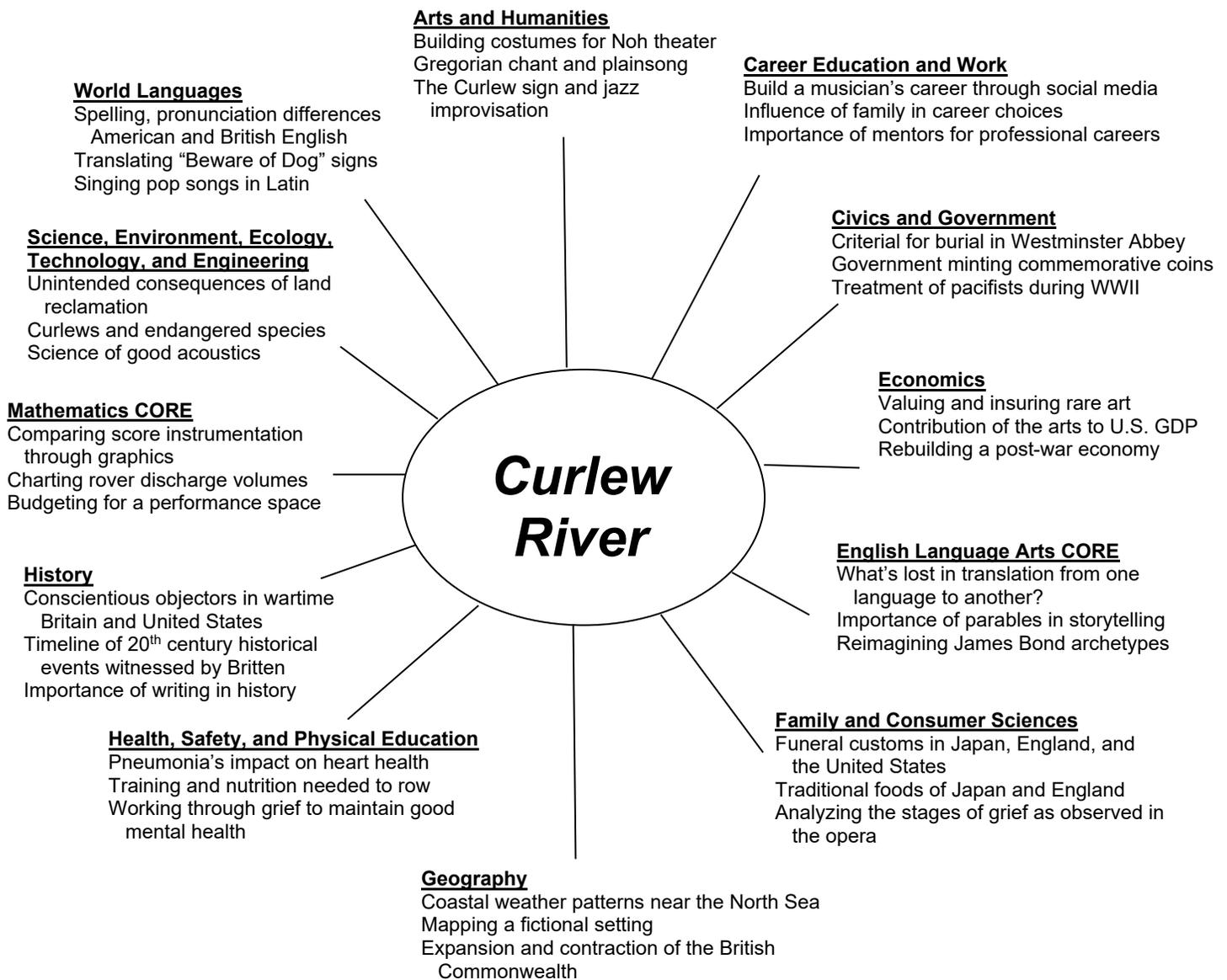


# Curriculum Circle for *Curlew River*

How does the opera *Curlew River* by Benjamin Britten and William Plomer intersect with all academic content areas?

Begin with the opera and brainstorm connections to all curricula.



## Lesson Plan Stems for *Curlew River*

How does the opera *Curlew River* by Benjamin Britten and William Plomer 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

What is the difference between an opera, a play, and a ballet? Choose a favorite book and retell the story first as a conversation, then by singing, and lastly by dancing.      PreK/ES

What is good audience behavior—also called etiquette—for attending a play or an opera? What does a top-notch audience sound and look like?      PreK/ES

*Curlew River* is a reimagining of a famous Noh play. Noh theater artists use fans as props. What are some different kinds of fans? When would someone use a fan?      PreK

Look at a picture of the Benedum Theater’s stage and compare it to a picture of the stage at the National Noh Theater in Tokyo. What do both stages have in common? What is different between them? *Curlew River* will be staged in the Calvary Episcopal Church in Shadyside. Look at a picture of the inside of this church. In what ways does a church look similar to a theater? How is it different?      PreK

Props in Noh theater are minimal. The most commonly used prop is the fan, as it is carried by all performers regardless of role. Artists may carry their fan in hand when entering the stage or carry it tucked into an obi (a sash). What are some common props used in opera? Who is responsible for keeping track of props?      ES

Read the summary of *Curlew River*, and listen to some selections from the opera. Draw caricatures of the characters based on their personalities, as they come through in the music.      ES

Benjamin Britten was influenced by Noh theater and wrote *Curlew River* for an all-male cast. He also composed *Billy Budd* for an all-male cast. Are there other Britten operas with female characters?      ES

As with many of Britten's works, individual instruments in *Curlew River* are used to symbolize particular characters. Listen to several music samples from this opera. How does Britten use the flute and horn to symbolize The Madwoman and The Ferryman? ES

Noh masks are treasured by Noh families and institutions, and the most valuable Noh masks are held in private collections, rarely seen by the public. Using a photograph, recreate a Noh mask as accurately as possible. If you were to design a mask to represent an archetypal Western character, such as a cowboy, a farmer, a princess, etc., what would that mask look like? ES

The story of *Curlew River* is told as a mystery play performed by monks portraying the four main characters: The Abbot (who acts as a narrator), The Madwoman, The Ferryman, and The Traveller. A chorus is provided by eight Pilgrims. What is the highest note in *Curlew River*? Chart the voice ranges of the characters: 1 treble, 4 tenors, 5 baritones, 3 basses. ES

Noh theater is a classical Japanese musical drama that has been performed since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Noh combines dance, drama, music, and poetry, and is characterized by its highly stylized and symbolic nature, with actors wearing elaborate masks and costumes, and using slow, precise movements to convey emotion and narrative. Noh plays are typically performed alongside Kyogen, a form of comedic theatre. Does Noh have a Western culture counterpart? What are some theater traditions in other parts of the world? ES/MS

