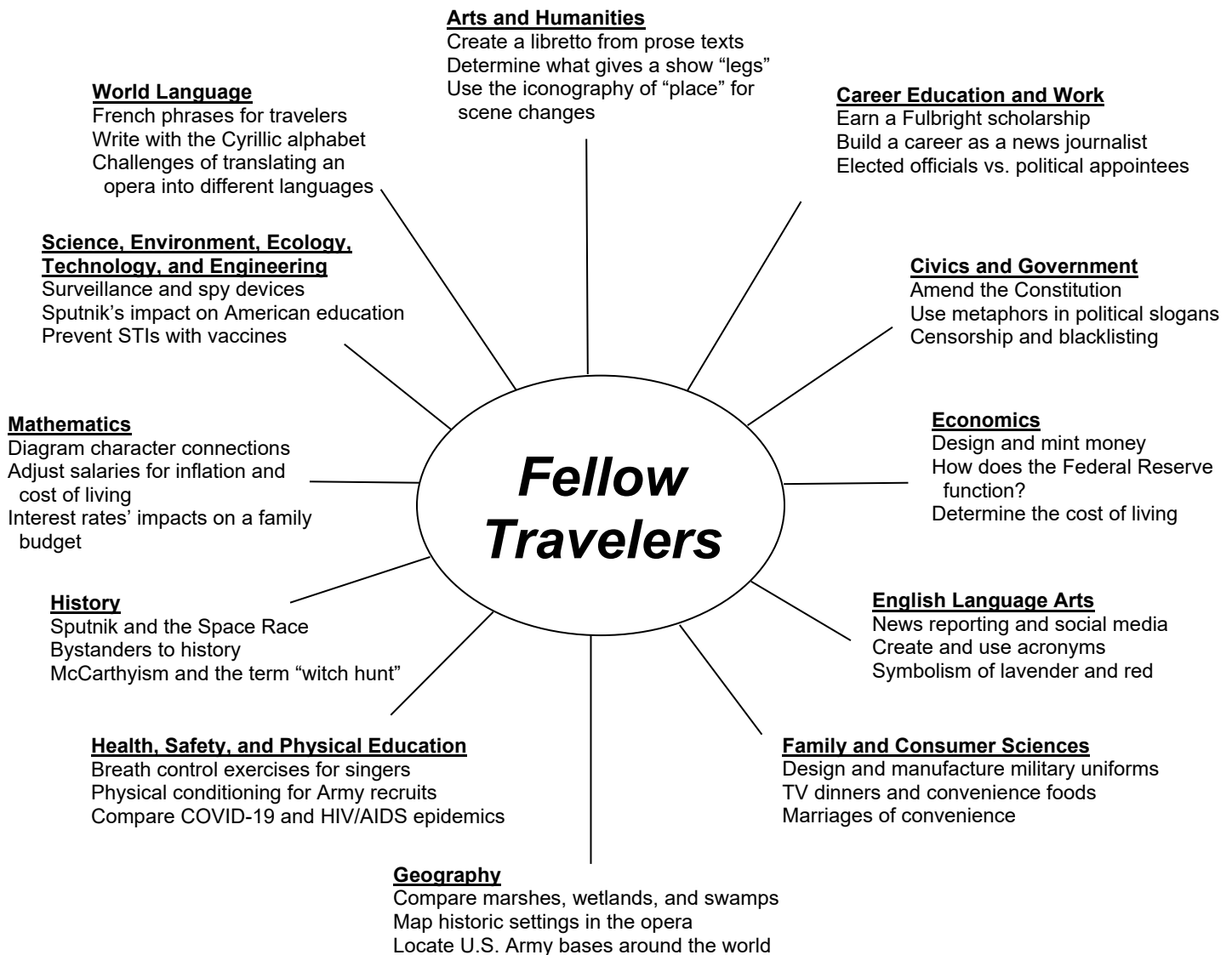


Curriculum Circle for *Fellow Travelers*

How does the opera *Fellow Travelers* by Gregory Spears and Greg Pierce intersect with all academic content areas?

Begin with the opera and brainstorm connections to all curricula.





Lesson Plan Stems for 2025–2026

Developed by Opera on TAP:

Cheryl Begandy Eugene Myers
 Lee Ann Conover Donna Priore
 Marilyn Egan Marie Romanelli, Editor
 Mike Lancet

Lesson Plan Stems for *Fellow Travelers*

How does the opera *Fellow Travelers* by Gregory Spears and Greg Pierce intersect with all academic content areas?

Begin with a lesson plan stem and connect the opera to classroom curricula.

NOTES: Suggested grade levels are listed to the right of each lesson plan stem.
 PreK=Pre-Kindergarten, ES=elementary school, MS=middle school, HS=high school

Arts and Humanities

State Standards: 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4

Opera composers and librettists write the music and words as collaborators. PreK
 What does it mean to collaborate? Tell your classmates about a time you may have collaborated with someone: What did you do together? Why did you choose to work this way? Did you enjoy working with others? Practice collaborating by creating a drawing with another student.

Listen to a few different pieces of music from an opera: a chorus number, a small number of singers such as a duet or quartet, and then to an aria. Can PreK
 your ears “hear” how many people are singing at the same time? How can you tell when there are different numbers of people singing? What do you listen for in these songs that helps you decide if it’s one, two, or more people singing?

Fellow Travelers was written so that several singers in this opera sing ES
 multiple roles. Why do you think some performers sing multiple roles? How can the opera be staged so that the audience understands when one singer is singing a different character? How might that affect production costs?

Listen to some sections from *Fellow Travelers*, which is sung in English, ES/MS
 then listen to some selections from a different opera that is sung in a different language. Do you think it is easier to understand an opera sung in English? Why or why not?

Fellow Travelers has nine singers and no chorus listed on the American ES/MS
 Guild of Musical Artist website. In this opera, some singers sing multiple roles. What is a swing singer on Broadway? Is that the same as opera singers who sing multiple roles?

