Va’, pensiero Giuseppe Verdi · Nabucco · Music and citizenship education

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

1. A chorus, a community Music: Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901). Words: Temistocle Solera (1815–1878). Opera: Nabucco, Part III. First performance: Teatro alla Scala, Milano, 9 March 1842.

In the opera, the Jewish people deported to Babylon sing: far from their homeland, they remember the places they love and let their thoughts carry their longing to return. The story recalls the biblical exile and Psalm 137. This is not a solo aria: the main character is a community, whose voice is heard through the choir and orchestra.

Over time, the chorus also came to be interpreted as a symbol of homeland and freedom during the Risorgimento, the movement for Italian unification. We must not confuse the meaning of the scene with later interpretations: the supposed patriotic encore at the first performance is not a documented fact. Va’, pensiero is not the Italian national anthem.

The original lyrics Go, thought, on golden wings; go, settle on the slopes, on the hills, where, warm and gentle, the sweet breezes of our native land carry their fragrance!

Greet the banks of the Jordan, and Zion’s fallen towers… Oh, my homeland, so beautiful and lost! Oh, memory, so dear and full of sorrow!

Golden harp of the prophetic poets, why do you hang silent from the willow? Rekindle the memories in our hearts, speak to us of times gone by!

Either draw forth a sound of bitter lament, like the fate of Jerusalem, or may the Lord inspire you with a harmony that gives us strength to endure our suffering!

Words to understand: clivi = slopes; olezzano = give off a fragrance; aure = breezes; membranza = memory; vati = poets/prophets; favella = speak; Solima = Jerusalem; concento = harmony of sounds.

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2. Listening and singing together Listening: Coro e Orchestra del Teatro dell’Opera di Roma, conducted by Riccardo Muti. Open the recording.

Observe What to listen for

Performing forces Mixed-voice choir and orchestra; many phrases move together in the same rhythm. Listen to how the voices blend.

Metre and character 4/4 metre; a slow, reflective pace, marked Andante. Do not confuse a slow pace with the absence of a steady beat.

Melody and phrasing Flowing, smoothly connected melodic lines and broad phrases; the words must remain clear, and breaths should support the phrasing.

Dynamics Contrasts and increases in volume give power to the memories and the plea. Identify a build-up and a return to piano (quiet).

Music workshop · 20 minutes

A. First listening (4 min). Write three adjectives, then say which musical element supports each choice: voice, rhythm, melody or volume.

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B. Steady beat (4 min). Follow a short passage by counting 1–2–3–4 with small hand movements. A classmate points out the start of each phrase: does the melody always begin on the first beat?

C. Singing (8 min). With your teacher, sing the first four lines in a key suitable for the class. First speak the words in rhythm; then sing legato (smoothly), without shouting. Agree on where to breathe and listen to the other voices. Anyone who does not sing can conduct, follow the words or make notes on the dynamics.

D. Two interpretations (4 min). Perform the same phrase piano and then with a controlled crescendo. How does the message change? Do not confuse forte (loud) with shouting.

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My observation Identify a specific moment in the recording and explain how the music expresses longing for home or hope:

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3. From a lost homeland to citizenship Memories of your homeland may involve language, landscapes, people and customs. The piece does not refer directly to today's Constitution, but we can explore connections with rights while still recognising the historical distance between them.

Reference Question for the class

Art. 2 of the Constitution Rights that must not be violated, and solidarity: how can we support someone who arrives in a new place?

Art. 3 of the Constitution Equal dignity and equality: what obstacles prevent everyone from taking part in class life?

Art. 10 of the Constitution The legal status of foreign nationals and the right to asylum in the circumstances provided for: how does a right differ from a favour?

Citizenship activity · 25 minutes

1. Words of community (5 min). In pairs, choose "homeland", "memory" or "hope". Explain its meaning in your own words, without asking anyone to share painful personal experiences.

2. A welcoming class (10 min). In groups, plan three practical actions: a classmate who acts as a buddy, easy-to-understand materials, and opportunities to take part in the choir in different roles. For each action, write who will carry it out, when, and how you will tell whether it works.

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3. A choral message (10 min). Create four original lines of verse about belonging without excluding anyone; read them together over a slow, steady beat. Do not use them to replace the historical lyrics when presenting the piece: this is your own creative work.

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Review and self-assessment • Who sings in the scene, and why? • Is the chorus the Italian national anthem? Explain your answer. • Name one musical element and one act of solidarity.

☐ I can distinguish between the scene, history and interpretation. ☐ I listen to the other voices. ☐ I can suggest a practical action. ☐ I still need to work on _____ For the teacher: expected answers: the community of Jewish exiles; no, the anthem is Il Canto degli Italiani. Assess the reasons given, how well pupils listen to one another and how practical their suggestions are, not their personal experiences.

Sources: Teatro alla Scala, "Il coro più conteso" (teatroallascala.org); Nabucco libretto, Teatro Fraschini (teatrofraschini.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Libretto-Nabucco.pdf); Constitution, arts. 2, 3, 10 (senato.it). The original lyrics and composition are in the public domain; recordings may be subject to separate rights.

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