting debut at Bayreuth.

1895 Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* premieres in London.

Later the same week, Wilde is accused by the Marquess of Queensberry—a British nobleman and father of Lord Alfred Douglas—of being a "sodomite," or a man who has sex with other men. Against the counsel of his inner circle, Wilde initiates a prosecution against the Marquess for defamatory libel under the Libel Act of 1843. The ensuing trial reveals intimate details about Wilde's private life, especially his relationships with younger men like Douglas (as well as those thought to be prostitutes), and calls into question the moral qualities of his work. Wilde ultimately drops the case against the Marquess, but the damage to his reputation cannot

be undone. He is also left bankrupt after being found liable for his opponent's legal expenses.

Immediately following the trial, Wilde is arrested and charged with "gross indecency," a term used in Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 to describe any homosexual act between men. This amendment made it possible to prosecute homosexual activity even when sodomy could not be legally proven.

In May, Wilde is convicted of gross indecency and sentenced to two years in prison with hard labor. His imprisonment inspires two important works: *De Profundis*, a 50,000-word letter to Douglas covering their relationship and Wilde's subsequent conviction, and the long poem *Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

1896 *Salomé* premieres in Paris in a production at the Théâtre de la Comédie-Parisienne.

1897 Wilde is released from prison and leaves for France, where he remains until his death.

1898 The Strausses move to Berlin, where Richard has secured one of the most prestigious jobs in Germany: principal conductor of the Staatskapelle Berlin at the Berlin State Opera.

1900 Wilde dies destitute in Paris.

1902 Strauss attends a Berlin performance of *Salomé* in a German translation by Hedwig Lachmann and directed by Max Reinhardt, Strauss's close collaborator in years to come.

1905 Strauss's *Salome* premieres in Dresden. It is hugely successful, providing the composer with additional income in the form of royalties that significantly augment his salary as a conductor.

Wilde's play has its United Kingdom premiere in a private London performance.

1907 The opera has its United States premiere at the Metropolitan Opera. Following an outcry from audiences and critics alike—and a campaign waged by the daughter of J. P. Morgan, an influential member of the Met's board—the work is banned from the Met stage. *Salome* does not return to the Met for nearly three decades.

1931 Wilde's play receives its first public performance in the United Kingdom at the Savoy Theatre in London.

1934 *Salome* receives its second staging at the Met, ending the 27-year ban.

Notes on a Scandal



Olive Fremstad as Salome at the Met, 1907
MET ARCHIVES

Salome is synonymous with scandal, and its first performance at the Metropolitan Opera was no exception. The opera premiered at the Met on January 22, 1907, in a benefit performance aimed at raising funds for the company. Strauss's work was already the source of controversy, and New York audiences knew what they were in for. "There was a long line at the box office as early as six o'clock and although only one admission ticket was sold to a person, the speculators continued to get hold of a number, which they sold at a considerable advance," noted a reviewer in the *New-York Tribune*. "The subscribers, however, were not very liberally represented in the audience. Many boxes were occupied by outsiders, and all over the orchestra were strange faces."

The response to the work was immediately divided. A review in the *New York Sun* noted, "Setting aside for the moment the question of whether the causation of nausea should be regarded as a laudable purpose for dramatic and musical art, it may be conceded that *Salome* is a creation of tremendous dramatic power, if irresistible musical expressiveness and of marvelous technical construction." A *New York Times* review similarly hailed the event as, "one of the most remarkable achievements in the way of a lyric production ever accomplished in this country." In the following days, readers wrote to the newspaper expressing their objection to—and support of—the work. One "distinguished physician," for example, described *Salome* as, "a detailed and explicit exposition of the most horrible, disgusting, revolting, and unmentionable features of degeneracy ... that I have ever heard, read of, or imagined." He concluded his letter with the promise that "for an hour and twenty minutes every day for a year I shall weep for having consciously sat through the most revolting spectacle of my life that has ever been presented to my hearing and my sight."

One particularly vocal critic of the production was none other than Louisa Pierpont Morgan, the daughter of J. P. Morgan, the famous American financier and influential member of the Met's board. After internal deliberations, the board sent word to the

Met's General Manager Heinrich Conreid that continued performances of *Salome* would be "objectionable, and detrimental to the best interests of the Metropolitan Opera House." As a result, *Salome* was banned from the Met, and the board of directors also refused to support Conreid in finding an alternative venue for the work under the auspices of the company. The ban was announced on January 31 in the *New York Times* and *New-York Tribune*. According to the report, Morgan offered to subsidize all production expenses for *Salome* out of his own pocket rather than have it performed again.

Salome remained exiled from the Met for 27 years. It was not until 1934 that it finally returned to the Met stage, after which the opera was revived again in 1938 and throughout the 1940s and 50s. In most



The uproar about *Salome's* cancellation at the Met was exploited by popular vaudeville dancer Gertrude Hoffmann and actor Julian Eltinge, seen here in 1908.

