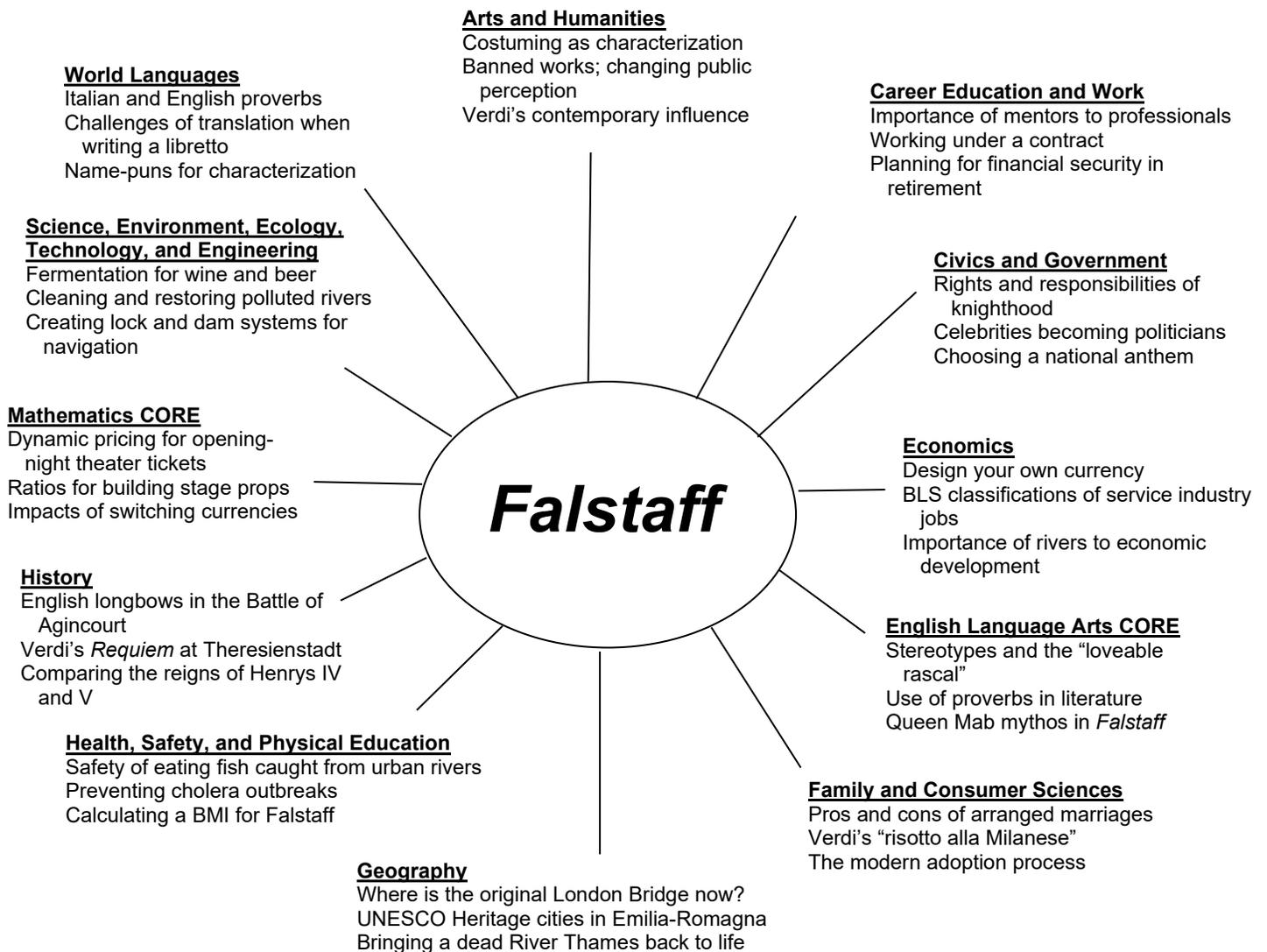


## Curriculum Circle for *Falstaff*

How does *Falstaff* by Giuseppe Verdi and Arrigo Boito intersect with all academic content areas?  
Begin with the opera and brainstorm connections to all curricula.



**Lesson Plan Stems for 2025–2026**

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## Lesson Plan Stems for *Falstaff*

How does *Falstaff* by Giuseppe Verdi and Arrigo Boito 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

In Act III of *Falstaff*, several characters wear disguises. What is a disguise? PreK  
 Why do people put on disguises? Have you ever worn a disguise? If so, when? What were you disguised to be?

In Act III, the elves and fairies have a dance. What type of dance would PreK  
 elves and fairies do? With your classmates, dry dancing like elves and fairies. What kinds of movements were part of your dance? Why did you use these movements?

*Falstaff* is considered a comedy, a funny opera. What elements make a PreK  
 story funny? What makes you and your friends laugh? Do you have a favorite funny story?