Gregory Spears, the composer of *Fellow Travelers*, studied in the United States and Denmark. What kind of music is popular among young people in Denmark today? How does it compare to the music that you and your friends enjoy? ES/MS

Greg Pierce, the librettist of *Fellow Travelers*, also writes plays, fiction, and lyrics. Is writing a play the same as writing an opera libretto? How does writing a play, a libretto, or lyrics differ from writing prose fiction? Try rewriting a section of one of your favorite stories as a scene from an opera. What did you have to change or add to retell the story in this different form? Which style do you prefer: prose writing, screen writing, play writing, or libretto writing? Why do you prefer your chosen style? ES/MS

Since 2016, *Fellow Travelers* has been produced by at least a dozen other opera companies: Cincinnati Opera, Prototype Festival (New York City), Lyric Opera of Chicago, Minnesota Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Virginia Opera, Arizona Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Opera Columbus, Madison Opera, and Opera Parallèle. Are all these opera companies the same size? How does Pittsburgh Opera compare in size to these other companies? How does the size of an opera company relate to its repertoire and productions? ES/MS

Look at some production photos of *Fellow Travelers*. The opera has 16 scenes, so choices for scenery, props, and costumes must match the time period and story. Therefore, time is limited for scene changes. What choices have the designers made in the productions? For example, why would a Fordham pennant be seen in one scene? ES/MS

Fellow Travelers has 16 scenes in two parts. Do the sets determine the staging decisions and passage of time? Or is it the other way around? Or a little of both? How do stage directors make decisions? MS

When a new show becomes popular and seems to be the kind that will be performed for many years, it is said to have “legs”. *Fellow Travelers* was praised as “a near-perfect example of fast-flowing musical drama” by *The New York Times* and is already widely considered a contemporary classic. How unusual is this review? Research other contemporary operas to determine how many have “legs”. MS

Thematically, color plays a significant role in *Fellow Travelers* (Red scare, Lavendar scare). What is a pastel color, and how does it compare to a primary or secondary color? How is the idea of “pastel color” used in this opera? MS/HS

Gregory Spears, composer of *Fellow Travelers*, studied in the United States and Denmark. Listen to some music from the opera. How would you describe his musical style? Does his music remind you of other kinds of classical music? Can you identify different elements that seem to comprise his style, such as romanticism, minimalism, and early music? MS/HS

Fellow Travelers is published by Schott Music, a publishing company that was founded in 1770, and is still in business today. The website lists the orchestra instrumentation this way: fl.ob.cl(bcl)-2tbn-pno-str(min 4.4.3.3.2). Which instruments are in the orchestra? Why does Schott use this system to describe orchestral instrumentation? MS/HS

One writer described the music in *Fellow Travelers* as “subtly beautiful, with an unusual orchestration and tonal harmony that includes pastel dissonances.” What audience of readers do you think this person was writing for? What do you think is meant by the descriptions “subtly beautiful” and “pastel dissonances”? Listen to an excerpt of the opera on the Pittsburgh Opera website and write your own description. Consider who you might be writing for: Your friends? Teachers? Social media? How does addressing a specific audience help shape your description of this music? MS/HS

What makes a work of art a “classic”? Think of another classic that you have read or seen and compare it to *Fellow Travelers*. What qualities do they share? MS/HS

Fellow Travelers has 16 scenes in two parts, which means scene changes have to happen quickly and the places themselves have to be easily recognized by the audience. What is the “iconography” of different places that make them instantly recognizable or understood by an audience? One opera reviewer noted that the *Fellow Travelers* production maintained tension through swift scene changes. How can quick scene changes such as these impact the drama of a story? (Consider how “quick edits” are used in films.) Select a story that takes place in many locations and design scenery that would work for multiple scenes. MS/HS

Both composer Gregory Spears and librettist Greg Pierce have lived and worked at Yaddo, an artists’ community in Saratoga Springs, New York. Yaddo is the leading nonprofit retreat for artists and writers, who come from all nations and backgrounds to live and work in a supportive community. How would collaborating with other artists benefit opera creators? MS/HS

Gregory Spears’s vocal music has been described as “charmingly idiosyncratic, alert to the revealing irregularities of speech in dialogue and, in arias, animated with squiggly ornaments reminiscent of the early Baroque.” Listen to several arias and identify when these ornaments occur. Why are they included? How does having this kind of ornamentation impact the story? HS

Career Education and Work

State Standards: 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.4

Composer Gregory Spears studied in Denmark as a Fulbright Scholar. What is a scholar? When you think about what you might want to be when you grow up, how important is getting a good education for that job? PreK

Gregory Spears is the composer of *Fellow Travelers*. What is a composer? Can you name any famous composers, like Mozart or Beethoven? How do you think they learned music? What do you imagine they were like as children? PreK

The composer of this opera, Gregory Spears, won a Fulbright scholarship to study music in Denmark. What is a scholarship? Why might a scholarship be important to earn? Do you think getting a scholarship will be important for you to reach your career goals? Why or why not? ES

One of the real people depicted in *Fellow Travelers* was a United States Senator. How does someone get involved in politics and get elected to a city, state, or national office? What do you think attracts people to careers in politics? What would you enjoy most about being a politician? Least? ES/MS

One of the historical persons depicted in *Fellow Travelers* was a United States Senator, which is an elected political position. However, not all political positions are acquired by election; some political careers are begun through an appointment. What is meant by the term “political appointment”? How are people appointed to political positions? How does that career differ from an elected official’s career? Research political positions that are appointed. ES/MS

Composer Gregory Spears earned multiple degrees in composition: a B.M. from The Eastman School of Music, an M.M. from the Yale School of Music, and a Ph.D. from Princeton University. How do composers and librettists learn their skills today? Is it necessary to attend college? Is earning advanced degrees an unusual career path for a composer or musician? ES/MS

One of the characters in *Fellow Travelers* is a journalist, someone who gathers and disseminates information to the public. What skills are needed to be a journalist? What education is required? What media formats would journalists have used in the 1950s, and what formats are used today? How has the career of journalism changed since the 1950s? How do journalists ensure accuracy nowadays? How important is journalism in a democracy? MS

Both composer Gregory Spears and librettist Greg Pierce have lived and worked at Yaddo, an artists’ community in Saratoga Springs, New York. How do Yaddo and other supportive communities for artists function when compared to the patronage systems of wealthy individuals that supported artists in the past? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of each? MS