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cases, the one-act work was presented as part of a double bill with another ballet or opera, such as Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*, Menotti's *Amelia Goes to the Ball*, or Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. *Salome* received its first new production at the Met in 1965, with legendary Swedish soprano Birgit Nilsson in the title role and Karl Böhm conducting. Another new production followed in 1989 and then in 2004, when Finnish soprano Karita Mattila was the first and only Salome to appear fully nude on the Met stage.

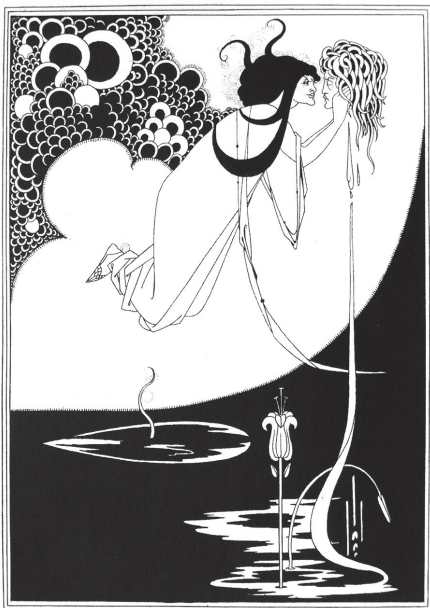
A stage photo of the Met's first production of *Salome*, 1906–07
MET ARCHIVES

Kiss from a Pose



Tattooed Salome by Gustave Moreau, 1874
MUSÉE GUSTAVE MOREAU

The Climax, from Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for *Salomé*, c. 1893–94

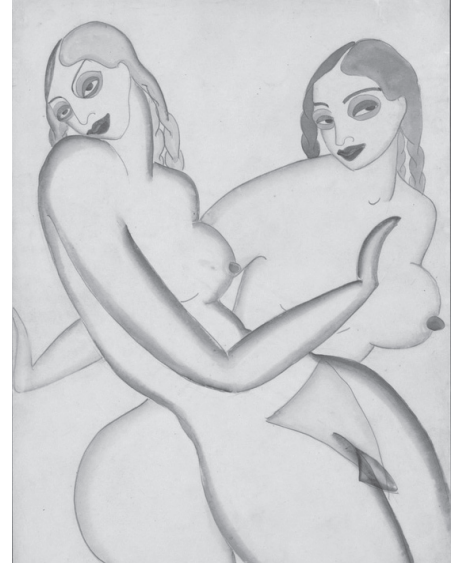
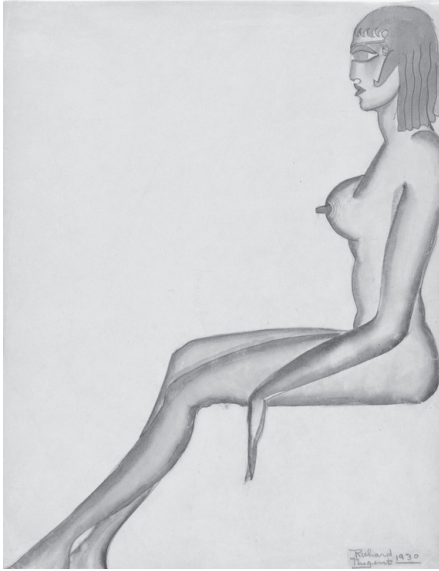


The story of Salome—both before and since Oscar Wilde's infamous 1893 play—has always been bound up with visual representation. Indeed, Wilde himself was likely inspired by the works of French Symbolist artist Gustave Moreau (1826–98), who included images of Salome in more than 150 of his drawings and paintings throughout his career. Among these is *The Apparition* (1876), of which Moreau made several versions, all of them highly intricate scenes with a bejeweled Salome conjuring the severed head of John the Baptist as it hovers—glowing and bloodied—before her. In both *Tattooed Salome* (1874) and *Salome Dancing Before Herod* (1876), Moreau depicts the infamous “Dance of the Seven Veils,” with the titular princess illuminated in the foreground and Herod seated upon his throne in the background. In *Tattooed Salome*, the princess's nude body is adorned with decorative patterns depicting a lotus flower and a set of eyes on her chest and torso, which were added by Moreau some 15 years after he initially started the painting. *Salome Dancing Before Herod* returns to this scene, with Herod and his executioner in full view, in an ornate palace likely inspired by the Alhambra in Spain.

The publication of Wilde's play also had visual dimensions. In 1893, the British magazine *Pall Mall Budget* commissioned 20-year-old artist Aubrey Beardsley to create an illustration inspired by the French publication of *Salomé*. The work Beardsley submitted was rejected but subsequently published in another British periodical, *The Studio*. Ultimately titled *The Climax*, the work depicts Salome floating in the air holding John the Baptist's Medusa-like head, with a pool of his blood giving rise to a single lotus flower. (In an earlier version of the illustration, Salome is floating above the phrase “*J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche*” [“I've kissed your mouth, Jochanaan, I've kissed your mouth”].) When Wilde saw Beardsley's work, the playwright commissioned him to create ten full-page illustrations and a cover design for the first English edition of *Salome*. Beardsley's black-and-white Art Nouveau style was heavily influenced by Japanese woodblock prints. His sweeping, exaggerated figures, androgynous bodies, and abstract scenes perfectly encapsulate the erotic grotesquerie of Wilde's play.