The lead character in this opera is Sir John Falstaff. The “Sir” in his name PreK  
 means he’s a knight. What do you imagine a knight looks like? What should he wear so everyone knows he’s a knight?

*Falstaff* ends with the characters singing a fugue, or a piece of music that PreK/ES  
 begins with one voice, and other characters join in singing the same tune, but at different times. Try singing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” as a fugue. What do you notice about this kind of singing? How did it feel to sing together like this?

In 1813, the year that Verdi was born, the waltz was the big dance craze in ES  
 European ballrooms. What is a waltz and what is the time signature for this kind of dance? What features of this dance made it so popular? Learn the basic steps of a waltz.

Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner are two famous opera composers who were contemporaries of each other. Create a Venn diagram to compare each composer's operas. What do they share in common?	ES
The role of Mistress Quickly is sung by a mezzo-soprano or a contralto. What are these voice types? Why would Mistress Quickly's role have been written in this range?	ES/MS
Describe the character traits of Mistress Quickly. Does her name offer any clues to her character? How do you visualize her? Design a costume for this character that will help the audience understand her character's traits and role.	ES/MS
How would you stage Falstaff's dunking in the Thames River? A term for staging this kind of action is called a "hazard." What special considerations need to be made to make use of these kinds of hazards? Are there any other hazards in this opera?	ES/MS
<i>Falstaff</i> is a through-composed opera. What does "through-composed" mean? How are "through-composed" operas different from "number" operas?	ES/MS
Henry Ford built his first car in the same year that <i>Falstaff</i> premiered—1893. If you were to update the opera's setting to 2010, what motor vehicles might suit or symbolize each character? How might Falstaff have been tricked and humiliated nowadays?	ES/MS
Create a "Musical Life of Verdi" timeline to represent all the operas that Verdi wrote. List a one-sentence plot synopsis of each opera and include a key excerpt of music from each opera in your timeline.	ES/MS
American composer Cole Porter was born in 1893, the same year that <i>Falstaff</i> premiered. What kinds of music did Cole Porter compose? Would any of his pieces fit the story of <i>Falstaff</i> ?	ES/MS
The title character in <i>Falstaff</i> is a baritone. How many other operas have baritones as the main male character? How are voice types linked to different character types? What are the audiences' expectations for the roles certain voice types are asked to sing?	ES/MS
In Act II of <i>Falstaff</i> there is an on-stage band, called a <i>banda</i> . Is it better to have the actors play the instruments themselves, or is it better to have the actors "fake it" while the orchestra in the pit plays the music for this on-stage band? Why or why not?	MS
Verdi composed for 40 years before attempting to write his comic (and final) opera, <i>Falstaff</i> . Why do you think he waited so long? Which is harder to write—comedy or tragedy? Why?	MS

- Imagine you are the scenic designer for *Falstaff*. How would you and your crew create and stage the moonlit Windsor Forest scene? What are the challenges that staging this scene would present? MS
- In 1893, the year of *Falstaff*'s premiere, the boundaries of the country of Siam were established. What is the current name for Siam? Which musical is set in Siam? Create a Venn diagram that compares the comic opera of *Falstaff* to this musical. What similarities have you discovered? MS
- In the opera, the characters all attempt to trick and fool Falstaff. On what theatrical devices does the opera depend in order to credibly trick this character? Would these same devices work with a modernized production of *Falstaff*? If not, how would you stage a modern production to achieve the same ends? MS/HS
- Falstaff is described as "portly" and "rotund." If the performer singing the role of Falstaff is not physically like this description, how might a costumer create a "fat suit" to give the artist the illusion of girth, but that when worn, will not interfere with the singer's performance or be excessively uncomfortable? MS/HS
- You are the costume designer for *Falstaff*. What are the different costumes needed for Act III of the opera? What might the cost be for building all these costumes? Select a particular character and design both an extravagant and a "budget" version of one of the character's costumes. MS/HS
- Only recognized as a comical figure nowadays, the actual historical Falstaff was an important military officer, who was eventually defeated in battle by Joan of Arc. What operas or theater pieces use Joan of Arc as a character? MS/HS
- In 1893, the year that *Falstaff* premiered, George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was banned in England. What other works of art (such as plays, paintings, music, books, etc.) have also been banned? Why are some works of art banned? Do they stay banned forever? MS/HS
- In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, Katherine Lee Bates wrote the words for "America the Beautiful." This song has become a memorable tune, one that most Americans recognize and sing. What makes a song "memorable"? Are there any memorable tunes in *Falstaff*? What other memorable opera songs do you know? What do they have in common? MS/HS
- Falstaff* is known as a lyrical comedy. What does this designation mean? How does this term distinguish this style of opera from lyrical opera? What are some other designations for operatic styles? Compare Verdi's lyric style to different composers from his time, such as Wagner and Puccini. MS/HS