After two decades of writing more conventional-styled operas, Britten's next three stage works were called Parables for Church Performance: dramas specifically designed to be performed in church. What is unique about using a church as an opera venue? How does a church setting differ from a theater setting? What might be the challenges of writing an opera for a very specific type of space? ES/MS

The composer Benjamin Britten also wrote *A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, a piece originally commissioned for the British educational documentary film called ***Instruments of the Orchestra*** released in November 1946. *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* is scored for symphony orchestra. Listen to this piece, then compare it to the orchestra Britten uses in *Curlew River*. Compare the size, number, and types of instruments used in *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* to the orchestra used in *Curlew River*. How are they alike? How do they differ? Why do you think Britten chose a different kind of orchestra for *Curlew River*? ES/MS

Benjamin Britten collaborated with librettist William Plomer to create *Curlew River*. Read the summary of Plomer's life. Would Plomer have been familiar with Noh theater? How does *Curlew River* reflect Noh traditions? ES/MS

The harp part in *Curlew River* is heavily influenced by music written for the koto, which is a type of zither, and the chamber organ part features extensive use of tone clusters, which are derived from the shō, an ancient Japanese free-reed mouth organ. What makes an instrument a zither? What makes an instrument a mouth-organ? Explore other world instruments in the zither and the mouth organ families. ES/MS

Though written just two years after his epic composition *War Requiem, Op. 66*, which uses two orchestras, two choruses, and three soloists, Britten's *Curlew River's* orchestra includes only seven instruments. Another difference is that the casts of his Church Parables are all male. Why would a composer write for a cast of all the same gender? In *Curlew River* the role of The Madwoman is written for a tenor voice. Why is The Madwoman played by a man? How does this help or challenge the characterization of The Madwoman? Britten's Church Parables are heavily influenced by Noh theater. Are all parts in Noh male? ES/MS

*Curlew River* is based on the Japanese Noh play *Sumidagawa*, which Britten saw during a visit to Japan in early 1956. In a broadcast message to the people of Japan following his visit, Britten declared that he had come to regard Noh plays as “among the greatest theatrical experiences of my life”. What other artists have been influenced greatly by one theatrical experience? ES/MS

Benjamin Britten composed *Curlew River* and conducted the premiere recording, even though the opera does not require a traditional conductor because the instrumentalists conduct themselves. Is it common for composers to conduct the premiere of their works today? ES/MS

Benjamin Britten composed a variety of stage works for ballet, operetta, opera, comic opera, children's opera, miracle play, and parables for church performance. Do most composers have such a range of works? What other composers have also written a broad range of work? ES/MS

Noh actors wear elaborate silk costumes called shozoku (robes) that can be considered works of art, along with wigs, hats, and props such as the fan. Opera costumes may also be elaborate but are usually built for specific productions and from a director's artistic “vision.” Compare how costumes are used in Noh theater to how they are used in Western opera. What are the seven categories of Noh costumes? How does a Noh performer create character with his or her costume? How is character created through Western costume design? Investigate some different kinds of Noh costumes. Design some Western opera costumes that contain Noh elements. MS/HS

Benjamin Britten was a 20<sup>th</sup>-century composer. What are characteristics of 20<sup>th</sup>-century music? How does it compare with earlier time periods? Listen to excerpts of Benjamin Britten's opera *Curlew River*. What musical style best describes Britten's compositions, and why? MS/HS

Compare audience expectations and etiquette for watching a Western opera in a Western-style theater to an audience watching a Japanese Noh performance in a Noh theater. How do both audiences typically behave in a formal theater? How do they know when the performance has begun? How do they know what is happening on stage? How does each audience show its appreciation for the performance? How might a change in a performance's location impact how an audience behaves or patrons' expectations for the performance? For *Curlew River*, the audience will be viewing this production at Calvary Episcopal Church. How might this religious setting change the etiquette an audience usually follows for a theatrical performance in a secular setting?

MS/HS

Noh is a chanted drama, and a few commentators have dubbed it "Japanese opera". However, the singing in Noh involves a limited tonal range, with lengthy, repetitive passages in a narrow dynamic range. Could a trained western opera singer learn to sing in Noh? How does Noh training differ from Western opera training?

MS/HS

Britten opens *Curlew River* with the plainsong "Te lucis ante terminum" by Thomas Tallis, who is also considered one of England's greatest composers. Why would a composer use another composer's music in his opera? Did Benjamin Britten use the music of Tallis out of respect? What is meant by the term "plainsong"? What is the history of chanting and plainsong? How is it related to Gregorian chant? Look at the sample of Tallis's "Te lucis . . ." printed below. How different from modern music notation is this example of plainsong?

MS/HS



Listen to a recording of traditional koto music and then the harp part in *Curlew River*. How did Britten adapt the sounds of the Japanese instrument to a western instrument? How would the playing technique need to change on the harp? Are the timbres similar? Repeat the activity with a traditional Japanese flute (shakuhachi) and a western flute. How do special techniques (such as flutter-tonguing and glissandi) help characterize The Madwoman in *Curlew River*?

MS/HS

One of the most notable features of a Noh stage is the independent roof that hangs over the stage, even in indoor theatres. Supported by four columns, the roof symbolizes the sanctity of the stage, as its design is derived from the worship pavilion (haiden) or sacred dance pavilion (kagura-den) of Shinto shrines. The roof also unifies the theatre space and defines the stage as an architectural entity. Compare this stage tradition to the proscenium and scenery setup at the Benedum Center for an opera performance.

MS/HS

In *Curlew River*, there is no conductor specified—instead, the musicians lead themselves and the places indicating which instrument is to lead are marked in the score. This approach allows Britten’s performers to play in two or more separate groups at separate tempi, much like the music of a Nobayashi ensemble in Noh plays. This approach leads to another unusual notational device, the “Curlew sign”, which is used to “resynchronize” musicians by instructing one to sustain or repeat notes *ad lib* until a given point has been reached in the music of another group. What does the “Curlew sign” look like in a score? How is this improvisation similar to jazz?

HS

### Career Education and Work

State Standards: 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.4

Composer Benjamin Britten began to study music when he was a young child. What do your parents encourage you to study?

PreK

Benjamin Britten said, “The old idea of a composer suddenly having a terrific idea and sitting up all night to write it is nonsense. Nighttime is for sleeping.” When do you have creative ideas? How do you remember them?

PreK

Benjamin Britten’s father was described as a prosperous oral surgeon. What does it mean if someone is prosperous at his or her job?

PreK

Think about how often you hear music as part of another experience, such as when you see an advertisement, or watch a movie, or enter a business. What types of companies need someone to compose music for their products or productions? What other opportunities exist for professional composers? Do you think people who write music for a living are in demand? Why or why not?

PreK/ES

Benjamin Britten’s *Billy Budd* was commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1951. Who funds new operas today? How many new operas have been developed in the last 10 years? How do composers support themselves while composing?