American artists also took note of the salacious work. Richard Bruce Nugent, a queer writer and painter active during the Harlem Renaissance, completed a series of paintings and line drawings inspired by the Salome story. *Mrs. Herod* (1930) shows a seated nude woman in profile, her skin tinted pink and her hair a pale purple. Another work from the series depicts a woman, possibly dancing, with green hair and eyes, her nipples and mouth both a bright yellow. Less morbid and solemn than conventional renderings of the biblical tale, Nugent's figures are decidedly unadorned, vibrant, and self-assured; their sensuality seems not to signal depravity, excess, or doom but rather a kind of joyous autonomy.

Three decades before Nugent, another Black American painter, Henry Ossawa Tanner, also took Salome as his subject. Taking a much different approach, Tanner's

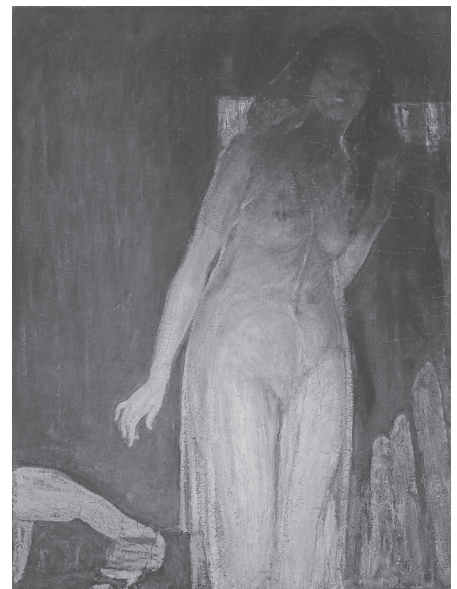


canvas is almost mysterious—Salome is a ghostlike figure draped in transparent cloth, her face obscured by deep blue shadow. What we glimpse is neither her seductive dance nor her necrophilic union with John the Baptist, but perhaps the moment when she is first presented with her reward. Her posture (almost backing away from the severed head) and her gaze (staring directly at it) suggest the simultaneous curiosity and revulsion with which Salome engages the prophet.

Depictions of Salome in the visual arts far precede Wilde's play, his inspirations, and its legacies. In the late medieval and Renaissance periods, paintings of the biblical princess with John the Baptist's head were produced by artists like the Italians Giovanni di Paolo, Titian, Caravaggio, and Artemisia Gentileschi, as well as the German Reformation painter Lucas Cranach the Elder. In the 19th and 20th centuries, painters as varied as Gustav Klimt, Joseph Glasco, and Izabela Gustowska have similarly found inspiration in the controversial legend.

Richard Bruce Nugent, *Mrs. Herod and two untitled works from the Salome series*, 1930
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Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Salome*, ca. 1900
SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, GIFT OF JESSE O. TANNER,



Shall We Dance?

Perhaps the most iconic scene in Strauss's *Salome*, the "Dance of the Seven Veils" (or "Salomes Tanz" in German) (**Track 1**) is infamous not only for its implicit stage action—the titular princess performs a seductive dance for her stepfather (and uncle) Herod—but also for the deliberate cacophony of its orchestral accompaniment. As with his later operatic works like *Der Rosenkavalier* (1912), Strauss assembled a massive ensemble for *Salome* comprising approximately 100 instrumentalists—18 woodwinds (including a heckelphone, similar to a bass oboe), 15 brass, nine percussionists, two keyboard players, two harps, and roughly 60 strings.

This instrumentation is used to great effect in the "Dance," which alternates between frenzied, raucous whiplash and stately, foreboding elegance. It begins with the former in a section marked *sehr schnell und heftig* ("very fast and violent"), as the tambourine, snare drum, and timpani set a frantic pace under a motif in the oboes whose

Swedish soprano Birgit Nilsson as Salome during the Met's 1964–65 season

MET ARCHIVES



chromatic embellishments lend an air of the exotic and sensual. This first passage in 2/4 meter gives way to a kind of ironic waltz. The melody in the violas spells out an A half-diminished seventh chord, while guttural glissandi in the cellos suggest something is amuck even within the measured metric confines of the dance.

The leitmotif associated with Salome—first heard in the clarinet at the very outset of the opera—appears in the flute, followed by a shifty, unsteady section that alternates between bars of 5/4, 2/4, and 3/4. In the subsequent section, given an ethereal, almost otherworldly feel through exceedingly high notes in the strings, chromatic flourishes in the woodwinds, and sparse chords in the celesta, percussion instruments break through in sputtering thirty-second notes: first the triangle, then the castanets.