Verdi's *Falstaff* is based on three Shakespeare plays. What other operas or stage works are also based on Shakespeare's plays? Do any of these works use Shakespeare's words, or just his plots and characters? MS/HS

The orchestra for *Falstaff* includes some instruments not usually found in an opera orchestra, including a guitar, an extra flute, and a harp. Why did Verdi include these instruments in the score? What other opera composers have written unusual instruments into their orchestra scores? How does adding instruments impact production costs? MS/HS

In Act II, Alice is onstage playing a lute. What is a lute? What is the symbolism of a woman playing a lute? If a lute-player is not available, what other instrument could be substituted in the pit? What other instruments did 16<sup>th</sup>-century women play? What instruments were popular for women to play in Verdi's time? Were there any instruments that women were NOT supposed to play in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? HS

Anton Graff, the famous Swiss portraitist, died in 1813, the same year that Verdi was born. Describe Graff's style of painting, compared to other famous portraitists. What famous opera composer did Graff paint? How did that person's style of composing compare to Verdi's? HS

In *Falstaff's* score, the chorus parts are labeled "SSS AA TT BB." What does this mean? Define harmony. If all the sections of the chorus were singing something different, how many parts would be part of this harmony? If some of the sections were singing the same music, how many different combinations of sections are there? How does this make a score more complex? HS

Verdi was an influence on many contemporary composers, such as Benjamin Britten. In what ways do Britten's compositions reflect his deep admiration for Verdi? What other composers have been influenced by Verdi? HS

### Career Education and Work

State Standards: 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.4

During his professional years, Verdi worked as a teacher, a composer, and even a politician. Do you know anyone who works more than one job at a time? What skills might a teacher, a composer, and a politician all have in common? PreK

In this opera, the character Falstaff tries to get money by pretending to be in love with two different, wealthy women. How could Falstaff earn money on his own? What sort of work could he do? If you wanted to earn some spending money, what work could you do to earn it? PreK

<p>The famous conductor Arturo Toscanini was a fan of Verdi's opera <i>Falstaff</i>. Why does an orchestra need a conductor? What does a conductor do? Practice being a conductor; try to get your classmates to do a simple task all at the same time. What did you discover about being a conductor?</p>	PreK
<p>In this opera, Mistress Quickly operates an inn. Create a chart depicting the jobs needed to run an inn. Which jobs would have been more likely to have been held by men and which by women?</p>	ES
<p>At age 11, Verdi received schooling in Italian, Latin, the humanities, and rhetoric. What do these courses teach you? How important would these kinds of classes be to someone who wants to work as a professional musician? What courses did you take when you were 11 years old? How does Verdi's education at age 11 compare to yours?</p>	ES/MS
<p>In Shakespeare's plays the character of Falstaff is a mentor (of sorts) to the young Prince Henry; Verdi was a mentor to his only student Emanuele Muzio. What is a mentor? Who can be one? What are mentors expected to do? How important are mentors to people beginning their careers? What sorts of positions offer mentorships for new employees?</p>	ES/MS
<p>Artists frequently collaborate with each other, and the success of Verdi's <i>Falstaff</i> owes much to his collaboration with the librettist Arrigo Boito. What does it mean to collaborate professionally? What skills does collaboration require? In what professions is collaboration a key to success?</p>	ES/MS
<p>In the 1840s and 1850s, Verdi wrote operas under contracts with Bartolomeo Merelli and the Casa Ricordi, a famous publishing house. What is a contract? What are the benefits and drawbacks of working under contract? How did Verdi view these years where he was under contract to write operas? In what ways did having contracts with Merelli and Ricordi benefit Verdi?</p>	ES/MS
<p>Verdi was almost 80 years old when he began to work on <i>Falstaff</i>. How might this fact have influenced his composition or choice of subject? What other famous people began new works late in life? What are the advantages of having an older person as an employee, or as the head of a company? How many older people today are working at careers or even starting second careers?</p>	MS/HS
<p>The real Falstaff—Sir John Fastolf—warred against Joan of Arc at the battles of Agincourt and Orleans. Who was Joan of Arc? How did she challenge notions of femininity and women's roles? Are there any other examples of women military leaders in history? What challenges and obstacles do women serving in the military face today? Do you think that a woman today would be chosen to lead the army?</p>	MS/HS
<p>In this opera, Falstaff has a run-in with Doctor Caius in Act I. What did the title of "Doctor" mean in Falstaff's time? What does it mean now?</p>	MS/HS

To what service industry do innkeepers and hotel workers belong nowadays? What are the occupations associated with keeping an inn? What are the pay or salary scales? To what extent do these workers depend on tipping as part of their pay? MS/HS