Some of the historical people depicted as characters in *Fellow Travelers* are a United States Senator and an aide in a government office. Research Joseph McCarthy, Roy Cohn, G. David Schine, and Charles E. Potter. Trace their careers and compare their historical portrayals to how they are characterized in the opera. MS/HS

As of 2024, more than three million people were employed by the United States' Federal government, which accounts for less than 2% of all employment in the U.S. Research government careers in the 1950s and today. What are the benefits of working for the federal government? How difficult is it to get a job with the government? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a career in government agencies? What opportunities have changed since the time in which this opera is set? How has the size of the federal workforce changed since then, when compared to the overall workforce population? Is working for the government lucrative? Why would someone want to work as a public servant? MS/HS

One of the characters in *Fellow Travelers* is an aide in a senator's office. What does an aide do and how does one apply for this job? What clearances are required? What are the benefits and drawbacks of being a senators' aides: do they have access to confidential information, sit in on senate meetings and hearings, or have the ability to influence the opinions of a senator? Are these jobs considered steppingstones for other careers? MS/HS

One of the characters in *Fellow Travelers* is a journalist. In the 1950s, there were no cell phones, personal computers, internet, or social media, so news and information would have been disseminated through fewer platforms and at a slower pace than we experience today. What are some advantages of having a lag in reporting time? What are some of the disadvantages? How does today's expectations of instantaneous access impact how journalists work and how they build their careers? MS/HS

Gregory Spears spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, where he studied early Danish minimalism and orchestration with composers Hans Abrahamsen and Per Nørgård. What is a Fulbright scholarship? What does it allow a recipient to do? How does someone become a Fulbright Scholar? Is the program prestigious? HS

In *Fellow Travelers*, Hawkins betrays his friend and lover Timothy by informing the government investigating committee that Timothy is gay. One of the motivating factors that drives Hawkins to this betrayal is the need to preserve his own career with the government. In what ways can the perceived or actual needs of a career come into conflict with a person's personal life, desires, beliefs, and ethics? Describe your reaction to Hawkin's decision. If he hadn't informed on Timothy, what consequences to his career might Hawkins have faced? Can you think of a situation when it would be appropriate to betray someone's secret for the sake of a career? HS

Civics and Government

State Standards: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4

One of the ideas this opera explores is censorship, the term we use when certain words or ideas aren't allowed. Do you know any words that you aren't allowed to say? Why might some words be ok to say and others are not? Imagine if a common word such as "and" was censored. Try telling a short story without using the word "and". How difficult was it to tell the story this way? PreK

Fellow Travelers reminds us that the 1950s was a time of fear for many people. What does the word "fear" mean? What are some things grown-up people might fear? What are some things you might fear? Why are you fearful of these things? PreK

One of the purposes of the House of Representatives and the Senate is to debate ideas to create laws and govern the country. A debate is a conversation where different points of views about ideas are discussed (think: pros and cons.) Pick an idea to debate with a friend, such as chocolate vs. vanilla, school uniforms, or longer recess time. How will you support your ideas about your topic? How can you convince your friend that your ideas are correct? PreK/ES

Color figures prominently in this opera because colors can be symbols that stand for other meanings. What does a white wedding gown mean? What does a red rose mean? What do red-white-and-blue mean to Americans? What colors are in other nations' flags, and what do those colors mean? PreK/ES

In *Fellow Travelers*, some of the characters are afraid that personal details would be shared with powerful people who could hurt them. How do you keep personal details safe? ES

In *Fellow Travelers*, Timothy, in agony over his fraught relationship, tells Hawkins he's decided to enlist in the Army. Where are Army recruitment offices in Pittsburgh? What are the rules for enlisting? What are the requirements to be eligible to enlist? ES

Politicians are elected to office to represent all the people who live in their districts. How do elected officials know what their constituents want? How do constituents communicate with their representatives? What can you do if you disagree with the decisions your elected officials are making? What are some of the things that others have done to make change? ES

One significant term associated with 1950s politics and the opera *Fellow Travelers* is the concept of blacklisting. What is a blacklist? What does it mean if someone is on a blacklist? Investigate some famous people who were blacklisted in the 1950s. Why were they blacklisted? How did that impact their lives and careers? ES

In this opera, one of the characters is a journalist. What role can journalism play in defending democracy? ES/MS

Read the Declaration of Independence, particularly the “We hold these truths to be self-evident...” sections. What rights does this document seem to establish, and for whom? What rights were not guaranteed to all of its citizens in the United States’ Declaration of Independence? [You can start your research at Records of Rights (recordsofrights.org).] Which historical document later codified these rights, and what is the process used to add these parts—called amendments—to the federal government’s Constitution? How many amendments to the Constitution currently exist, and which amendments were specifically written to codify rights not already enumerated? Are there any current amendments yet to be ratified that also focus on rights? If you were to propose an amendment, what would you want to change or add? ES/MS

As is seen in the opera *Fellow Travelers*, during the 1950s some government workers kept details about their personal lives secret. This is called self-censoring. What’s the difference between government censorship, societal censorship, and self-censorship? How does today’s access to social media impact what is public and what is private information? What are some people fearful of other people knowing today? MS/HS

Parts of Washington, D.C. were built on drained and reclaimed wetlands or marshy areas, so that some parts of it are naturally prone to flooding and poor drainage. However, the political phrase “the swamp” is often used to describe Washington D.C., despite the fact that it is NOT built on a swamp. What do the political phrases “the swamp” and “drain the swamp” imply today? What does the Washington D.C. neighborhood called “Foggy Bottom” imply? How did that neighborhood earn its name? MS/HS

As with the opera *Fellow Travelers*, several popular films also depict the Red Scare and the McCarthy era: *Julie & Julia*, *Oppenheimer*, and *Bridge of Spies*. Do these films depict government actions accurately? Why might some films or historical novels make changes to historical events? What are your feelings about that: should historical films allow artistic license with historical events? Are films a good way to teach people about history? What do you think is the best way to learn about our country’s history? MS/HS

One of the characters in *Fellow Travelers* is a journalist. What do you think the main goal of news journalism should be? What is meant by biased reporting? Do you think that the news in the United States is unbiased? What media is used to disseminate news reporting? Where should people get their news from? Does the United States government support news journalism? Do you think the news in the United States is controlled by the government? Should there be an official government news source? Why or why not? HS

Pittsburgh Opera marketing for *Fellow Travelers* includes the phrase “the Red Scare, tinted lavender”. What was the Red Scare in the 1950s? How did the U.S. government respond to the Red Scare? What role did the U.S. Senate play in addressing the Red Scare? What role did the House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, and the President play? What does the phrase “tinted lavender” imply? How did the U.S. federal government conduct investigations during the 1950s, and is the process the same today, or has it changed? Are there any parallels to the Red Scare today? Do current news stories about immigration draw parallels to the 1950s Red Scare?

