

Leona Mitchell

Opera Star

a teacher's guide

Gwendolyn Hooks, author

Leona Mitchell

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Note for Teachers

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This teacher’s guide for *Leona Mitchell – Opera Star* is designed for use in classrooms of third through fifth graders. However, teachers of other grades can easily modify the lessons and activities to match the level of their students.

This guide was created to be used in the classroom to supplement subjects of English language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science lessons. Activities also use music, visual arts, and drama to engage students in the learning process.

Although many other states use the Common Core State Standards in their schools, Oklahoma schools currently use the Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills. Oklahoma Heritage Association Publishing purposely tried to integrate relevant standards and skills from both into the lessons and activities for this teacher’s guide.

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English Language Arts

Reading Comprehension

Hold up the book *Leona Mitchell*. Have students answer the following questions:

- What is the title of this book? (*Leona Mitchell*)
- Who is the author of *Leona Mitchell*? (Gwendolyn Hooks)

Then ask students to describe what they see in the photo on the front cover. (a woman) Ask students to infer who the woman might be and why she was placed on the cover. (Leona Mitchell; to interest the reader in Leona's biography)

Discuss the parts of the book with students, such as the front cover, title page, copyright page, table of contents, spine, back matter, and back cover. Have volunteers describe the need for each book part. Help students understand the kinds of facts in each section of the back matter. Point out that boldfaced words in the text are words listed in the glossary at the back of the book.

Tell students this book is a biography, a true, nonfiction text about a real person's life. Ask students to tell what they think might be included in a biography. Open the book to its table of contents. Have volunteers read aloud the titles of the book's chapters.

Read aloud the book to the students or ask volunteers to read aloud passages from the text.

Ask students to answer the following questions about the text:

- How are the chapters organized? For example, are they written in chronological order (from Leona's younger years through her older years) or written according to main events in her life? (in chronological order)
- Where did Leona live as a child? (Enid, Oklahoma)
- Why did Oklahoma City University offer Leona a four-year scholarship to attend their school? (She had a beautiful voice and didn't have the money to pay for her schooling.)
- What was Leona's first encounter with opera music? (Mrs. Priebe's opera records) What made Leona like that kind of music so much? (She liked how high the women sang and thought it was beautiful, like birds singing.)
- What can you infer as the reason most operas are written in foreign languages? (because the operas were written by people who were from foreign countries and spoke foreign languages themselves)

- Why do you think Leona stayed at the New York Met for 18 years? (The Met is an important opera house, and it is an honor for singers to sing there.)
- What do you think Leona meant when she said, “Work hard and take the lumps?” (That to succeed, people should work hard even when things don’t go the way they want them to go.)
- Leona sometimes had stage fright. How does it feel to have stage fright? Why do you think stage fright made it difficult for Leona to sing in operas? (Operas are performed in front of people. People who have stage fright are frightened to be the center of attention. Opera singers are always the center of attention on stage.)
- What caused Leona to invite many of her family members to go to foreign countries with her? (She missed her family when she was traveling, so because she could not stay home with them, she often took them with her.)
- What is the meaning of the following sentence? *No matter how far she travels, she carries Oklahoma in her heart.* (No matter how far away from Oklahoma Leona travels, she misses Oklahoma and its people and thinks of them often.)

Activity #1: Music and Writing

Have students listen to a musical recording of Leona Mitchell. Ask them to write one or two paragraphs describing how Leona’s voice and opera music is the same or different from the kind of music the students usually hear.

Activity #2: Visual Arts

Ask students to look online for photos or videos of Leona taken during an opera. Then have students draw a picture of Leona in a scene from the opera. Tell students to write a caption for their picture, describing what is happening in the scene and from which opera the scene was taken

Activity #3: Using Back Matter as a Reference Tool

Have students use the back matter to answer the following questions:

- In the Timeline, what is included along with Leona’s life events? (the years her life events occurred)
- In which section in the back matter can you learn which Websites tell where to find Leona singing? (Listen to Opera Online)
- Under which back matter heading will you find the address to the Leona Mitchell Southern Heights Heritage Center and Museum? (Places to Visit)

Activity #4: Writing and Acting in a Drama

Discuss with students the main features of an opera, such as an opera is a play where all the words are sung not spoken. Have students work in groups to write their own operas. Tell students to make their operas five to ten minutes long. Volunteers act out their operas for the rest of the class.

Page Have students read the story of Cinderella. If Leona was cast in a Cinderella opera like the students at Ozark Opera (page 38) in Inspiration Point, Arkansas, which part would you choose for her to play? Why?

Social Studies

Activity #1: Globes

Remind students that Leona Mitchell traveled all over the world to perform. Ask students to scan the book's pages and write down the cities, states, and countries where Leona traveled. Then help students locate the places on a globe.

Activity #2: Writing

Have students scan the book's pages to find which operas are mentioned. Ask students to write down the operas on a paper. Have each student research one of the operas online and learn facts about it, such as which language it is written in, who wrote it, where it was first performed etc. Then tell students to write a paper describing the opera and place it on a wall under the heading "Leona's Operas." Allow time for students to read the pages.

Activity #3: Maps

Open the book to the map in Chapter 2. Have students answer the following questions:

- What state's outline is shown on the map? (Oklahoma)
- What two Oklahoma towns are shown on the map? (Enid and Oklahoma City)
- How are the locations of the two towns indicated?
- In which parts of Oklahoma are the towns located? (Enid is located in north central Oklahoma; Oklahoma City is located in central Oklahoma.)

Mathematics

Word Problems

Ask students to listen to the following word problems and to use a pencil and paper to figure out the answers. Have volunteers tell their answers to the class.

- Leona was born in 1949. She started college in 1968. How many years separate 1968 from 1949? (19)

- The judges at Leona’s college audition usually listened to students singing for one or two minutes. They listened to Leona sing for 15 minutes. How much longer did they listen to Leona than to the other students? (13 or 14 more minutes)
- Leona started college in 1968. She graduated from college in 1971. How many years did it take her to get her college degree? (3 years)

Activity: Math Game

Assign the class into three groups. Tell them they are going to play a multiplication game in which one group at a time will go to the chalkboard and together answer a question, such as one of the following. Each team that answers a question correctly gets 5 points. If a team answers a questions incorrectly they have 2 points taken away from them. At the end of the game, tally the points and name the winning group.

- In Leona’s family there were 15 children. If 11 of them wanted spaghetti for dinner, how many did not want spaghetti? (4)
- If 5 of Leona’s nieces and nephews traveled with her to Rome in 1977, and 17 traveled with her to London in 1980, how many nieces and nephews traveled with her in 1977 and 1980? (22)
- If Leona sang in 4 operas every year for 12 years, how many operas did she sing in during those 12 years? (48 operas)

Science

Activity #1: Vibrating Vocal Chords

Tell students that every person has a larynx, an organ in our neck. Explain that it is where our vocal cords are located and that when we talk, sing, or make other vocal sounds, our vocal cords vibrate. Direct students to place their fingers lightly on the front of their necks. Then ask them to speak or sing. Have volunteers tell what their fingers feel when they speak or sing. (slight movements going back and forth; vibrations) Then direct students to sing loudly and describe what their fingers feel. (more movement in the vocal cords)

Activity #2: How Vocal Cords Make Sounds

Direct students to look up “vocal cords” in a resource book or online. Ask them to find out how our vocal cords make sounds. Then discuss with students what they learned about how vocal cords help people talk and sing.