Verdi's second wife was soprano Giuseppina Strepponi, who by 1846 was forced into early retirement at the height of her singing career because her voice had failed. What professions rely on a person's physical abilities? How do people who rely on their physical abilities plan for a time when they can no longer perform? MS/HS

By 1860, Verdi had written more than 20 operas and was earning enough income to be able to retire and work independently. How much income does the average American need in order to be able to retire, and how much has the average American saved toward retirement by the time he or she is eligible? Is it enough? What factors need to be considered when thinking about retirement? How can people save for retirement? What vehicles are available to help with saving, planning for, and supporting retirement? How significant are defined benefit plans and defined contribution plans to most Americans' retirement savings? HS

### **Civics and Government**

State Standards: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4

The character of Sir John Falstaff in this opera is a knight. What do you imagine when you think of a knight? How should he look and dress? What do you think knights do each day? Would you like to be a knight? If so, why? PreK

London is the capital city of England and Rome is the capital city of Italy. What is a capital city? What is the capital of the United States? What is the capital of Pennsylvania? PreK

The Republic of Italy is comprised of 20 individual "regions." The United States is also comprised of individual regions; what do we call those regions here? How many states are there? PreK

The Republic of Italy was formed in 1946 when the Italians chose to abolish their monarchy. What is a monarchy? Who is the head of the government in a monarchy? England still has a monarchy; who is the current monarch of England? The United States is a republic. What position is the head of the U.S. government? Who is our current head of the U.S. government? PreK/ES

Verdi was invited to run for office because he was a celebrity. Do celebrities make good politicians? What qualities and characteristics do good politicians need? ES

<p>In 1862, Verdi was awarded the Order of Chevalier of the Legion of Honour by the French government for his service to the arts. What award or medal does the United States bestow on people who make outstanding contributions in the arts? How does the United States' government define an "outstanding contribution"—how does someone become a recipient of the award?</p>	ES
<p>Falstaff is a knight and therefore is addressed as "Sir." Describe the English government system at the time when the opera <i>Falstaff</i> is set. What rights and responsibilities did the title of "knight" confer then? What does it mean if someone is knighted nowadays? Who are some modern knights of Great Britain? When a man is knighted he is called "Sir;" what is a woman who is knighted called?</p>	ES/MS
<p>Verdi was already a celebrity musician when he was invited to run for office in the new Italian government. He won his first election in 1859, and then served as a council member, a member of parliament, and lastly as a senator. What other famous celebrities do you know of who have held elected offices? Why might a celebrity be invited to run for public office? Why do people elect celebrities to political positions? What training or experience do celebrities have that might make them attractive candidates for winning elections?</p>	ES/MS
<p>Verdi's song "Va, pensiero" from his opera <i>Nabucco</i> is popularly considered the unofficial Italian national anthem. What is a national anthem, and why do countries have them? How are national anthems chosen? What is the national anthem of the United States? Does the U.S. have an "unofficial" anthem as well? Compare "Va, pensiero" to the U.S. national anthem. Which is easier for people to sing?</p>	ES/MS
<p>In 1813, the year Verdi was born, Mexico declared its independence. From what country did Mexico separate? How do countries become "independent"? At the time of its independence, what form of government did Mexico choose? Is that same form of government in place in Mexico today?</p>	ES/MS
<p>Verdi's contribution to music also extended into his pivotal work with copyright laws. What is a copyright? What is public domain? How does it protect musicians? How did Verdi's use of copyright change how composers were paid? How did his work help establish modern copyright laws? Do copyright laws still apply to Verdi's music?</p>	MS/HS
<p>Verdi's interest in politics of the Italian <i>Risorgimento</i> became popularized in 1859 when the slogan "Viva Verdi" was used as an acronym for the movement. What did this acronym stand for? What was the <i>Risorgimento</i>? How did it change Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? How long did the <i>Risorgimento</i> last, and how did it help shape Italy in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries?</p>	MS/HS

The historical Falstaff—Sir John Fastolf—participated in several military campaigns in France and was governor of an English stronghold in France. What were the social, political, and economic reasons motivating the conflict between Britain and France in the 15<sup>th</sup> century? MS/HS

In New York City, there is a public square named after Verdi with a life-size, marble memorial statue of the composer and four of his most famous characters. The statue was dedicated in 1906. How are memorials chosen for public displays, and how are these endeavors funded? How is someone chosen for memorialization? Who decides what and where public art is placed? MS/HS

In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, the United States Supreme Court declared the Chinese Exclusion Act to be constitutional. What did this ruling mean? What was the effect of this particular decision on immigration? From where does the Supreme Court derive its power to declare acts constitutional or unconstitutional? HS

## Economics

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

Verdi eventually became so wealthy that he was able to fund the building of a hospital and a home for old musicians. Can you name any other famous, wealthy people who have also given money to build public spaces, such as hospitals, schools, libraries, parks, etc.? PreK