The dance then slows into a modulation from A minor to C-sharp minor, an expressive, almost romantic melody taken up by the strings (bolstered by the horn and trumpet). Accented by the harp accompaniment and soft cymbal crashes, the waltz regains its footing and begins to accelerate again, helped along by tambourine shakes and a chromatic descending line in the English horn. The section concludes, unexpectedly, with a suspension and resolution to a serene A-major chord, a slight reprieve before the primary theme comes crashing back in—as if tempting us with the possibility of calm only to snatch it away again.

The finale is a no-holds-barred demonic romp that fires on all cylinders. The flutes and oboes reprise the first motif from the dance while the violins scurry in rapid, descending chromatic figures. The snare drum enters in insistent triplets, doubled by the violas, and alternating with the castanets and rapid ascending runs on the xylophone. Accented arpeggios blare in the trumpets and clarinets, anticipating Herod's call to have Salome executed at the opera's end. And just before the bombastic final cymbal crashes of the dance, Strauss gives us a brief hint of the shimmering leitmotif representing Salome's infatuation with Jochanaan. As the score reads, "Salome lingers for a moment in a visionary pose by the cistern where Jochanaan is held captive" ("*Salome verweilt einen Augenblick in visionärer Haltung an der Cisterne, in der Jochanaan gefangen gelaten wird*"). This short motivic interruption reminds us that while the entire dance was performed before Herod, in truth it was done for the prophet.

FUN FACT

Strauss was inspired to compose *Salome* after seeing a performance of the play in Berlin in 1902. That production was directed by Max Reinhardt, who also staged Hugo von Hofmannsthal's play *Elektra* in Berlin in 1903. After seeing a performance of that play, Strauss was also moved to adapt *Elektra* as a one-act opera, which premiered in 1909. Reinhardt would go on to direct the world premieres of Strauss's operas *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) and *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912), both with libretti by Hofmannsthal. In 1920, the three collaborators were among the co-founders of the prominent Salzburg Festival, a five-week summer festival of drama and music that continues to this day.



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 *Salome*—including desire, attraction, obsession, and temptation. 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 *Salome*, 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 statement was chosen. Explain to students where and how each 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

Start a conversation! Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- 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

The world premiere of Strauss’s *Salome* in 1905 has become one of the most mythologized moments in modern music history, but subsequent performances may have been even more impactful. A second staging in Graz, Austria, attracted the likes of composers Gustav Mahler and Giacomo Puccini, as well as Arnold Schoenberg (plus six of his students), who would go on to revolutionize composition through his 12-tone serialist technique. It is also possible, historians speculate, that a 17-year-old Adolf Hitler attended the Graz performance.

Sonic Boom

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Music history and theory, creative writing, visual arts, theatrical design, film, digital media

MATERIALS

Handout
Audio tracks
Found objects and materials
Recording device
Sound editing software
Synopsis (optional)
Illustrated synopsis (optional)

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3

Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.7

Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they "see" and "hear" when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

CORE ARTS

MU:Re7.2.C.HSI.a

Analyze aurally the elements of music (including form) of musical works, relating them to style, mood, and context, and describe how the analysis provides models for personal growth as composer, performer, and/or listener.

TH:Cr2.8.b

Share leadership and responsibilities to develop collaborative goals when preparing or devising drama/theatre work.

Cr2.1.PK.HSI.a

Apply aesthetic criteria in developing, proposing, and refining artistic ideas, plans, prototypes, and production processes for media arts productions, considering original inspirations, goals, and presentation context.

Richard Strauss's *Salome* shocked audiences not only because of its scandalous subject matter, but also because of its music. The work was described by contemporary operagoers as "thunder," "noise," and "orchestral cacophony." Indeed, Strauss scored *Salome* for a massive ensemble comprising approximately 100 instrumentalists—18 woodwinds (including a heckelphone, similar to a bass oboe), 15 brass, nine percussionists, two keyboard players, two harps, and roughly 60 strings.

In this activity, students will explore how Strauss crafted the unique soundscape of *Salome* through chromaticism, dissonance, polytonality, and other techniques played by a large variety of instruments. After exploring the sound profile of the music Strauss composed for his controversial work, students will be tasked with crafting their own Foley art, or sound effects, to accentuate a dramatic retelling of the opera.

STEP 1. LISTEN

To begin the activity, place students in groups of three and assign each student in the group one of the following roles: illustrator, poet, or music critic.

Once students have been divided into groups and assigned their roles, they are ready to listen to excerpts from *Salome*. As they listen together as a class, each student will be tasked with analyzing and responding to the music based on their assigned role. Illustrators will draw whatever images come to mind; poets will write a list of words, phrases, and descriptions that represent the music; and music critics will use musical terminology to analyze the excerpt (e.g., orchestration, tempo, dynamics,

The image displays a complex collage of musical score excerpts from Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*. The score is written in various staves, including vocal lines and instrumental parts. Handwritten annotations in purple and black ink are scattered throughout, highlighting specific musical elements and lyrics. The lyrics are in German, such as "Mänsiger wieder etwas mänsiger" and "monotonie moderato". The score includes dynamic markings like "p" and "f", and tempo markings like "Moderato". The overall layout is dense and artistic, reflecting the intricate and dissonant nature of the music.

timbre, melody, rhythm). You can use the handout included with this guide to help students organize their work.