HS

During the 1950s, it was common practice for police, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to release the names of people arrested or questioned for committing acts of “moral perversion” to local news journalists, who were then asked to publish the names, addresses, and places of work for those accused. This practice was seen as a necessary step to “protect the public”. The alleged acts of moral perversion included any same-sex interaction between two individuals determined to be intimate: holding hands, walking arm-in-arm, hugging, dancing, etc. What might the government’s motive have been in publishing the names of its employees being investigated of homosexuality? What is this practice of public outing called today? What do you think of this practice? Are there other examples of personal actions that the government might seek to make publicly known?

HS

Investigate how politics has historically used the concept of “otherism”—defining and treating people as fundamentally different and inferior. What political movements were successful in using this concept? How did these movements spread their ideas? How has this concept been used in United States’ political history? What are the outcomes of otherism and its propaganda, an “us vs. them” focus in societies? Compare otherism to the foundational statement in the United States Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” and explore the cognitive dissonance created when political movements claim both ideas.

HS

Economics

State Standards: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5

What does United States’ money look like? Describe it: is it all made out of the same materials? What different amounts (called denominations) can you recognize? Does U.S. money look the same as money from other countries? If you were in charge of creating money, what would you want it to look like? Design and draw your own set of currency.

PreK

Having money is necessary to pay for things we need and want. How do the adults in your life get money? Governments also need to pay for things and services, so to run a country, they also need to collect money. How do governments get money? Where does this money come from? PreK

The U.S. government produces its money in places called “mints”. Where are the government mints located? Which one produces which currencies? What materials are used? How are U.S. currencies designed—who creates what the money will look like? What is the process for creating a new version of currencies? What happens to money when its no longer “usable”? ES

In *Fellow Travelers*, several scenes occur in Timothy’s apartment. Research apartment rental costs in Pittsburgh and in Washington, D.C. Which is more expensive? Why? What would the cost have been for each location in the 1950s? ES/MS

What is meant by the term “cost of living”? Living on your own means you need to budget, so you have enough money to cover all your expenses. Make a list of all the things you might need and want to pay for if you were living on your own for one month. What does each cost? How much do you need in total? How much would you need to earn to support yourself for this month? (Ask an adult in your life to help you brainstorm.) Using play money, learn about budgeting by dividing your one-month’s “salary” into different envelopes for specific expenses or purposes. Do you have any money left over? If so, what should you do with it? ES/MS

Fellow Travelers is a new opera. Does it cost more to perform a new or a traditional opera? Make a checklist of costs to put on a play. ES/MS

How are congressional hearings funded, such as the Army-McCarthy hearings referenced in *Fellow Travelers*? Who pays for these events? How can the total costs for staff time, witness expenses, facility costs, publishing costs, and security be determined? ES/MS

Fellow Travelers takes place in the 1950s, close to the U.S. involvement with the Korean civil war. Describe the U.S. economy in the 1950s: would you consider it a prosperous economy, and if so, why? What industries dominated the U.S. economic landscape at that time? How does that era compare with the U.S. economy today? How would you describe the current U.S. economy, and why? MS/HS

Since 2016, *Fellow Travelers* has been produced at Cincinnati Opera, Prototype Festival in New York City, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Minnesota Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Virginia Opera, Arizona Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Opera Columbus, Madison Opera, and Opera Parallèle. What are the budget sizes of these companies? Is *Fellow Travelers* a “lean enough” opera so companies of all sizes can afford to produce it? How does Pittsburgh Opera’s budget compare to these other companies? MS/HS

Fellow Travelers was co-commissioned by Cincinnati Opera and G. Sterling Zinsmeyer, and developed by Opera Fusion: New Works, a collaboration between Cincinnati Opera and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, which focuses on the creation of new American operas. What is a commission and what is it worth? Why would Zinsmeyer provide funds to produce a new opera? How do new operas usually get produced?

MS/HS

The Federal Reserve, the central banking system of the United States, was created in 1913 after a series of financial panics led to the desire for a more centralized control of the monetary system in order to alleviate these frequent financial crises. Research the Federal Reserve's structure, its relationship to the United States government, and how it makes policy decisions. Who are the current members of the Federal Reserve? How are members chosen? How do the interest rates established by the Federal Reserve affect the U.S. economy and the cost of living? How do the decisions made by the Federal Reserve influence world economies?

HS

English Language Arts

State Standards: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5

Some operas, such as *Fellow Travelers*, are based on books. Select a favorite book and tell the story by singing it.

PreK

In *Fellow Travelers*, a character in the opera is suspected of having a secret that could ruin his career. What does it mean to be suspected of something? How can you protect yourself if someone tells a lie about you?

PreK

Some of the characters in this opera are actual famous people and some are fictional. What does it mean when we say a character in a story is an actual or real person, and another character is fictional?

PreK

In *Fellow Travelers*, several characters' personal lives are being scrutinized by other workers (and potentially the government.) What does being "under scrutiny" mean? Can scrutiny be both good and bad?

ES

Fellow Travelers examines an intimate relationship between two men. What do the words gay, homosexual, and lesbian mean? Are these words considered respectful terms?

ES

Fellow Travelers takes place in the 1950s. Several characters are seen on stage in their "skivvies". What does that word mean and where did it come from? Is the term slang? Is it in common usage today?

ES

Several characters in *Fellow Travelers* have multiple costume changes and must be involved with "quick changes". What does that term mean? What are synonyms of "quick"?