Verdi was smart with his money, and as his wealth grew, he was able to invest in land near his hometown. If you were wealthy, what would you want to buy with your money? PreK

Great Britain's money is different from money in the United States. What denominations of money do people in England use? Compare what a pound note looks like to what a U.S. dollar looks like. What features stand out? If you were to design your own currency, what would it look like? What features would you include? PreK/ES

In Falstaff's day, what was the role of an inn? How important was an inn to the town where it was located? Do modern inns function in the same way? ES

In the Shakespeare plays from which *Falstaff* is derived, Mistress Quickly runs an inn for her husband, who never appears onstage. Why would it have been important for the character of Mistress Quickly to have a husband if he's not part of the play's action? Could Mistress Quickly have owned the inn herself? How could women own businesses in Falstaff's time? How could they earn a living? How did the nobles make money? ES/MS

Who controls the "purse strings" in this opera? Why were these people expected to control the household income? Was this economic division the same in other countries? ES/MS

In 1893, the same year that *Falstaff* premiered, Henry Ford built his first automobile. What innovations in production did he introduce? How did these innovations change American industry? ES/MS

Verdi was a philanthropist; he built a hospital, a rest home for aging musicians, and even wrote a song in 1894 to benefit earthquake victims. How was Verdi able to be a philanthropist? How are philanthropies established and funded? What kind of income does it take to establish and maintain a philanthropic organization? Can you name some philanthropic organizations that operate today? ES/MS

What are the monetary units used by modern Great Britain? What were the basic units of currency that Falstaff would have used in 15<sup>th</sup>-century England? Chart a monetary exchange comparison for British, American, and European (euro) monies. MS

As an innkeeper, Mistress Quickly would need to closely manage the expenses for running the hotel, bar, and stable. Research business models for running a small, independent hotel and restaurant. What business expenses would an independent hospitality owner need to take into account? Would the hotel and restaurant be managed separately or as one business? How are modern hotel room prices determined? What part of that business model would bring in the most reliable stream of income? At what point is a modern innkeeper able to make a profit? MS/HS

At one point in the opera, Falstaff is tossed into the Thames River. How are rivers important to the economic life of a city—in Falstaff's era and in our own time? How are rivers managed to encourage economic development? Compare the economic significance of the Thames River to the Allegheny, Ohio, and the Monongahela Rivers. MS/HS

In this opera, Falstaff is trying to seduce two different wealthy wives so he can take some of their money. What laws governed how women and men could inherit money in 15<sup>th</sup>-century England? Who could earn money? How has that changed over time? How important was marriage to both women's and men's financial security in Falstaff's time? Do those ideas still apply today? MS/HS

Verdi built the Casa di Riposo per Musicisti as a rest home for older and poor musicians; currently, about 60 people live in this institution. How did Verdi fund building this facility? The Giuseppe Verdi Foundation maintains this institution through royalties generated through the foundation. Explore how the foundation is funded, what its endowment is, how it generates money, how the foundation is managed, and how it remains solvent even though the original founder is dead. MS/HS

In *Falstaff*, much of the action takes place in an inn with a restaurant. New restaurants often open in Pittsburgh. What is needed for a successful restaurant business? HS

Mistress Quickly is an innkeeper, a job that is part of the service industry. HS  
 What is the service industry? How important is the service industry to the United States' economy? With your classmates, brainstorm all the jobs that would be associated with an inn or hotel. The Bureau of Labor Statistics classifies these jobs according to the tasks performed. How would Mistress Quickly's innkeeper job be classified? Research some of these service industry jobs on the BLS website: <https://www.bls.gov/oes/>. What is the average income for these jobs? What level of education is required? Can a person support a family with the wages and benefits associated with these jobs?

### English Language Arts CORE

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

In Act III, Falstaff disguises himself as Herne the Hunter, a ghost that haunts Windsor Forest. What ghost stories do you know? What do you think a ghost who haunts a forest would look like? PreK

Verdi wanted to write a comic opera, so he chose the story of *Falstaff*. What makes a story funny? Look at a picture of the character Falstaff. How do you know this character is going to be in a funny opera? PreK

In this opera, many characters play tricks on each other. What does it mean to play a trick on someone? Why do people sometimes play tricks on others? Have you ever played a trick? If so, how well did it work? How did the person react to your trick? PreK

In Windsor Forest, the characters dress up as fairies, sprites, nymphs, and witches. What are fairies, sprites, witches, and nymphs? What other stories do you know that include these characters? ES

What does the word "page" mean, as it is used in the story of *Falstaff*? Are there still pages today? How many different definitions of the word can you find? ES

Learn some vocabulary from the opera: ES/MS

Amalgam	Feign	Pittance	Rotund
Bemoan	Gory	Portly	Sprite
Berate	Henchmen	Preen	Subterfuge
Betroth	Masquerade	Procrastinate	Tryst
Cower	Mutiny	Rascal	Unrequited
Crony	Obnoxious	Rendezvous	
Dishonorable	Penitent	Revenge	