ES/MS

Noh theater is an important form of classical Japanese dance-drama that has been performed since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. How do Noh performers learn their craft? Is there a comparable career path in Western opera? Compare these two career paths while considering how performers learn their roles, get their training, apply to schools, learn their instruments and other performance elements, and work with masks.

ES/MS

How did Britten become a well-known composer in his lifetime? Who are some living, well-known composers today? If new composers or musicians want to become known today, how do they reach their audiences? What social media platforms do musicians use to reach their fans? Could a musician become famous today without using social media? Why or why not?

ES/MS

When young Benjamin's musical aptitude became evident, the family engaged composer Frank Bridge as a mentor to supervise his musical education. Bridge's tutelage was one of the formative and lasting influences on Britten's compositional development. What is a mentor? What does a mentor do? How important is having a mentor today? In what other professions do mentors play significant roles?

ES/MS

Benjamin Britten's father was a prosperous oral surgeon in the town of Lowestoft, Suffolk; his mother was a leader in the local choral society, and she encouraged him to become a musician. How many famous musicians, artists, or other performers come from families where a parent or other relatives make their livings in the arts? How influential are parents on someone's choice of career? How committed should a young person be to pursue a career that is not approved by both parents?

ES/MS

Benjamin Britten said, "The old idea of a composer suddenly having a terrific idea and sitting up all night to write it is nonsense. Nighttime is for sleeping." What does Britten mean by this statement? What myths about the nature of creativity in professional artists does this quote dispel? Discuss the idea of creativity and balance in a musical career.

MS

With a Koussevitzky Commission backing him, Britten wrote the enormously successful opera *Peter Grimes* (1944–1945), which marked the greatest turning point in his career. How important is a commission to a composer?

MS/HS

Instrumentalists who play in the Pittsburgh Opera orchestra have been trained to play western classical music. In *Curlew River*, there are new techniques based on Japanese Noh instruments. How flexible should professional musicians be? What sort of cross training are professional musicians expected to have? To build a career as a professional musician, is it better to have a wide breadth of experience with many instruments and styles, or is it better to specialize? Why?

MS/HS

Librettist William Plomer also worked as a literary editor for Faber and Faber. As chief reader and literary adviser to Jonathan Cape, Plomer recognized the salability of Ian Fleming's *James Bond* series. What is an editor? How does a person become one? What kinds of skills does a librettist have that might translate well into professional editing? How important is a good editor to writers and publishers? What does the fact that Plomer held multiple jobs say about having a career as a professional librettist?

MS/HS

In what ways has recent technology impacted the music industry? What technologies exist now for making and publishing music that Britten did not have access to in his lifetime? How might new technology have impacted Britten's career? Compare Britten's career path to that of a living composer. What does it take to have a career as a professional musician or composer today?

MS/HS

Britten's formal training also included studies at the Royal College of Music. Upon graduation, Britten obtained a position scoring documentaries for the Royal Post Office film unit. Working on a tight budget, he learned how to extract the maximum variety of color and musical effectiveness from the smallest combinations of instruments. How did this entry-level job help him later in his career?

HS

### **Civics and Government**

State Standards: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4

Composer Benjamin Britten was given awards from the United Kingdom and Sweden. What are some awards that the United States government gives? What awards could students earn in school? Draw an award that you'd like to earn.

PreK

Britten was born in England, where the (symbolic) head of the government is a king or a queen. How does a person become a king or queen? Who is the head of the United States government? Can anybody become the United States president?

PreK

During Britten's lifetime, his country experienced two world wars. Britten himself was a pacifist, which means he did not believe in war. What is war? How can people learn to get along without fighting?

PreK

Though he always returned home to England, Benjamin Britten traveled extensively in Canada, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Create a graphic organizer to compare the governments of each country during Britten's professional composing years (1934–1976). Did any of these countries change their type of governing systems during these years?

ES/MS

Benjamin Britten chose to be buried beside his partner Peter Pears at Aldeburgh Parish Church, though many feel that his status as England's greatest composer warranted a burial space in London's Westminster Abbey. What is Westminster Abbey, and why are people buried there? Who are some of the people interred at Westminster Abbey? What criteria determine if someone can be buried at Westminster Abbey? In the United States, what criteria determine if someone can be buried at Arlington National Cemetery?

ES/MS

During his lifetime, Benjamin Britten was awarded the OM (Order of Merit) and the CH (Order of the Companions of Honour), for his distinguished service in the arts. Other honors that the United Kingdom confers include knighthood. Who decides and confers these honors? Are there comparable honors to Britain's OM and the CH in the United States? If so, who is responsible for recognizing distinguished service and conferring these awards?

ES/MS

During Britten's lifetime (1913–1976), two world wars erupted and the British Empire changed dramatically. What is meant by the term "empire"? How was Britain an empire prior to World War I? Is Britain still an empire today? Explore the empire's colonies. How did the governance of the British Empire change after World War II? What other significant changes to the British system of government occurred that are still in effect today?

MS/HS

In 2013, the Royal Mint released a 50 pence coin to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Britten's birth. The coin features musical notes and words from "Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings". What is a mint? Do commemorative coins have a circulating value? Who designs commemorative coins for a government? What is the process for minting a commemorative coin; is it the same as for minting a government's circulating coins? Why do governments issue commemorative coins?

MS/HS

A steadfast pacifist, Britten left England in 1939 as World War II began and spent four years living in the United States and Canada. Why would Britten's pacifist beliefs lead him to leave his country as a war broke out? How were pacifists treated by the British government during wartime? How did world events impact the creation of his operas?

MS/HS

Homosexuality was illegal in Britain during most of Britten's lifetime, until the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 partially decriminalized homosexuality. Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears were longtime partners but were never prosecuted by the government for their homosexual relationship. Why? Compare Britten's story to that of Alan Turing, who was prosecuted for homosexual acts in 1952. What happened to Turing? How have Britain's laws regarding same sex relationships and rights of LBGTQ+ persons changed since 1967? How do the British government's laws regarding same sex couples and the rights of LBGTQ+ persons compare to those in the United States during this same time period?