ES

In literature, colors are often used symbolically. What do the colors red and lavender symbolize? What was the Red Scare? What was the Lavender Scare? Do you think these colors were good choices to symbolize these events? Why or why not? ES

Learn some vocabulary from the opera *Fellow Travelers*: ES/MS

betrayal	desperate	ideology	pervasive
complicated	dossier	influential	poisonous
convictions	emeritus	interrogation	purge
crusade	heartbreak	introspective	scrutiny
deception	humiliating	manipulative	searing

Love, deception, and betrayal are some of the thematic topics depicted in *Fellow Travelers*. What other operas include love, deception, and/or betrayal? What other stories from books, movies, or plays also explore these thematic topics? ES/MS

In *Fellow Travelers*, one of the characters writes letters to his friends because he is serving abroad in the Army. Have you ever written a letter to a friend? How is the format different from writing to a business? How do members of the armed forces communicate with their friends and family now? Do soldiers and sailors still write and receive letters? ES/MS

For the sake of brevity, sometimes acronyms are used to replace long titles. For example, the acronym UNESCO refers to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. An acronym is formed by using the initial letters of words that comprise the title. What do these acronyms stand for in music: ASCAP, BMI? What do these acronyms stand for in government: AG, DOD, FBI, FY, IRS, POTUS, SCOTUS? Find and alphabetize other government acronyms. Does your school use acronyms to name any of its offices, positions, or departments? ES/MS

Librettist Greg Pierce writes plays, fiction, and lyrics. His most recent opera libretto is *The Hours*, with music by Kevin Puts (2022). He grew up in the small town of Shelburne, Vermont, and now lives in New York City. Does growing up in a small town influence a writer? What other famous authors came from small towns? ES/MS

The book *Fellow Travelers* by Thomas Mallon is also the basis for a television mini-series of the same name. Why would this story make a good mini-series? What elements of a story help inspire adaptation to a different format? What other books have been adapted in multiple genres? ES/MS

One of the characters in *Fellow Travelers* is a journalist. With the advent of social media and smart phones, journalists are under pressure to provide a constant stream of news. How do you think a “race to be the first to provide breaking news” might affect the accuracy of reporting? Which do you think is more valuable when getting news, timing or accuracy? Explain your thinking. MS

Summaries are intended to be brief but still address the pertinent ideas in a text, which can be a difficult task to do. Writing flash fiction is a good way to practice this kind of succinct writing. In only 100 words, retell the story of *Fellow Travelers* in a flash fiction format. Keep in mind you must include only the essential elements of character and plot development to have a sense of the story's beginning, middle, and end. What will you include from this story? What will you leave out?

MS

The opera *Fellow Travelers* is based on a book of the same name by Thomas Mallon. It's described as "a searing historical novel set in 1950s Washington, D.C.—a world of dominated by personalities like Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, and Joe McCarthy—and infused with political drama, unexpected humor, and heartbreak." Read the summary of the opera and consider if this book could be included on a school's recommended reading list. If so, for which grades would you recommend it? Why? Mallon once described himself as a "supposed literary intellectual/homosexual/ Republican". What do you think he meant by that? Does this self-description of the author influence your decision whether or not to include this text on a reading list? Why or why not?

HS

Critic Anthony Tommasini wrote this review of *Fellow Travelers* for *The New York Times*: "Originality in the arts is a vague and overhyped virtue. Few works are completely original. All creative artists borrow from others, both masters they revere and contemporaries they may be in competition with. Still, originality just comes through sometimes, as the composer Gregory Spears demonstrates in his personal, boldly quirky score for the wrenching, and sadly, timely, opera *Fellow Travelers*." Discuss the value of originality? When does "judiciously borrowing (with permission)" from other artists become something new? When is it just imitation? What other artists are known for "judiciously borrowing" from other artists? When is it not permissible to borrow?

HS

Gregory Spear's compositions have been described as "musical reflection of human speech and its psychological fluctuations are sometimes stunningly faithful." Explore the rhythms of English language speech and compare to Spear's music. Is the reviewer accurate?

HS

Family and Consumer Sciences

State Standards: 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4

In *Fellow Travelers*, some scenes include characters having food and drinks. Do operas use real food and drink on stage? Why or why not? What might be some practical props to use if real food and drink isn't allowed on stage?

PreK

Hats were fashionable in the 1950s, and both men and women wore them whenever they left the home. Design some hats that you'd like to wear for different occasions: going to a restaurant, to a sporting event, to the beach, or the pool. PreK

In the 1950s when *Fellow Travelers* takes place, more and more United States households had television sets and a new kind of frozen dinner—the TV dinner—was created so that people could eat a meal while watching TV. Does your family eat at a table? Does your family watch TV during meals? TV dinners were a novelty because they included all the courses (meat, starch, vegetables, and dessert) all on one tray, to be heated up at the same time. Have you ever had a TV dinner? Did you enjoy it? PreK/ES

One costume element to consider for *Fellow Travelers* is the hats that men and women wore in the 1950s. Look at some fashion magazine images from the 1950s. How would you describe the hats? Why did people wear hats whenever they went out in public? Do people still wear hats with the same frequency? If not, when did this fashion fade? When do we wear hats now? ES/MS

Some of the scenes in this opera take place in the kitchen of a small apartment. Design a set to show what a typical apartment kitchen would look like in the 1950s. What appliances would have been available and in common use? What appliances do we have now that weren't available then? How would these differences impact how you shopped and cooked in the 1950s? ES/MS

The character Timothy writes letters to his friends while he is stationed in France, serving in the Army. How difficult would it be to maintain a friendship through letters? How do people maintain long-distance relationships now? What are the challenges of maintaining long-distance relationships? ES/MS

TV dinners were developed in 1953, during the decade when *Fellow Travelers* takes place. What was the appeal of the TV dinner? Are TV dinners still available in frozen foods sections of grocery stores? What are convenience foods and how nutritious are they? (Read a fascinating history of the TV dinner in *Smithsonian Magazine*: "A Brief History of the TV Dinner". How was leftover Thanksgiving turkey involved?) MS/HS

One of the gay men in *Fellow Travelers* marries a woman, a type of arrangement that is sometimes called a marriage of convenience. Why do you think he did that? What would the advantages of being married have afforded this character? Why might the woman have agreed to this marriage? Is marriage always about romance? Historically, why did people get married? MS/HS