Mistress Quickly tells the gory story of "The Black Huntsman's Ghost." Is this an actual ghost tale? How does it relate to the context of *Falstaff*? ES/MS

- Falstaff recalls his “salad days” in Act II. What is meant by the term “salad days”? Where did this phrase originate? Create a chronology of the character Falstaff’s life, based on this opera, his biography, and his roles in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. ES/MS
- The characters in this opera exchange notes to express their secret feelings of love. How would these characters communicate those taboo feelings today? Explore the origins of Valentines and Valentine’s Day cards. Design a Valentine that Falstaff might have sent to either Alice or Meg. ES/MS
- The character of Falstaff argues that honor is meaningless. Does the opera’s “moral” agree with him or not? How is a character’s honor (or lack of it) an important theme in other operas? ES/MS
- How does the opera demonstrate the theme of forgiveness? Is this a realistic presentation? Should Falstaff be forgiven? Why or why not? ES/MS
- Using the English translation of one of the arias, create an etymology scavenger hunt for words with Greek and Latin roots or origins. ES/MS
- In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, American novelist Stephen Crane wrote *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. What other American novelists published books that year? ES/MS
- In Shakespeare plays, how the play ends is often what determines if the play is considered a tragedy or a comedy. If a Shakespeare play is a tragedy, how will it resolve? If it’s a comedy, how will it resolve? Where does Verdi’s opera fit? ES/MS
- This opera ends with a variation on a popular English proverb: “He who laughs last, laughs best.” What is a proverb? What does this proverb mean? How does it apply to the characters in *Falstaff*? What other proverbs can you think of that might also apply to different characters in this opera? ES/MS
- In Shakespeare’s time, the woods symbolized a wild place where the rules of civilization didn’t necessarily apply. Consider the ending of this opera; why is it important that this scene takes place in the woods, and not at the Garter Inn? MS/HS
- In 1893, the same year that *Falstaff* premiered, Arthur Conan Doyle killed off the character of Sherlock Holmes in his story “The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes.” The public was outraged and demanded that the fictional detective be brought “back to life” for future adventures. What other times has the public successfully objected to an action such as the canceling of a favorite TV show or the “death” of a favorite character? MS/HS
- Sir John Falstaff was based on a real person—Sir John Fastolf—who served at the Battle of Agincourt. In Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, read or watch the battle scenes in Kenneth Brannagh’s film version of the play. Create a chart that compares the three versions presented of Falstaff: historical, literary, and operatic. MS/HS

Discuss the character of Falstaff as the epitome of the “loveable rascal.” Is this kind of character a stereotype? How does this kind of comical character compare to the “wise fools” of Shakespeare’s tragedies? MS/HS

Shakespeare wrote his plays in iambic pentameter, which is a poetic rhythm that feels a bit like a heartbeat. Read the lyrics from the final song in *Falstaff*: “Tutto nel mondo è burla.” Using the Italian lyrics below, how would you describe the poetic structure (rhythm and rhyme) of this song? How does it compare to iambic pentameter? How does the English translation change the poetic structure? Rewrite the translation so that the English version more closely matches the original rhythm and rhyme. What did you need to change to achieve that same poetic structure of the Italian lyrics? MS/HS

<i>Tutto nel mondo è burla.</i>	<i>Everything in the world is a jest.</i>
<i>L'uom è nato burlone,</i>	<i>Man is born a teaser,</i>
<i>La fede in cor gli ciurla,</i>	<i>Faith falters in his heart,</i>
<i>Gli ciurla la ragione.</i>	<i>Reason falters in his head.</i>
<i>Tutti gabbati! Irride</i>	<i>All are deceived! Every mortal</i>
<i>L'un l'altro ogni mortal.</i>	<i>Laughs at the other.</i>
<i>Ma ride ben chi ride</i>	<i>But he who laughs truly laughs</i>
<i>La risata final.</i>	<i>The final laugh.</i>

Shakespeare often used existing stories as the basis for his own works. For example, the source story for the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* was taken from an old Italian poem that was written to commemorate the deaths of two actual people. Trace the appearances of the Falstaff character throughout Shakespeare’s plays. What was the source of the Falstaff legend from which Shakespeare developed this character? HS

Chart the differences in characterizations of Falstaff in this opera, Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. Compare these literary portraits to the Falstaff characterizations shown in Orson Welles’ cinematic *Henry IV* and Gus Van Sant’s in *My Own Private Idaho*. HS

The appearance in *Falstaff* of magical woodland sprites, demons, and assorted fairy royals are elements common to both Shakespeare’s comedies and tragedies. Trace the origins, appearance, and symbolism of the Queen Mab mythos throughout Shakespeare’s plays. Are there other authors who also use the Queen Mab mythos? If so, to what end? HS