As students actively listen to the excerpts from *Salome*, remind them to show (illustrator) or describe (poet and music critic) what they are hearing with as much detail as possible. Remind students that no observation is too basic! In between excerpts, have students share their analyses in their groups and/or with the entire class.

Track 2: “*Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Nacht!*”

Track 3: “*Jochanaan! Ich bin verliebt in deinen Leib, Jochanaan!*”

Track 4: Orchestral Interlude

Track 5: “*Salomes Tanz*” (“Dance of the Seven Veils”)

Track 6: “*Man soll ihr geben, was sie verlangt!*”

Track 7: “*Es ist kein Laut zu vernehmen*”

Track 8: “*Ah! Ich habe dienen Mund geküsst, Jochanaan*”

STEP 2. REFLECT

As students listen to the excerpts from *Salome*, you can use the following questions to guide discussion:

- How did this excerpt make you feel? Go with your gut instinct—what is the first word that comes to mind?
- What images did you see in your mind?
- What stood out to you?
- What similarities did you notice between the illustrator’s and poet’s analyses?
- What effect do you feel Strauss is seeking in this excerpt? How do you know? What exactly are you hearing?
- What catchphrase can be used to encapsulate the part of the plot you think Strauss is portraying in this excerpt?
- Using onomatopoeia, what one word would you use to capture the sound profile of this excerpt?

STEP 3. EXPLORE

Sound is an integral part of storytelling. In the world of cinematography, Foley artists—professionals who record Foley, or everyday sound effects, for films—are tasked with using sound to bring a story to life. Opera is no different! Before stories were told on the big screen, they were told through song and on the stage.

Much of Strauss’s orchestral music lies in the realm of tone poems—extended orchestral works that are programmatic in nature, telling a story of a person or place. (For students with more advanced knowledge of music, you might contrast a tone poem with a symphony, which typically has a standard four-movement structure.)

VIOLIN
 VIOLA
 FRENCH HORN
 ORGAN
 DOUBLE BASS
 VIOLIN
 CLARINET
 DOUBLE BASS
 VIOLIN
 CLARINET
 DOUBLE BASS
 BASSOON
 VIOLIN
 FRENCH HORN
 CELLO
 VIOLIN
 TROMBONE
 VIOLIN
 VIOLIN
 TROMBONE
 VIOLIN
 VIOLIN
 FRENCH HORN
 VIOLIN
 KETTLEDRUM
 VIOLIN
 TRUMPET
 CELLO
 VIOLIN
 KETTLEDRUM
 VIOLIN
 CLARINET
 VIOLIN
 DOUBLE BASS
 VIOLIN
 CLARINET
 CELLO
 VIOLIN
 KETTLEDRUM
 CLARINET
 VIOLIN
 DOUBLE BASS
 VIOLIN
 FRENCH HORN
 OBOE
 VIOLIN
 FRENCH HORN
 OBOE
 VIOLIN
 GLOCKENSPIEL
 VIOLIN
 VIOLA
 TRIANGLE
 VIOLIN
 BASSOON
 VIOLIN
 TROMBONE
 VIOLIN
 CLARINET
 VIOLIN
 CASTANETS
 VIOLIN
 VIOLIN
 VIOLIN
 CONTRABASSOON
 VIOLIN
 TROMBONE
 VIOLIN
 TRUMPET
 VIOLIN

DOUBLE BASS
 VIOLIN
 CLARINET
 VIOLIN
 VIOLA
 VIOLIN
 DOUBLE BASS
 DOUBLE BASS
 VIOLA
 VIOLA
 PICCOLO
 FLUTE
 VIOLA
 VIOLA
 CELLO
 CELLO
 DOUBLE BASS
 VIOLA
 CELLO
 TRUMPET
 DOUBLE BASS
 VIOLIN
 CLARINET
 DOUBLE BASS
 FLUTE
 VIOLIN
 KETTLEDRUM
 FLUTE
 VIOLIN
 VIOLIN
 OBOE
 HECKELPHONE
 CLARINET
 HARP
 BASSOON
 CELLO
 FRENCH HORN
 KETTLEDRUM
 ENGLISH HORN
 FRENCH HORN
 CELLO
 TRUMPET
 CELLO
 TUBA
 KETTLEDRUM
 GONG
 CYMBALS
 BASS DRUM
 SNARE DRUM
 TAMBOURINE
 CELLO
 KYLOPHONE
 HARP
 CELESTA
 HARMONIUM
 VIOLIN

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Mother Knows Best

Upon seeing the captive prophet Jochanaan, the princess Salome becomes intensely fascinated with his appearance. After Jochanaan rejects her wish for a kiss, Salome returns to the palace, where she is greeted by Herod's lustful stare. Herod invites Salome to have dinner with him, but she refuses. He then proposes a deal: He will grant her whatever she wishes if she dances for him. Despite her mother's impassioned pleas not to accept Herod's offer, Salome agrees—bringing her tale to a dark (and bloody) end.