In *Fellow Travelers*, Timothy enlists in the Army. Who designs uniforms for soldiers? Where are the uniforms manufactured? What are the requirements for these garments, and all the clothing issued to soldiers (underwear, socks, shoes, etc.) How have uniforms for enlisted soldiers changed since the 1950s? MS/HS

Popular culture in the 1950s portrayed men as working outside the home and women as staying home to raise families. What are the challenges of managing a home and family on one income? What are some advantages of having one adult stay at home? What are the challenges? MS/HS

Geography

State Standards: 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4

In *Fellow Travelers*, the character Timothy is stationed in France. Locate France on a map or globe. What are some famous buildings in Paris, France? PreK

Fellow Travelers is about people who live in Washington, D.C. Have you ever visited our nation's capital? How long would it take to drive there? PreK

Parts of Washington, D.C. were built on areas that were once marshes and wetlands, not a swamp as some people think. What is the difference between a wetland, a marsh, and a swamp? Are there any swamps near Pittsburgh? What plants and animals live in swamps? ES

In *Fellow Travelers*, the character Hawkins lives in Chevy Chase, a suburb of Washington, D.C. in the state of Maryland. What are some Pittsburgh suburbs? What do the terms urban, suburban, and rural mean? ES

Pittsburgh Opera is renting the Opera Parallèle production for *Fellow Travelers* performances. Where is Opera Parallèle located? How would the production travel to Pittsburgh? ES

Librettist Greg Pierce grew up in Shelburne, Vermont (population ~ 7,000) and now lives in New York City (population ~ 8.5 million). Compare the geography, transportation, culture, and governments of these very different locations. ES/MS

In *Fellow Travelers*, the character of Timothy is stationed on an Army base in France. In what other countries does the United States currently maintain army bases? Plot these places on a world map. Why are there bases in these locations? How were these base locations acquired? Are Army bases in foreign countries considered "American soil"? How does the Army adapt its uniforms to suit the different climates where these bases are located? MS/HS

The 16 scenes of *Fellow Travelers* take place in various locations: MS/HS

Brick House	McCarthy's Office
Chevy Chase	Park in Dupont Circle
France	Roof of the Old Post Office
Hawkins's Office	Senator Charles Potter's Office
Interrogation Room	St. Peter's Church
M304	The Hotel Washington
Mary's Kitchen\	Timothy's Apartment

Create a map of Washington, D.C. showing all the known (actual) locations for these scenes, as well as where the fictional locations could be.

Health, Safety, and Physical Education

State Standards: 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4, 10.5

In some operas, characters drink on stage, but there is never alcohol in their glasses. What would be a good liquid to use in a wine glass on stage? What liquids look like wine or other alcohol? PreK

In *Fellow Travelers*, two men meet at night in a park. Should a child go to a park at night to meet a friend? Why or why not? PreK

When the character Timothy joined the Army, he would have learned to march in step as part of his basic training. What is a march? How is marching different from walking? Practice marching with your classmates. PreK

In *Fellow Travelers*, two men appear on stage in their "skivvies", which are underwear. What is underwear? What would the audience see if someone were only wearing underwear on stage? How do performers try to look their best if the role requires them to just wear underwear on stage? PreK/ES

Singing opera is a physically demanding job, because artists must be able to control their breath and project their voices for long periods of time. How can someone improve his/her breath control? What physical exercises are part of opera singers' regimens for maintaining their voices? ES

The librettist Greg Pierce plays ping-pong. Describe strategies and skills for playing the game and how to improve your skills. Are there psychological benefits to playing ping-pong? ES/MS

Opera singers' physical appearance is often a topic of concern and jokes. Do others sometimes pressure artists about their physical appearance? If so, why? What is body shaming? How should we talk to people about their physical appearance? ES/MS

In the opera *Fellow Travelers*, Timothy enlists in the Army. How does the army train its recruits to fight? What are some of the physical conditioning tasks and exercises all recruits must do? What physical tests must new recruits pass to graduate from basic training? ES/MS

In the 1980s, the emergence of HIV/AIDS in gay communities became an epidemic. What do the terms epidemic and pandemic mean? What does it mean when a disease has become endemic? Compare the illness AIDS to COVID-19. How is each contracted? Are both illnesses curable? How can people protect themselves from each illness? What is a vaccine and how does it work? What diseases have been controlled or eliminated by vaccines? What vaccine is linked to Pittsburgh?

MS/HS

Fellow Travelers takes place in the 1950s, before the emergence of HIV in the early 1980s. What is meant by the terms HIV/AIDS? What causes this illness, and how can it be contracted? Which communities does it primarily affect? How did the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s lead to significant stigma and discrimination? Is there a cure for HIV? How is HIV treated? How did the epidemic lead to better information about practicing safer sex?

HS

History

State Standards: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4

Fellow Travelers takes place in the 1950s, more than 70 years ago. Do you know anyone who is at least 70 years old? Ask them about what happened when they were a child.

PreK

The 1950s Space Race between the USSR and the United States also influenced the development of computers. Do you have a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone at home? Do you have any of those items in your classroom? How do you use computers?

PreK

Fellow Travelers takes place in the 1950s, when both the Soviet Union and the United States were involved in the Space Race. The first satellite was Sputnik, launched by the USSR in 1957. What are satellites? What other vehicles have traveled to outer space?

ES

History is part of the Social Sciences. What other core disciplines are considered part of Social Sciences? Would composers and librettists need to study history? Does *Fellow Travelers* demonstrate that the creators needed to learn the history of the 1950s?

ES

Research historical figures Senator Joseph McCarthy and others prominent during the Red Scare, such as Roy Cohn, G. David Schine, and Charles E. Potter. How has history treated them and their actions? The term “witch hunt” has been used in relation to the Red Scare and the Lavender Scare. When did the term “witch hunt” originate?

ES/MS

Is history always accurate? What can influence the accuracy of how history is recorded? Where and how do most people come to learn about history?