## Family and Consumer Sciences

State Standards: 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4

Verdi, like his character of Falstaff, loved food and wine, especially the foods native to his home region. What are some of your favorite foods? Are there any foods or drinks that are local to where you live? PreK

*Falstaff* ends with a wedding in the woods. What is a wedding? What happens at a wedding ceremony? Where do you think most weddings take place? Have you ever been to a wedding? PreK

Verdi was once described as having a porcupine personality. Look at a picture of a porcupine. What makes this animal unique? What do you think people meant when they described Verdi as a porcupine? Is that a compliment? Why or why not? PreK/ES

Verdi and his second wife Giuseppina adopted the 7-year-old daughter of a distant cousin, and this little girl eventually became the heir to Verdi's estate. What does it mean if someone is adopted? PreK/ES

In this opera, people make fun of Falstaff's weight. What diet plan would you put Falstaff on? What "modern" diet plan could have existed in his time? ES

Falstaff's "henchmen" protest that their personal ethics prevent them from delivering Falstaff's love-notes in Act I. What are ethics? What conflicts enter their decision to not go along with Falstaff's plan? ES/MS

In Act II, Falstaff hides in a large laundry basket. How was clothing laundered in Falstaff's time? How is it laundered today? Create a graphic organizer to show the inventions and innovations that have changed how laundry is done from then to now. ES/MS

Falstaff's diet and drinking preferences led directly to his girth. What would a typical diet have been for a man like Falstaff? Create a menu for Falstaff, and calculate the nutritional values and calories for this meal. ES/MS

Verdi loved living in the countryside near Parma, and he was by all accounts a very good cook. One of his favorite dishes was a regional specialty called *risotto alla Milanese*. Research this dish; how is it prepared and what ingredients would you need to make it? Try making this dish for your classmates or family. Did you enjoy it? ES/MS

By the time *Falstaff* premiered, Verdi was 80 years old. In the United States, what was the average lifespan of a man in the 1890s? What was the average lifespan of a woman in the 1890s? Compare those lifespans to today's averages. What are the factors that account for the changes in life expectancy? ES/MS

Verdi grieved the loss of his first wife and young children. What are healthy ways to deal with a loved one's death? ES/MS

Verdi and Strepponi adopted 7-year-old Filomena Maria, the daughter of a distant relative, who then became the heir to Verdi's estate. How are children adopted nowadays? What agencies help with adoptions? What is the process for legally adopting a child—especially if the child comes from a different country—and how long does it take? How much does it cost for an adoption? What are some of the challenges adopting parents face through this process?

MS/HS

In *Falstaff*, Ford plans to wed his daughter Nannetta to Dr. Caius, despite her unwillingness. Was arranged marriage common in the time when the opera is set? Are marriages still arranged today? What are the advantages and disadvantages of arranged marriages? How does the success of arranged marriages compare to the success of love matches?

MS/HS

Falstaff and his cronies consume a lot of beer and wine throughout the course of this opera. In Shakespeare's time, what would have been the advantages of drinking alcohol instead of water, milk, or other kinds of beverages? What are the nutritional or health-promoting qualities of wine and beer?

MS/HS

Childhood was precarious in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; within a few-years' span, Verdi lost his younger sister aged 17, his first wife aged 26, and their two children both died before their second birthdays. What was the childhood mortality rate in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and what is it today? What were the causes of childhood mortality in 19<sup>th</sup> century America? What are some factors that account for the changes in childhood mortality now? Are there any countries nowadays where childhood mortality more closely resembles that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century than of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? If so, what factors account for this disparity?

MS/HS

Verdi fell in love with a famous soprano Giuseppina Strepponi, and the couple's relationship was considered scandalous because they cohabitated for many years before deciding to marry. How common is it for couples to cohabitate before marriage nowadays? Why might a couple want to cohabitate? What are the advantages and disadvantages of delaying marriage? Are there any statistics that track the long-term success of marriages of couples who cohabitate prior to getting married, compared to those who don't?

HS

Verdi and Boito had a falling out early in their relationship. How was their relationship mended? How did it flourish? How close were they when Verdi died?