It can be difficult for students to listen to the guidance of a parent whose advice directly opposes their own wishes. Ask them to think back to an instance when someone advised them not to do something, and they did it anyway. Were there negative consequences? Looking back on the situation, would they make the same choice again? How might things have changed for Salome had she listened to her mother's advice? If they could give guidance to their past selves about that situation, what would it be? Have students take a moment to jot down any concrete ideas they might be able to use for similar situations in the future.

Just as Strauss used specific instruments to paint musical scenes and emphasize plot aspects, Foley artists use ordinary objects to create extraordinary moments in film and on stage. Ask students to consider: What does celery have to do with broken bones?

As a group, have students brainstorm which everyday objects can be used to create the following sounds:

- Horse walking (coconuts)
- Rain (sizzling bacon)
- Grass (newspapers rustling)
- Thunder (shaking aluminum)
- Fire (creasing cellophane)

STEP 4. CREATE

Students should return to their original groups of three. In their groups, they should use miscellaneous objects and materials found around the classroom—or at home—to make sound effects that accentuate a dramatic retelling of *Salome*. If students need to review the plot of the opera, they can consult the synopsis included in this guide or the illustrated synopsis (metopera.org/salome-illustrated).

Once they have reviewed the synopsis, students should record a retelling of the opera's plot through dramatic reading, acting, or an original summary. Their retelling must include a minimum of seven unique Foley effects that bring the opera synopsis to life. Students are welcome to use any editing software (e.g., GarageBand, iMovie) or online tools to complete their projects.

STEP 5. SHARE

Once each group has recorded their version of the synopsis with original Foley effects, have students watch and/or listen to each other's final products. When watching and listening to their peers' projects, ask students to identify which moments they felt had the most impactful sound effect. They can also try to guess what items each group may have used to create that sonic accent!

DIVING DEEPER: If students show an interest in the art of Foley, encourage them to check out the work of Foley artist Stefan Fraticelli (@oddiostudio on Instagram) as well as the YouTube video, “Foley Artists: How Movie Sound Effects Are Made” (youtube.com/watch?v=U_tqB4IZvMk).

For any students interested in Strauss’s musical language, especially his tone poems, encourage them to listen to works like *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1896) or *Ein Heldenleben* (1898). For an additional assignment, have students imagine they are being commissioned to compose a tone poem of their own. Ask them to identify a subject, explain the work’s tonal palate and orchestral landscape, and articulate why they made those specific creative choices.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

In Oscar Wilde’s play *Salomé*, the character of Jochanaan is imprisoned in a cistern, a kind of water storage tank. When Salome demands to see him, the prophet emerges from the cistern. In the Met’s production directed by Claus Guth, however, this action is reversed: Salome instead descends into the chamber where Jochanaan is being held captive. How does this change alter the dynamic between the two characters? What do we glean from such a subtle shift in direction?

Salome and Censorship

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

English/language arts, creative writing, visual arts and design, politics, social studies

MATERIALS

Synopsis
 Notebook paper
 Black and colored markers
 Illustrated synopsis (optional)
 “The Creation of *Salome*” Timeline (optional)
 “Notes on a Scandal” Deep Dive (optional)

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3

Describe how a particular story’s or drama’s plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1.c

Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others’ questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.9

Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.

CORE ARTS

VA:Cr1.2.HSI.a

Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

TH:Re8.1.6.b

Identify cultural perspectives that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

MU:Cn11.0.C.HSI.a

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

Both the play and the opera *Salome* have faced extensive censorship and cancellation. Strauss’s work was banned in London until 1907, its content has been modified to be more palatable, and some performers cast in the title role have even refused to perform the infamous “Dance of the Seven Veils.” Wilde himself never saw his play performed; by the time it premiered in Paris in 1896, he had been imprisoned for “gross indecency.”

Through this activity, students will gain familiarity with the opera’s plot, explore the life of Oscar Wilde and the performance history of the opera, reflect on the importance of our freedom to access ideas and information, and create their own original projects inspired by the historical censorship of both Wilde’s play and Strauss’s opera.

STEP 1. REVIEW

A basic understanding of the opera’s plot is vital to this activity. Distribute the synopsis included with this guide and invite students to read it silently or aloud in groups. You may also wish to have students act out scenes in short improvisatory skits, or you may wish to list the major plot points on the board to ensure students understand the story’s structure and themes. You can also use the illustrated synopsis (metopera.org/salome-illustrated) for those interested in visual materials.

Check for understanding:

- Focus on Salome as the titular character. Over the course of the opera, she makes what could be described as a series of bad decisions. Think about which emotions are motivating each of these choices. What does she want and why?

Before moving on:

- Ask students to think about which parts of Salome’s story seem familiar. Presumably, many of them have felt jealousy, disappointment, attraction, desire, and frustration. Which aspects of the plot do they recognize from their own lives?

STEP 2. DISCOVER

Once students have a basic understanding of the opera’s plot, it’s important to understand the performance history of this opera and how it became subject to alteration, censorship, and outright bans. You can have students explore the timeline included with this guide, as well as the Deep Dive essay “Notes on a Scandal.” Below are a few key moments to review as a group:

1893: Oscar Wilde publishes the play *Salomé* in French.