ES/MS

J. Edgar Hoover was the head of the FBI from 1935 to 1972. What role did Hoover and the FBI play in the Lavendar Scare?

MS

What were the power dynamics during the late 1940s and 1950s that created the Red Scare and the McCarthy era? How did Senator Joseph McCarthy become so powerful in the government? What was blacklisting? How did it affect the arts and artists? What happened to Senator McCarthy and others associated with the House UnAmerican Activities Committee (HUAC)?

MS

In *Fellow Travelers*, Timothy and Hawkins are involved in a homosexual relationship that puts both of their careers at risk. In the 1950s the U.S. government considered LGBTQ+ employees to be national security risks, because the government believed that the perceived stigma of homosexuality made these employees vulnerable to blackmail, which could lead to breaches in national security. Have some elements of that homophobia continued in government service? What rights and protections do LGBTQ+ government employees have, if any?

MS/HS

What does it mean when people say that history repeats itself? James Baldwin was an American writer and civil rights activist, and among the many quotes for which he is famous is one from a letter he wrote in 1970 to fellow activist Angela Davis: "For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night." What do you think this quote means? What historical events might he have been referencing with this quote? How does it apply to the political concept of otherism? Is Baldwin's quote still relevant today? If so, how and why?

MS/HS

Thomas Mallon, the author of the novel *Fellow Travelers*, is renowned for his attention to historical detail and context, and for his interest in the "bystanders" to larger historical events. What do you think he means by the term "bystander"? How do bystanders help us understand historical events? Whose stories become history?

MS/HS

Research the history of service restrictions in the U.S. military. At what point were non-citizen immigrants permitted to serve? When was the military desegregated for servicemen of color? When were women allowed to serve? When were gay servicemen and women allowed to serve openly? Who can serve in the military now?

MS/HS

The term Lavendar Scare was popularized by David K. Johnson, whose book *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (2004) explores the moral panic over homosexuality that led to the persecution and mass firings of LGBTQ+ employees of the federal government. While most historians have focused on the McCarthy hearings and the Red Scare, the Lavendar Scare occurred alongside this other panic and continued well into the 1970s. Explore the historical context of the Lavendar Scare to today's "otherism" movements. Research other instances when the U.S. government discriminated against its citizens *en masse*.

HS

Who was Senator Joseph McCarthy? For what is he infamous? The term "McCarthyism" was coined in 1950 in reference to McCarthy's practices, but today the term is used more broadly to mean demagogic, reckless, and unsubstantiated accusations, as well as public attacks on the character of patriotism of political opponents. What lessons can be learned from McCarthy's actions? Do you think McCarthyism continued to exist beyond the 1950s and McCarthy's death in 1954? Do you think it continues to exist today? Give examples.

HS

In the 1950s, men aged 18 and older were required to participate in the draft and serve if they were U.S. citizens or if they were immigrants living in the U.S. What is meant by the term "the draft"? Why were men required to serve in both war and peacetime? What would make a man ineligible for the draft? Did the draft have any exemptions for homosexuality? Is there still a draft today?

HS

Following the world premiere of *Fellow Travelers* in Cincinnati in 2016, Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim wrote in *The New York Times*: "With its smart music and sharp-edged romantic drama, *Fellow Travelers* seems assured of lasting appeal. But the large clusters of audience members who stayed behind in the lobby after Sunday's performance discussing and analyzing the show suggest that—at this moment in time, in particular—it offered much more than mere entertainment." To what moment in time might Fonseca-Williams be referring when she wrote this review in 2016? Was she suggesting the opera captured the *zeitgeist* of today? Does opera, both new and old, often reflect on current events? Explain, giving examples.

HS

Mathematics

State Standards: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4

Some operas use large orchestras of 50 or more instrumentalists, and some use chamber orchestras. *Fellow Travelers* has an orchestra of 17 or 22 players. Can you count to 17? Can you count to 22? Can you count to 50? How high can you count?

PreK

Some operas are divided into acts; others are divided into scenes. *Fellow Travelers* has 16 scenes. Count out 16 items.

PreK

Most operas last two or three hours. If an opera starts at 7:00, what time will it end?

PreK

A span of ten years is called a decade. The decade of the 1950s is comprised of the years 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, and 1959. In what year were you born? To what decade does your birth year belong?

PreK

How much would it cost to travel to Washington, D.C.? How would you travel there from Pittsburgh: by car, train, or plane? Compare the cost of travel for each mode: What is the price of a train or an airplane ticket to Washington, D.C.? How much would it cost in gasoline if you traveled by car? ES

The opera *Fellow Travelers* has a running time of 2 hours and 15 minutes, including one intermission. Research the length of other operas to determine the shortest and longest operas. Would *Fellow Travelers* be considered a long opera? ES

The Pittsburgh opera production *Fellow Travelers* will have seven cast members, no chorus, and three performances in the Byham Theater. Even though there are 16 scenes, the scenery is sparse. Calculate how much less a chamber opera like *Fellow Travelers* will cost than a mainstage production in the Benedum Center like *La bohème*. ES/MS

How do diagrams help make complex relationships clear? Consider the relationships among historical characters in the opera: Joseph McCarthy, Roy Cohn, G. David Schine, and Charles E. Potter. Create a graphic to explain the connections among these people. How will you convey visually the significance of each? How can diagram elements such as size, color, and placement help someone understand these relationships? ES/MS

In 1950, a U.S. Senator earned an income of \$12,500. How does that compare to the average salary of a male in the U.S. at that time? What are U.S. Senators paid in 2025? How does that salary compare to the average worker's salary in 2025? ES/MS

From 1947–1955 United States senators earned \$12,500 per year. Now the salary is \$174,000. Even though it seems that Senators make more money now, compare these spending power of salaries by calculating to adjust for inflation and the average cost of living from 1955 to 2025. Given these adjustments, do senators earn more or less now than they did 75 years ago? MS

Read some current articles about the Federal Reserve. How has the Federal Reserve altered interest rates so far this year? How could raising or lowering interest rates affect your family? MS/HS

Science, Environment, Ecology, Technology and Engineering

State Standards: Earth and Space Science, Life Science, Physical Science, Environmental Literacy and Sustainability, Engineering, Technology, and Applications of Science

In the 1950s, computers were a new, exciting technology. What kinds of new technology do you and your family have at home? PreK