HS

## Economics

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

Noh masks can be very old and valuable. What makes something valuable? Do you have any old items in your family that you think are valuable? PreK

Opera companies often need to rent a theater or other performance space. What does it mean to rent a space? What does it mean to own a space, such as a home? PreK

Which do you think is more expensive: to put on a big opera or a chamber opera? Why? Does your school produce big musicals or plays? If so, how are these productions funded? Who pays for them? PreK/ES

Pittsburgh Opera is producing *Curlew River* at Calvary Episcopal Church. How does a church rental compare to a theater rental? How many audience members does this church seat, and how does that compare to the Benedum Theater? How many tickets need to be sold to cover the cost of the space rental? Are ticket sales enough to support an opera? If not, where does the rest of the money come from? ES

Noh masks are treasured by Noh families and institutions, and the powerful Noh schools hold the oldest and most valuable Noh masks in their private collections. How can a school be considered “powerful”? How valuable are these masks? How are monetary values placed on pieces of art? Are they insured? Could they be replaced? How important is Noh theater to Japan’s cultural and tourist economy? ES/MS

The English Opera Group produced the premieres of almost all of Britten’s later operas at the Aldeburgh Festival. What is the Aldeburgh Festival and why was it founded? Does it still occur? What types of works are presented there? In what ways might the festival’s founding be considered an economic decision? Was Britten’s pivot to composing chamber operas or cantatas intended for school or community groups later in life an economic decision? How did artists adapt their works to accommodate the post-war economy of Great Britain? How does the Aldeburgh Festival fund its work today? MS/HS

How are the arts funded in the United States? Is there a national organization that supports performing arts, such as opera? What percentage of the U.S. GDP comes from the arts? How is this contribution measured and reported? How do arts events, such as opera performances, contribute to both the local and national economies? MS/HS

If Pittsburgh Opera had decided to cast a contralto in the typically male tenor role of The Madwoman in *Curlew River*, what economic impact would that have on production costs? Has any other opera company ever cast a contralto for this role? Why might a company want to cast a contralto? MS/HS

When Britten returned to England in 1942, he was already an established composer. Describe the economic conditions of post WWII England where Britten was working. How did England rebuild its economy after the war? How long did it take? What significant changes were made? What role did the performing arts play in that post-war recovery? HS

### English Language Arts CORE

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

The opera *Curlew River* uses both singing and chanting. Listen to an excerpt of the chanting in this opera. What does the chanting sound like? How is it different from singing or regular talking? Practice saying the same sentence in your whispering voice, your talking voice, your chanting voice, and your singing voice. PreK

*Curlew River* uses the kind of stock characters that are expected to appear in this kind of story. What kinds of characters do you expect to see in a story? Brainstorm with your classmates the kinds of characters that you find in stories you like, such as a princess, or an evil stepparent, or a wise older person. PreK

In *Curlew River*, a mother is upset because her child has been kidnapped. What does “kidnapped” mean? PreK/ES

Both the operas *Fellow Travelers* and *Curlew River* include people who travel, but the spellings of “traveler” and “traveller” differ. Why? Find other words that use American English spelling different from British English spelling. ES

*Curlew River* includes both English and Latin text. Learn some basic Latin terms: ES

Salve	Hello
Vale	Goodbye
Quid est?	What is it?
Quid vis?	What do you want?
Ego sum...	I am...
Tibi gratias ago	Thank you (literally: I give thanks to you)
Euge!	Hurray!
Eheu!	Oh no!
Bene!	Well!/Good!
Satis!	Enough!

Where can Latin be found in everyday usage nowadays?

Benjamin Britten based some of his operas on Christian parables. What is a parable? What makes a work a parable? From what source or sources do most parables seem to originate? Are parables effective for story telling? Why or why not? ES

*Curlew River*'s story is about a woman driven mad by the mystery of her lost son. What is a mystery? What are the elements of a typical mystery story? Does this opera qualify as a mystery story? Does the ending solve the mystery? ES

Learn some vocabulary from the opera: ES/MS

Acolyte	Distinguished	Kidnapped	Requiem
Aptitude	Documentary	Loss	Sanctity
Burial	Etiquette	Muse	Stylized
Chanting	Fictional	Mystery	Treasured
Comedic	Funeral	Pacifist	Tributary
Commemorated	Hysterical	Parable	Unfortunate
Commission	Influenced	Prosperous	Valuable
Conventional	Isolated	Pseudonym	Volume

Benjamin Britten collaborated with librettist William Plomer to create *Curlew River*. In other works, Plomer wrote under the pseudonym—or pen name—Robert Pagan. What is a pseudonym or *nom de plume*? Why would an author want to use a nom de plume? What other authors have also used pseudonyms? Brainstorm a list of authors' real names and their chosen pseudonyms. If you were an author, what "nom de plume" would you choose, and why? ES/MS

English is a Germanic language, but many words are derived from Latin, which is a language that is also used in *Curlew River*. Make a list of English words that have Latin roots, or words that have been influenced by Latin words. ES/MS

Learning to paraphrase without plagiarizing another person's work is a valuable skill. What does it mean to paraphrase? Rewrite this description of the opera in your own words as a paraphrase of the original: "Based on the Japanese Noh play *Sumidagawa*, *Curlew River* retells this story as a Christian parable. Written in the style of monastic plain song and laden with musical symbolism, this piece artfully melds theatrical simplicity with ecumenical grandeur." What idea does this description try to convey? How can you get the same idea across, but with your own words, so that an audience of your friends would understand your meaning? ES/MS

Curlews have a distinctive nighttime call that is sometimes described as a scream, and this call is the source of a myth that imagines a curlew as a mother screaming for her lost child. What other myths involve birds or bird calls? How many of these stories are tales of loss or death? What do various kinds of birds symbolize in literature? ES/MS

There are many Noh plays about parents searching for children, but *Sumidagawa* is the only one in which the parent does not find the child. In addition to the opera *Curlew River*, what other adaptations have been made of this classic play? What other stories also depict a parent unable to find a lost child? ES/MS

<p>Similar to the storytelling conventions of the <i>commedia dell'arte</i>, Noh theater uses stock characters who are recognizable across many narratives, as well as stock plot devices. What is meant by the term “stock” in this context? Why might using stock characters and devices be an effective part of storytelling? List other works that utilize stock characters or plot devices.</p>	ES/MS
<p>The tenor Peter Pears inspired all of Britten’s leading roles and most of his songs and therefore could be considered Britten’s <i>muse</i>. What is a muse? From where does this term come? Is having a muse important to all artists? Who were the acknowledged <i>muses</i> of the following artists: Robert Schumann, Frederic Chopin, Gertrude Stein, and Michelangelo?</p>	MS
<p>Noh theater plays are poetic, relying heavily on the Japanese seven-five rhythm common to nearly all forms of Japanese poetry. The Western author William Shakespeare’s plays are also poetic texts, written mostly in iambic pentameter. Do any other Western playwrights use poetic formats? Try writing a short scene from your own favorite story or movie as a poetic play, using either iambic pentameter or a haiku form or rhythm.</p>	MS
<p>Music critics have frequently commented on a recurring theme in many of Britten's operas: that of the isolated individual at odds with a hostile society. What are some literary themes in <i>Curlew River</i>? Is this idea also present in <i>Curlew River</i>? What other operas or texts might also explore this theme? To what extent might this theme reflect the artist’s perception of him or herself?</p>	MS/HS
<p><i>Curlew River</i>, the first of Britten's three “Parables for Church Performance”, is based on the Japanese Noh play <i>Sumidagawa (Sumida River)</i> by Kanze Jūrō (1395–1431). What other historical plays have influenced western art?</p>	MS/HS
<p>After visiting Japan in 1956 and attending Japanese Noh plays, Britten called them “some of the most wonderful drama I have ever seen.” Compare the Noh tradition and Britten’s semi-operatic “Parables for Church Performance” (<i>Curlew River, The Prodigal Son</i>). What are the similarities? Like Britten, many other western artists have also been influenced by Noh theater, including poets and playwrights. Who are some of these artists, and which of their works demonstrates this influence?</p>	MS/HS
<p>Though it is based on a Japanese medieval Noh play, <i>Curlew River</i> is an adaptation, not a translation. What is the difference between the two terms: adaptation and translation? Can a work in one language be successfully translated to another, word-for-word? What is meant by the phrase “lost in translation”? Are there words in English or Japanese that cannot be translated from one language to another without losing the meaning?</p>	MS/HS