1895–97: Wilde is imprisoned for “gross indecency.”

1896: *Salomé* premieres in Paris.

1900: Wilde dies destitute in Paris.

1902: Richard Strauss sees a Berlin production of *Salomé* translated by Hedwig Lachmann.

1902–05: Strauss composes *Salome* with a libretto adapted from Lachmann's translation.

1905: The opera *Salome* premieres in Dresden, Germany.

1907: Strauss's *Salome* premieres at the Met and is immediately banned.

Ask students to think back to the plot summary of the opera. What are some of the events or ideas in this opera that audiences may have found objectionable or that may have made some audience members uncomfortable? Students can also consider which, if any, of these elements of the opera would still be considered objectionable to contemporary audiences. Why or why not?



JOKANAAN: Who is this woman who is looking at me?
I will not have her look at me. Wherefore doth she
look at me with her [redacted] under her gilded
eyelids? I know not who she is. I do not wish to know
who she is. Bid her begone. It is not to her that I
would speak.

SALOMÉ: I am Salomé, daughter of Herodias,
Princess of Judaea.

JOKANAAN: Back! daughter of Babylon! Come not
near the chosen of the Lord. Thy mother hath filled
the earth with the wine of her [redacted] the cry
of her sins hath come up to the ears of God.

SALOMÉ: Speak again, Jokanaan. Thy voice is wine to
me.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN: Princess! Princess! Princess!

SALOMÉ: Speak again! Speak again, Jokanaan, and
tell me what I must do.

JOKANAAN: Daughter of [redacted] not near me!
But cover thy face with a veil, and scatter ashes upon
thine head, and get thee to the desert and seek out
the [redacted]

SALOMÉ: Who is he, the Son of Man? Is he as
beautiful as thou art, Jokanaan?

JOKANAAN: Get thee behind me! I hear in the palace
the beating of the wings of the angel of death.

STEP 3. EXPLORE

Now students can begin to think critically about controversies in contemporary culture. Before proceeding, explain to students that the United States as a nation does not officially ban books. Thus, people in the U.S. cannot be arrested or fined for reading or buying any book. Books can be challenged, however, which means that they can be banned from certain institutions—for example, schools or libraries. These “challenges” are attempts to remove a text because a particular group or individual finds its content objectionable. A “ban” refers to the actual removal of those materials from a given institution. Schools and public libraries account for 81% of all book challenges.

Ask students to explore the top ten most challenged texts of 2023 and consider why these books were challenged:

Gender Queer: A Memoir by Maia Kobabe (challenged for LGBTQIA+ content; claimed to be sexually explicit)

All Boys Aren't Blue by George M. Johnson (challenged for LGBTQIA+ content; claimed to be sexually explicit)

This Book is Gay by Juno Dawson (challenged for LGBTQIA+ content and sex education; claimed to be sexually explicit)

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky (challenged for LGBTQIA+ content, rape, drugs, and profanity; claimed to be sexually explicit)

Flamer by Michael Curato (challenged for LGBTQIA+ content; claimed to be sexually explicit)

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison (challenged for rape, incest, equity-diversity-inclusion content; claimed to be sexually explicit)

Me, Earl, and the Dying Girl by Jesse Andrews (challenged for profanity; claimed to be sexually explicit)

Tricks by Ellen Hopkins (challenged for drugs, rape, LGBTQIA+ content; claimed to be sexually explicit)

Let's Talk About It: A Teen's Guide to Sex, Relationships, and Being a Human by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan (challenged for LGBTQIA+ content, sex education; claimed to be sexually explicit)

Sold by Patricia McCormick (challenged for rape; claimed to be sexually explicit)

Other texts that have faced challenges include: the *Captain Underpants* series, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* edited by Alvin Schwartz, *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by

Harper Lee, *A Court of Mist and Fury* by Sarah J. Maas, *Looking for Alaska* by John Green, and more.

Using chart paper and/or a whiteboard, have students generate responses to the following questions, working either as class or in small groups:

- Why are books challenged?
- Who is initiating these challenges? Where are they coming from?
- What content might some individuals or groups find objectionable?
- Look at the list of texts that are being challenged today. What do these texts have in common with *Salome*?

STEP 4. REFLECT

Once students have considered contemporary book challenges and the history of *Salome*, convene a discussion that considers how stories are an essentially human way of helping us make sense of our experiences. Literacy scholar Rudine Sims Bishop notes that stories have the power to serve as “windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors.”

- Stories act as “windows” when they allow us to get a glimpse of how others—other people, other places, other times—live and perceive their world.
- Stories act as “mirrors” when we can see ourselves, our own struggles and emotions, or our own identities represented.
- Stories act as “sliding glass doors” when they help us build empathy, enabling us to step outside of ourselves to feel along with a character who is not like us.

Consider the list of frequently challenged books. Think, too, about the story of *Salome*. How are these stories windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors? Why?