When the Soviets launched Sputnik, American education shifted to focus more on science. Do you study science at school? What kinds of science do you study? Do you ever think about traveling in space?	PreK/ES
The Space Race between the USSR and the United States in the 1950s also help spur the development of computers. What is a computer? Where are there computers in your classroom? In your home? How do computers make life easier for us? How do they make life safer for us?	ES
In 1954, the McCarthy hearings were broadcast live from April 22 to June 17 on ABC and DuMont. There weren't as many television channels then. How many television channels are available now? What media are available now to watch congressional hearings? Would you use a computer, a phone, or other device to watch? What is CSPAN?	ES
During the Red Scare of the 1950s, the FBI would sometimes place wiretaps on American citizens' phonelines to listen to their conversations. What is a wiretap? How does it work? Are wiretaps still used today? What other forms of tracking can be placed on our modern communication devices?	ES/MS
<i>Fellow Travelers</i> takes place in the 1950s, when both the Soviet Union and the United States were involved in the Space Race. The first satellite was Sputnik, launched by the USSR in 1957. How did Sputnik influence American education and the study of science?	MS/HS
The Lavendar Scare was in part a reaction to the fear of Soviet spies working in U.S. government jobs. What surveillance equipment was developed in the 1950s for spying on our government's enemies? What kinds of technology are used for spying and surveilling now? Do governments just surveil suspected enemy agents, or are citizens surveilled as well? What other organizations rely on surveillance to perform their functions?	MS/HS
<i>Fellow Travelers</i> is about two men falling love, and takes place before the HIV/AIDS pandemic. What treatments have been developed to prevent or cure AIDS? As with other sexually-transmitted infections, HIV is passed on through body fluids, most often through unprotected sex. Is there a vaccine that teens can get to prevent STIs? What vaccines are available and recommended today?	MS/HS
In 1954, J. Robert Oppenheimer, the American theoretical physicist who helped develop the first nuclear weapons, was accused of espionage, associating with communist sympathizers, and failing to support the development of the hydrogen bomb. As a result, he was subjected to more than four weeks of hearings by the United States Atomic Energy Commission. The commission's report resulted in Oppenheimer's security clearance being revoked, and effectively ended his career, generating considerable protests from the scientific community and controversy	HS

regarding whether Oppenheimer's treatment was a result of McCarthyism than any actual wrongdoing. What other scientists have been charged with crimes or accused of anti-government leanings for their scientific or personal beliefs?

World Languages

ACTFL Standards: 1 Communication, 2 Cultures, 3 Connections, 4 Comparison, 5 Communities
(National Standards from American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages)

Sputnik, the first satellite, is a Russian word for "traveling companion". Who do you travel with when you go to school? PreK

Composer Gregory Spears studied music in Denmark, where he needed to speak another language (Danish). What other languages have you heard? Have you been to another country where a different language is spoken? PreK

The character Timothy in *Fellow Travelers* is an American soldier stationed in France. What are some French phrases that would be useful for someone traveling in France? Practice saying phrases such as hello, good morning, please, and thank you in French. PreK/ES

Fellow Travelers is sung in English. Explore other languages used in operas. Do some companies translate foreign languages into English to perform in the United States? Do other countries translate English operas into their own languages? What are the advantages and disadvantages of translating songs into other languages? Try translating an English language pop song into another target language. What were the challenges you faced with translation? Does the song still have the same effect in a target language as it did before the translation? Why or why not? ES/MS

Gregory Spears spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, where he studied early Danish minimalism and orchestration with composers Hans Abrahamsen and Per Nørgård. Does studying abroad require learning a different language? ES/MS

The Cyrillic alphabet used in the Russian language looks very different from the alphabet used in English-speaking countries. Practice writing the Cyrillic characters. How many letters are in this alphabet? How is each pronounced? Write your name in Cyrillic. ES/MS

Fellow Travelers takes place in the 1950s, when both the Soviet Union and the United States were involved in the Space Race. The first satellite was Sputnik, launched in 1957. How did Sputnik's launch influence American education and modern foreign language programs? MS/HS

Character Themes for *Fellow Travelers*

Eleanore N. Childs, a Pittsburgh attorney and child advocate, worked with teachers for more than a decade to research character education and develop the Heartwood Ethics Curriculum for Children. Heartwood's *life lessons through literature* promote understanding and practice of seven universal character attributes, which constitute the foundation of community among all people.

The Heartwood Institute defined seven universal character attributes:

- **Courage** is not only mastering fear; it is the ability to face difficulty or risk with integrity and honor.
- **Loyalty** is being faithful to a person, group, or ideal based on understanding that we are all part of something greater than ourselves.
- **Justice** is being guided by a balance of truth, reason, and fairness to all.
- **Respect** is regard for all life on earth. It calls us to value all people and their contributions, viewpoints, and differences, such as culture, religion, age, race, and ability.
- **Hope** guides our future through faith and aspiration, helping us to rise above selfishness and despair.
- **Honesty** is being truthful and honorable, the foundation for friendship and community.
- **Love** is deep care and concern for others, encompassing all the attributes. The more love we give, the richer we become.

Discuss two attributes—honesty and courage—after reading the synopsis of *Fellow Travelers*.

1. To what extent—if any—do Timothy and Hawkins demonstrate honesty with each other? Do you think they are honest with themselves? With others? How does Mary demonstrate honesty with both Timothy and Hawkins? In their world, what consequences come with honesty? Do any of these characters have the courage needed to face those consequences?
2. In one scene, Mary decides to quit her job rather than remain working under an atmosphere of panic and persecution. How does Mary's decision to quit her job reflect her courage? How does her decision compare to Timothy's decision to quit journalism and enlist in the Army? How might his actions also reflect a kind of courage? What are the consequences of both their decisions?
3. In the final scenes, Hawkins confesses that he denounced Timothy to the authorities to end their relationship, in the hopes that his betrayal would drive Timothy to hatred. What does this action tell us about Hawkins' character? Why does Hawkins need Timothy to hate him? Why does he need Mary to tell Timothy about the betrayal? Who in this opera—if anyone—best demonstrates the attributes of honesty and courage?