*Sumidagawa* is a famous Noh play, and Britten used it as the inspiration for *Curlew River*. Research other *nohgaku* plays to find common themes. Which of those themes is present in *Curlew River*? Does *Curlew River* offer a similar resolution to *Sumidagawa*? HS

Unlike Japanese Kabuki, which includes only male performers since 1629, Noh theater has admitted women as performers in recent decades. Trace the role of women performers in Western theater, opera, and the Church of England. Research the etymology of the word “hysterical” and its connection to women performers. Debate if the term hysterical and its connotations are sexist and outdated. HS

The librettist of *Curlew River*, William Plomer, also worked as an editor for Ian Fleming on the James Bond books. How different would the books (and movies) be if the dashing and debonaire lead spy character—007—was a woman and the stock character of the “Bond girl” was a sexy man? HS

Though famous for singing in Britten operas, British tenor Ian Bostridge is also a published author with several advanced degrees. Research his 1997 book: *Witchcraft and Its Transformations, c. 1650–1750*. What do you think of this review by Professor Stuart Clark: “This book is the most sophisticated and original of all recent histories of early modern demonology. It achieves that rarest of feats in the scholarly world: taking a well-worn subject and ensuring that it will never be looked at in quite the same way again.”? HS

## Family and Consumer Sciences

State Standards: 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4

The characters in this opera are traveling to visit a grave. What is a grave? Where do we usually find graves? What do they look like? What do you imagine this grave in the opera looks like? PreK

When someone we love dies, we experience grief, like the mother in this opera. What does it mean to grieve? How do you know if someone is sad? Is it ok to cry in public if you feel sad? Have you ever seen an adult cry? PreK

What does it mean to lose something? Have you ever lost something? How did you feel when that something was found? PreK

In *Curlew River*, a child dies and is buried. Have you ever been to a funeral for someone who died? Why do families bury someone who died? What is cremation? What other ways do we honor and remember someone who has died? PreK/ES

In 1913, the year that Benjamin Britten was born, the zipper became a popular fastener in clothing. How was clothing fastened prior to then? How has clothing changed since 1913? What kind of fasteners would have been used in medieval times, when *Curlew River* is set? ES/MS

Britten was inspired to write *Curlew River* while on a trip to Japan. What kinds of food would he have eaten there? What kinds of food are typical of Japanese cuisine? Create a typical Japanese menu for Britten: what would he have been served for breakfast, lunch, and dinner while traveling in Japan?

ES/MS

In *Curlew River*, the son was buried before the mother learned of his death. Explore funeral and burial traditions in England, Japan, and the United States. Which have formal services, wakes, or receptions? What color clothing is appropriate for mourners to wear? Where do the services or memorials take place? Is burial in the ground ubiquitous throughout cultures? Is cremation more prevalent in some cultures? What are appropriate ways to offer condolences? How long do the services last? How do funeral traditions in the United States reflect regional, cultural, and personal preferences?

ES/MS

In *Curlew River*, the son was kidnapped. How are kidnappings handled today? What agencies or groups get involved to find and return kidnapped children? Would any of those groups have been available in the Middle Ages when this opera is set? What are “Amber Alerts” and how were they enacted? Statistically speaking, children who are kidnapped are usually taken by whom? What are current teachings to help young children avoid what we used to call “stranger danger”? How can children be taught safety boundaries?

ES/MS

This opera is set in the Middle Ages. What kinds of costumes would help establish this setting for the audience? Design costumes for each of the characters. What fabrics will you use? How much will each costume cost to build? If this opera were set in medieval Japan, what costumes would be appropriate for each character for that time period?

MS

Britten rejected a public funeral and state burial in Westminster Abbey to be interred next to his companion Peter Pears in their local parish cemetery. What kinds of decisions does a person need to make when planning for their own funeral? What is the cost of the average funeral and cemetery burial in the United States nowadays?

MS

Benjamin Britten was an Englishman. What are some traditional English foods and beverages? What kinds of food might a typical British citizen eat in a day, and how does that compare to the foods usually eaten by Americans? What are some traditional foods served for special occasions? How are these foods made? Pick one traditional British dish or beverage and research its history. Where did the item originate and how long have the British been eating or drinking this item? How has it changed (if at all) over time?

MS/HS

Burial in Westminster Abbey has a long tradition; since 1727, when Sir Isaac Newton became the first scientist to be buried in the abbey, it has become a prestigious honor. When Britain's foremost composer Benjamin Britten died in 1976, many thought he should have been buried in Westminster Abbey, but his wishes were to be buried in Aldeburgh Parish Church so that his grave could be side by side with Pears. How do people decide where they want their final resting places to be? Why might someone choose to have a private and modest burial over a public event? How important were his family relationships to his decision? If you were famous, what would you choose: a famous, national burial site or a family plot? Why?

MS/HS

The mother in *Curlew River* has lost her son. How do her actions in the opera reflect the Kübler-Ross model that outlines five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance? How have you experienced grief?

HS

## Geography

State Standards: 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4

The opera *Curlew River* includes a river in the story. What rivers are in Pittsburgh?

PreK

Look at a photo of a curlew bird. Have you ever seen a bird like that around Pittsburgh? Do you think birds like that would live near Pittsburgh? Why or why not?

PreK

Benjamin Britten was born in Lowestoft on the east coast of England in Suffolk. Find Suffolk on a map or globe. Would Britten have been able to see the ocean from his hometown?

PreK/ES

Rivers are important to this opera and the Noh play from which it's adapted. Are the Curlew River and the Sumida River settings real or fictional places? Are there any other bodies of water named after curlews? If so, locate these places by their latitude and longitude.

ES

Librettist William Plomer was a South African and British novelist, poet, and literary editor. Born of British parents in Transvaal Colony, he moved to England in 1929 after spending a few years in Japan. He also traveled through Korea, China, the Soviet Union, Poland, Germany, and Belgium. Trace his travels on a map or globe.

ES

How could Benjamin Britten have traveled to Japan in 1956? Trace several possible routes from his home in England to Tokyo.