Students can work as a whole class or in pairs or small groups to consider that question and share out ideas. Explain that both affordances and constraints can accompany censorship: It might afford safety, but it might also constrain our ability to become more proximate with other people’s stories so that we can learn from them.

It’s important for students to recognize that while some groups or individuals may object to certain content in these stories, others might feel represented. These texts might also help people get a glimpse of others’ experiences and thus build empathy.

Students may want to consider how to strike a balance between these ideas. Movies and video games, for example, have age ratings to signal that extreme violence might be inappropriate for young children. Similarly, parents—who account for the largest group of individuals that challenge books—might want to protect their children from certain content. Ask students to consider the following: To what extent should those parents be able to prevent others’ children from experiencing those stories?

STEP 5. CREATE

As a culmination of this lesson, students will use censorship to create beauty by turning *Salome* into a “blackout poem.” Blackout poetry uses censorship—that is, the literal blacking out of words from a text—to create something new, original, and visually striking.

First, students need pages with words. You can provide them with material or ask them to use library resources, online search engines, or other tools to find usable texts. Since Wilde’s play is in the public domain, it is easy to find the full text of *Salome* online. Students can also use reviews written about *Salome* (either the play or the opera, or both), excerpts from this guide, sections of Wilde’s biography, or excerpts from the play or libretto (in German, English, or French).

Each student should get a full page of text. Ask them to skim the text for words that stand out to them. They should use a piece of notebook paper to list the words in the order they appear in the text. Once students have compiled their list, they should review their list to determine a central theme or idea to represent in their blackout poems.

Using that central theme or idea, students should go back to their list of words and their page of text. They should cross out words on their list that do not fit and find other connecting words in the text that may help create a cohesive whole. Next, they should use a black marker to draw a box around each letter, word, or phrase in the text that they plan to keep in their poems.

To finish the blackout poem, they can decide whether to fill in the space around their boxed words with a drawing or design. Once that design is completed, they should blackout everything else on the page that does not belong in their poem. Feel free to show examples of blackout poetry so students have models to emulate.

STEP 6. SHARE

Once students have finished their individual poems, hang them up around the classroom and convene a gallery walk. Ask students to consider:

- Are there any poems or designs that are similar to each other? How so?
- What kinds of text did students use? Did any use the same text? Were their poems similar or different?
- What aspects of *Salome* and/or its history are reflected in the poems?
- Do the texts of the poems refer to themes or ideas that have led other works to be challenged or banned?
- There is a long history of visual art inspired by the story of *Salome*. (See the “Kiss from a Pose” Deep Dive essay for additional context.) How do the visual designs complement the poems’ text?

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

- Wandering eyes don't commit crimes.
- Temptation lies around every corner.
- Everyone commits transgressions.
- Everyone in life is punished for their immorality.
- Prophecies are always true.
- Those who are immoral will be cursed.
- Looks are everything.
- The eye cannot control its draw.
- Physical attraction (who you are attracted to) is pre-determined (or a result of natural selection).
- Everything in life is bearable.
- Messages are all around us—all we have to do is listen.
- Hallucinations are figments of the imagination.
- Food is the key to the heart.
- Dancing is salacious.
- Mothers always know best.
- Infatuation and obsession are easy to control.
- Promises must be kept at all costs.

Sonic Boom

As you listen to each excerpt, use the space below to record responses according to your assigned role: The illustrator will draw whatever images come to mind; the poet will write a list of words, phrases, or descriptions that represent the music; and the music critic will use musical terminology to analyze the excerpt.

TRACK 2: *“Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Nacht!”*

TRACK 3: *“Jochanaan! Ich bin verliebt in deinen Leib, Jochanaan!”*

Sonic Boom (CONTINUED)

TRACK 4: Orchestral Interlude

TRACK 5: “Salomes Tanz” (“Dance of the Seven Veils”)

Sonic Boom (CONTINUED)

TRACK 6: *“Man soll ihr geben, was sie verlangt!”*

TRACK 7: *“Es ist kein Laut zu vernehmen”*

Sonic Boom (CONTINUED)

TRACK 8: *“Ah! Ich habe deinen Mund geküsst, Jochanaan”*

Opera Review: *Salome*

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

As you watch *Salome*, 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 would 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
Narraboth admires Salome's appearance as the soldiers discuss Jochanaan's imprisonment. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Salome enters and demands to see the prophet. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Salome convinces Narraboth to let her see Jochanaan. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Salome descends into the cellar where Jochanaan is being held. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Salome expresses her lust for Jochanaan, who beseeches her to leave and repent. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Narraboth is struck and dies. Jochanaan curses Salome, and she returns to the palace. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Herod and Herodias enter bickering. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
A group of Jews and Nazarenes debate the nature of God. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Herodias begs Herod to silence Jochanaan. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Herod asks Salome to dance for him. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Salome dances for Herod. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Salome demands the head of Jochanaan on a silver platter. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Herod tries to change Salome's mind by offering gifts. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Salome descends into the cellar, where she finds Jochanaan's decapitated body. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Herod commands Salome to be executed. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