ES

Create a local map for the fictional area where *Curlew River* takes place. Read the opera's synopsis for clues as to the specific features your map should reflect. Include the topography of the area.

ES/MS

What different kinds of habitats do curlews need to live and breed? Why would curlews live near water? In what countries or continents are curlews found? Are curlew populations considered endangered or are they thriving? Why? ES/MS

Britten preferred to live in the country, especially his beloved home on the rugged Sussex coast. Find the location of Benjamin Britten's house by the North Sea and determine the weather patterns there. What are some important geographical factors that influence the weather in Britten's hometown? What are some important geographical factors that influence the weather in the Pittsburgh area? In what ways does weather affect our lives? ES/MS

In *Curlew River*, a woman learns of her son's unfortunate fate from a chance encounter with The Ferryman while crossing a river. What is a ferry, and why are ferries used? Where are there active ferries in England and the United States today? Are there ferries in Pittsburgh? Why or why not? ES/MS

Complete a chart that compares facts about the Sumida River (the non-fiction setting of the Noh play that inspired this opera) to the Ohio River, the Mississippi River, and the Amazon: consider volume, direction of flow, length, effect on sea level, mammals, fish, source of its name, yearly travelers, number of dams, bridges, and any other fun facts about each that you discover in your research. MS

In 1948, along with Pears, Eric Crozier, and others, Britten founded the English Opera Group, which produced some of Britten's operas at the Aldeburgh Festival. Still active today, where does the Festival take place? How could patrons travel to the festival today, and where would they stay? MS

The British Commonwealth has expanded and contracted over the centuries. Trace the expansion of the British Commonwealth, as well as when some of its colonies began to leave. Which countries were still part of the Commonwealth during Britten's lifetime? How many Commonwealth realms are there today? MS/HS

In *Curlew River*, The Ferryman "raises a sail" to move his boat across the river. How large would a body of water need to be to need a sail on a ferry? Why? MS/HS

The Curlew River is a fictional river in East Anglia, an area in the East of England that includes the counties of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk. How should East Anglia be described geographically? Are there any significant rivers in East Anglia? If so, why might Britten have created a fictional one for his opera's setting? The opera *Curlew River* premiered in Suffolk, in Orford Church. Why might Britten have set the opera in this area of England in a fictional location, but schedule the premiere in a real place? MS/HS

Locate several cities, such as Aldeburgh, where summer opera festivals occur. What is the purpose of an opera festival? Why are they held in the summer? How important are these festivals to their local economies? How important are they to the arts and the artists? Determine the significance of the Aldeburgh summer festival. What was its original purpose? Does it still fulfil that purpose today?

MS/HS

### Health, Safety, and Physical Education

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

In *Curlew River*, the characters are crossing a river on a ferry. How do passengers stay safe on a boat?

PreK

In *Curlew River*, The Ferryman rows the ferry for many hours. Show what a rowing motion looks like. What muscles do you use?

PreK

One way of keeping yourself safe near water is to learn how to swim. Can you swim? What muscles do you use when you swim? How do you breathe? What skills are you taught when you learn how to swim?

PreK/ES

Benjamin Britten had heart problems as an adult. How can we take care of our heart health today?

PreK/ES

In *Curlew River*, The Ferryman presumably rows all day back and forth across the river. Of the major muscle groups (arms, shoulders, chest, back, abdominal, upper legs and buttocks, lower legs), which would The Ferryman use? What kind of nutrition is needed to develop and maintain muscle? What skills are needed to row a boat with passengers on it? Is it the same motion as traveling in a kayak or canoe?

ES/MS

As an adult, Britten suffered from heart problems caused by a childhood infection. What types of nutrition and exercise are recommended to maintain a healthy heart into adulthood? How well do these guidelines help someone with existing heart damage? Create a daily diet and exercise plan that focuses on promoting heart health.

ES/MS

During heart surgery in 1971, Britten suffered a stroke, which ultimately slowed down his creative activities. What is a stroke? How is it possible to suffer one during surgery? What areas of the brain and heart are affected by a stroke? What therapies are needed following a stroke? Is it possible to prevent strokes? If so, how?

MS/HS

The mother in *Curlew River* has lost her son, and grief has driven her into madness. What are the emotions associated with grief? What is the grieving process, and what stages does it entail? In the past, people were expected or recognized to be “in mourning” for a year when they lost a family member. How long does grief last? What supports are available nowadays for people dealing with grief? How might grieving people care for their mental health?

MS/HS

In 1914, when Benjamin Britten was three months' old, he was infected with an illness labeled "influenza pneumonia" and nearly died. What are influenza and pneumonia? What systems of the body do they impact? What are the long-term consequences of each, if any? How are these diseases spread, how common they were in the 1950s, and are they still a problem today? How would both have been treated in the 1950s, and how are they treated today? What medical breakthroughs for treatment of these diseases have been made since Britten's infancy in 1914?

MS/HS

Benjamin Britten once outlined a list of 20 illnesses he had contracted throughout his lifetime, starting with a severe case of pneumonia in infancy, which left him with a damaged heart. What is the specific damage that can occur from an infection such as pneumonia? How does an illness in the lungs impact a person's heart? What other childhood illnesses can also affect or permanently damage heart function? How can hearts damaged by infection be repaired, if at all?

HS

One controversial author has posited that Britten's heart problems were caused by undisclosed syphilis, a theory that has widely been discredited. What is syphilis, and how is it contracted? What are its immediate and long-term effects on the body? How is syphilis treated today, and how would syphilis have been treated in Britten's young adulthood, prior to World War II?

HS

## History

State Standards: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4

There are only male performers in *Curlew River*, as even the role of the mother is sung by a man. Does that seem old-fashioned to you? Why might Britten have written his opera for just male performers? Are there any current movies or TV shows that only have male or female actors, instead of a mix of genders?

PreK

Britten was a pacifist, which means he believed in peaceful solutions to disagreements rather than fighting. How can two people resolve a problem peacefully? Can governments do the same thing?

PreK

*Curlew River* was written in 1964, at the height of the Cold War. How can a war be called cold or hot? What do you think is the difference between a hot war and a cold war?

PreK

Britten lived to be 63 years old, and in his lifetime, the world changed dramatically. What do you imagine our world might be like 60 years in the future? What might stay the same, and what might be different?

PreK

Benjamin Britten left England for North America in 1939, around the time of the beginning of World War II. What is a world war? Do you know anyone who fought in World War II, or in any war since? How and when do we honor those who fought?

PreK/ES

Benjamin Britten was born in 1913. In that year, Ford Motor Company instituted a 40-hour work week. How many hours do people work in a week now? PreK/ES

In 1939, Benjamin Britten left for North America. What is significant about the year 1939? What was happening in the world at that time? Why did Britten and others leave their native countries? What would make you want to leave your home and live somewhere else? Write a poem about the reasons to leave home. ES/MS

What roles do women play in the Japanese Noh tradition? Were these stage roles always available to women? Trace the roles of women in Japanese Noh and compare it to women in Western theater traditions. At what point were women actors fully permitted and accepted as public theater performers? ES/MS

Benjamin Britten lived from 1913–1976. Make a timeline that charts events in Britten’s personal life along with important historical events from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What momentous changes would Britten have witnessed in his lifetime? ES/MS

*The Imitation Game*, a film about Alan Turing and his work on decoding German messages during World War II using the Enigma machine, takes place during a period of history when Benjamin Britten was composing works in England. Both men were against violence and war. Trace other parallels between the two British citizens. ES/MS

In Western cultural and religious tradition, all monks were male. Is that true of other religions and cultures? Why were monks all male, and is that still true today? Were there any women in positions of authority in medieval and current Roman Catholic churches? Investigate the roles available to women in the medieval and modern Roman Catholic church. MS/HS

A steadfast pacifist, Britten left England in 1939 as World War II began and spent four years living in the United States and Canada. Why would Britten’s pacifist beliefs prompt him to leave his country as a war broke out? How were pacifists—also called “conscientious objectors”—treated by the British government during wartime? Consider both World War I and World War II, which were both fought during Britten’s lifetime. How were conscientious objectors treated in wartime in the United States? MS/HS

In medieval times, Roman Catholic services were read and sung in liturgical Latin. Did the average parishioner in England at that time speak and read Latin? What was monastic plainsong or plainchant? How was it used in liturgies of the Western Church? Was it in Latin or the vernacular? Would a parishioner have been able to understand what the monks were chanting? Did plainsong wane in the ninth century when polyphony was introduced, or is it still integral to Catholic services today? Is Mass still said in Latin? If not, when and why did it change to the vernacular? HS

Research the importance of the written word in Western and Eastern cultures. Learn how to do some characters in Japanese calligraphy, known as Shodo (書道), a traditional art form and a Zen practice that involves writing with a brush and ink on paper. How significant is the written word to the concept of history? Does history exist without a written record? Are there any cultures that do not use a form of writing to record their histories?

HS

### Mathematics CORE

State Standards: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4

Benjamin Britten's country honored him by making 50 pence coins with his name on them. What is on a 50-cent coin in the United States? Is a British penny the same as a United States penny?

PreK

The instruments in *Curlew River* are Flute (doubling piccolo), Horn, Viola, Double Bass, Harp, Percussion (5 small untuned drums, 5 small bells, 1 large tuned gong), and Chamber Organ. How many different instruments are there? How many players are needed?

PreK/ES

How much does it cost to rent the Benedum Center, the Byham Theater, and Calvary Episcopal Church for the run of opera performances? How many people does each theater seat? How many tickets would have to be sold in each venue, just to cover the cost of the rental fees? What percentage of an opera's budget do rental fees comprise?

ES

When measuring a river, the measurements include width, depth, and volume. What do these terms mean? How are these measurements attained? Measure the width of your classroom. Measure the depth of a bathtub. Measure the volume of milk in a container.

ES

The orchestra used in *Curlew River* uses the following instruments: Flute (doubling piccolo), Horn, Viola, Double Bass, Harp, Percussion (5 small untuned drums, 5 small bells, 1 large tuned gong), and a Chamber Organ. Sort the instruments into pie charts to demonstrate the proportion of each instrument family used in this opera.

ES/MS

Then create a graphic that compares the instruments used in a different Benjamin Britten work, *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, which is scored for symphony orchestra consisting of the following instruments:

- Woodwinds: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets in B flat and A, two bassoons
- Brass: four horns in F, two trumpets in C, two trombones, one bass trombone, one bass tuba
- Percussion: timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, snare drum, woodblock, xylophone, castanets, tamtam, whip
- Strings: harp, first and second violins, violas, cellos, double basses

Honoring people in Westminster Abbey has a long tradition; more than 3000 people are buried or commemorated in the abbey. Though Britten was offered this honor, he declined. Find the dimensions of Westminster Abbey. How is it possible to bury 3000 people inside this building?

ES/MS

Though the opera's Curlew River is fictional, the Sumida River that inspired its setting is real. Create a chart that compares the Sumida River to the Ohio River by discharge volume. Then compare these rivers to other large rivers in the world. Which river in the world has the most discharge volume?

ES/MS

Of the roughly 2000 plays created for Noh that are known today, about 240 make up the current repertoire performed by the five existing Noh schools. Calculate the percentages and ratios of these statistics. How many Broadway musicals have been created and are currently playing on Broadway? How many are performed in high schools? What are the percentages and ratios for those statistics?

ES/MS

In the early 1960s the pollution of the Sumida River was at its worst, with biochemical oxygen demand as high as 63 milligrams per liter (mg/l). What percentage of volume was that level of pollution? What should that level be in an unpolluted river?

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

Have you ever lost something? What technology is available to help you find a lost item?

PreK

The Cuyahoga River near Cleveland actually caught fire in 1969 because of oil and debris on the top of the river. The fire was so famous that it caused people to work on environmental laws. What are some ways that we can keep rivers clean?

PreK

A curlew is a bird with a long bill. Look at a photo of a curlew in a marshy area where it lives. What would they eat? Why would having a long bill be an advantage in this habitat?

PreK/ES

*Curlew River's* setting is based on a Japanese river called the Sumida River, which has often been polluted. What does it mean to be polluted? Are the rivers in Pittsburgh polluted? How can rivers be cleaned up?

PreK/ES

In *Curlew River*, The Madwoman sings about curlews, lambs, and crows. Classify each of these animals: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus.

ES

What are some scientific inventions and discoveries that originated in Japan? How important are these inventions today? ES

The Curlew Recovery Project invites donations to protect curlews. Are these birds endangered? Who decides if a bird or animal is endangered or extinct? ES

In *Curlew River*, a child dies and is buried. How are bodies prepared for burial in the United States? What is the process for cremating a body? What are the environmental pros and cons, both short-term and long-term, of each method? ES/MS

In *Curlew River*, The Ferryman recounts that the dying boy asked for a yew tree to be planted on his grave as a remembrance of him. What is a yew tree? Why are they popular for memorials? What do yew trees symbolize in different cultures? Have you ever seen a yew tree in a cemetery? Have you ever arranged to plant a tree in someone's memory? ES/MS

In a traditional theater, how does a stage manager communicate with the crew? What kinds of technology make this communication possible? What adaptations would need to be made for a performance in a non-traditional venue, such as Calvary Episcopal Church? ES/MS

One of the most recognizable characteristics of the Noh stage is its independent roof that hangs over the stage, even in indoor theatres. How is this roof supported architecturally? Are all roofs supported in the same way? If not, what are some different ways that roofs can be supported? ES/MS

In the early 1960s the pollution of the Sumida River was at its worst, but since the mid-1980s the river began to recover. As pollution has declined, the river's popularity has recovered. How do scientists know if a river is recovering? What are the signs that a river has become a viable habitat again? How do we know if a river is clean enough to swim in it? Trace the progress of eliminating pollution in Pittsburgh's rivers: the Allegheny, Monongahela, and the Ohio. How clean are these rivers now? What are some practical steps that students can take to protect waterways? ES/MS

Curlews are shorebirds known for their long, down-curved bills, and diverse species of curlews can be found in different countries across the globe. The Eurasian curlew, for example, is found in Europe, Africa, and parts of Asia, while the Long-billed curlew is primarily located in western North America. Other species like the Eskimo curlew are now critically endangered or extinct. Are there any curlews in the Pittsburgh area? Why would the bird be nicknamed the "candlestick bird"? What is the curlew's call like? Investigate curlews on birding websites and on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website, which has a free app for identifying bird calls. ES/MS

Curlews can be found in the fens or fenlands in eastern England. What is a fen? Why would curlews make this habitat their home? Why did many of the fenlands in England disappear? What are the unintended consequences of efforts to reclaim or restore these fenlands? What areas in the United States are—or were—comparable to the English fenlands? How are these lands faring?

MS

The Sumida River is an actual river that flows through central Tokyo, Japan. It branches from the Arakawa River at Iwabuchi and flows into Tokyo Bay. Its tributaries include the Kanda and Shakujii rivers. What is a tributary? What is a watershed? Research all the tributaries of the Ohio River in Pittsburgh and the entire watershed area. What efforts are being made worldwide to protect waterways?

MS

In the Benedum Center, Byham Theater, and Heinz Hall, patrons notice that acoustics play a role in attending a live performance. What are acoustics? How are they measured or described by professional sound engineers? What would acoustics be like in Calvary Episcopal Church where *Curlew River* will be staged? Why do churches seem to have such remarkable acoustics?

MS/HS

Though the story that the Sumida River caught fire because of pollution is an urban myth, the Cuyahoga River in Ohio actually did catch fire at least 14 times, due to heavy industrial pollution. The most famous instance of fire on the Cuyahoga River was on June 22, 1969, when an oil slick and floating debris were ignited by sparks from a passing train. This event is often cited as a catalyst for the environmental movement in the United States. What are the current laws for keeping America's waters clean? Which agencies are responsible for protecting water and waterways? Why are these laws often controversial?

MS/HS

Theater lighting is essential for creating the right setting in theatrical performances. How were stages lit from 1600–1800? When did gas lights become common? What was the first theater to have electric lighting? In theater, technicians need to control many lights simultaneously. What is a lighting board? How are computers used today in theater lighting? What functions must still be done manually and why? Learn about different types of theater lighting such as candles, light bulbs, the effect of lenses on light, and the manner in which photography was discovered. How prevalent are LED lights in theater today?

MS/HS

In 2001, David Austin introduced the Rosa Benjamin Britten, a colorful English rose that combines beauty, fragrance, a long-blooming season, and high resistance to disease. What does it mean to cultivate a plant? What are hybrids? How are new roses cultivated? How are names chosen for new plants? Is the Rosa Benjamin Britten rose considered a hybrid? Why would Austin have chosen this particular rose to name after Benjamin Britten?

MS/HS

The Japanese traditional herbal medicine called Kampo has 148 different formulations (mainly herbal extracts) that can be prescribed within the British national health insurance system. Make a chart of herbs found in Pennsylvania, with their medicinal uses. Discuss the ways in which Eastern and Western medicine differ in their views of herbs in medical practices. Should herbs be used in modern medical practices? Why or why not?

MS/HS

The Ohio River is the third largest river by discharge volume in the United States and the largest tributary by volume of the Mississippi River. In 2023, the Ohio was listed among America's Most Endangered Rivers due to farm runoff and wastewater from industrial processes such as steel production. What percentage of toxic discharges were nitrates and mercury? Did the East Palestine, Ohio train derailment impact the Ohio River? What is being done to protect the Ohio River and its tributaries?

HS

Cryptanalyst Alan Turing proposed a game for answering "Can machines think?" He proposed an experiment to define a standard for a machine to be called "intelligent," wherein a computer could be said to "think" if a human interrogator could not tell it apart, through conversation, from a human being. Turing suggested that rather than building a program to simulate the adult mind, it would be better to produce a simpler one to simulate a child's mind and then to subject it to a course of education. Nowadays, a form of Turing's test is widely used on the Internet; the CAPTCHA test is intended to determine whether the user is a human or a computer. What is a CAPTCHA test, and how does it work? When have you needed to use the CAPTCHA test?

HS

## 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)

In *Curlew River*, both English and Latin are used in the singing. Learn how to say some Latin words:

PreK

Hello: Salve  
Goodbye: Vale  
Thank you: Tibi gratias ago  
Good: Bene

In Benjamin Britten's home there were signs in different languages stating "Beware of Dog." Practice drawing the signs in several art media and learn how to pronounce each different phrase for "Beware of Dog."

PreK

The Japanese writing system is different from English. Characters are written from the top of the page to the bottom and are read from right to left. How is this different from reading and writing in English?

PreK/ES

Benjamin Britten was an English composer, and therefore, spoke English. However, some English words are not the same as American English words for the same thing. What do these English words mean: flat, crisps, jumper, lorry, biscuit? PreK/ES

British and American English words often demonstrate spelling differences. Brainstorm a list of words that are spelled—and often pronounced—differently in England and America. Do you notice any trends emerging? If so, what are they? ES/MS

At Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL), all operas are performed in English, the *vernacular*, with projected supertitles. This practice is part of their mission to make opera inclusive for a diverse audience. What does “vernacular” mean? What happens to a song when the words are translated to another language? In what languages are Pittsburgh Opera performances? Are supertitles projected even for operas in English? ES/MS

Translate the text of the chant “Te lucis ante terminum” into modern English. How does the new translation impact the rhythms of the chant? Translate your favorite pop song into Latin. How does the new translation fit with the original song? Did you have to change any words to make the translation fit the phrasing and rhythm? If so, how did that additional change impact the meaning of the song? MS/HS

### Character Themes for *Curlew River*

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—hope and love—after reading the synopsis of *Curlew River*.

1. The attribute of love would encompass the quality of compassion. What is compassion? How is compassion shown in the actions of the characters toward The Madwoman?
2. If one thematic idea in *Curlew River* is the concept of an individual at odds with his or her society, how does the attribute of hope apply in this opera? Who has hope, and for what? Is that hope realized by the end of the opera? Does a different message of hope transcend the initial desires of the characters?
3. In this opera, monks are making a pilgrimage based on their faith. In this context, what role does faith have in this opera, and how does the characters' collective faith contribute to, or demonstrate, the attributes of hope and love?