HS

## Geography

State Standards: 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4

*Falstaff* is set in England. Locate England on a map. What geographical feature separates England from the United States? PreK

Verdi loved his farm, where he raised horses and grew grapes for wine. What is a farm? Are there any farms near where you live? What do they grow there? PreK

At Villa Verdi, Verdi's home and farm estate, Verdi dug two decorative ponds in the shape of his initials: a G and a V. What is a pond? What are ponds used for? What makes a pond different from a lake or a river? Have you ever seen a pond? What shape are they usually? PreK/ES

Verdi, *Falstaff's* composer, lived in Italy. If he were to travel to London by train, what countries would he travel through? If he were to travel by boat, what countries would he travel around? Trace on a map Verdi's sea-route from Rome to London. PreK/ES

Where is Windsor Park located? Why might Windsor have been selected for the setting of this opera? ES

Name some world-famous bridges and locate them on a map. Look at a map of London and locate both the Tower Bridge and the (new) London Bridge. Where is the original 1830s London Bridge located nowadays? Why is it there? ES

In 1893, the year of *Falstaff's* premiere, Hawaii was annexed by the United States. How far from the North American continent is Hawaii? What are Hawaii's unique geographic and climactic characteristics? ES

Verdi is probably the most famous person from the Italian region where he was born. Who are the most famous people from your hometown? ES

Describe the physical characteristics of a forest, such as Windsor Forest. Consider the topography and climate in which Windsor Forest is located. How does that topography compare to places in Pennsylvania, such as Allegheny National Forest? ES/MS

Trace the Thames River's course through England. What has been the river's impact on its region? What is the condition of the Thames River now; is it safe for recreation and fishing? ES/MS

In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, the Corinth Canal in Greece opened. What did this canal connect? Locate some famous canals throughout the world. How many were built before 1893? ES/MS

Verdi made his home near Parma, in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. Locate this region on a map and describe its topography, climate, agriculture, industries, and culture. What famous cities are found in this region? For what else is the region known? MS/HS

In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, what famous canal had been built? Of what importance—political and economical—were canals to colonial empires such as Britain and France? Is there a similar structure in the American hemisphere? Do canals still have the same economic significance that they once had in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

MS/HS

Verdi lived in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, where the UNESCO heritage cities of Modena, Parma, Ferrara, and Ravenna are located. What is a UNESCO heritage site? How does a city become recognized as a UNESCO site? What does that recognition mean? Research one of the above cities and explore the properties that led to the UNESCO designation. Are any cities in the United States on the UNESCO heritage site list?

MS/HS

The River Thames was declared “biologically dead” in the 1950s, but an intense, decades-long restoration effort has restored it to a thriving ecosystem. Research the projects that were undertaken to improve the river quality and restore the ecosystems. How do we know the river is “clean”? What specific restoration projects were undertaken near Windsor, the setting of *Falstaff*? How successful have those projects been? What are the current threats to the river and its ecosystems?

HS

### Health, Safety, and Physical Education

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

When Falstaff is dumped into the Thames in Act II, he is wearing all his clothes. What do we usually wear to go swimming? Why? How hard is it to swim with all your clothes on? Why?

PreK

Act III takes place at night in Windsor Forest. Is it safe to walk in the woods at night? What would you need to bring with you to be able to spend time in the woods at night?

PreK

Singing opera requires good breath control. How long can you hold your breath? How long can you sing one note without stopping to take a breath? How can you practice extending your ability to control your breath?

PreK

How would a nymph, a fairy, and a witch move through a forest? Act out the kind of movement each of these characters would make.

PreK

Performing on stage can present some health safety challenges. How can performers keep themselves healthy on stage under hot lights while wearing heavy costumes, makeup, wigs, and singing for two or three hours? What would a performer’s body need before, during, and after a performance?

ES

In 1893, the year of the *Falstaff*’s premiere, Lady Margaret Scott won the first British golf championship. What other significant accomplishments of women occurred in that year? How many were sports related?

ES/MS

Singing opera is physically demanding, and professional singers have exercises they perform to help train for a role. When singing opera, what parts of a person’s body are involved? How do singers train themselves to breathe properly and control their breath? Practice some of these breathing exercises. How are they different from just breathing normally? In what parts of your body did you feel these exercises the most? How do opera singers build their stamina for performances?	ES/MS
Shakespeare’s plays—including the plays that feature Falstaff—often mention the game of “real tennis,” which was very popular with Renaissance-era royals and nobles. Research the history of tennis. Where did it originate? How would the game have been played in Falstaff’s time? How is it played now? What inventions helped change how the game is currently played?	ES/MS
In 1893, the year <i>Falstaff</i> premiered, Canadians introduced the game of hockey to the United States. How was the game of 19 <sup>th</sup> -century hockey different from professional hockey today?	ES/MS
What are the stage hazards to a singer whose performance requires him to be thrown into a “river”? How can this effect be staged safely? Is it safe for someone to be thrown into the real Thames nowadays? What are some real-life hazards associated with the Thames River?	MS/HS
The massive effort to clean up the Thames has been by-in-large a successful effort, with hundreds of species of fish and aquatic life making comebacks. However, in 2025 large amounts of microplastics—mostly from decaying wet wipes flushed into the sewer systems—have been found in the digestive systems of fish, particularly flounder. Is it safe to eat fish and seafood caught in urban rivers and bays? What other contaminants have been reported in river fish? Can people eat fish caught in the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers? What agencies keep track of what foods are safe to consume? How do they monitor—if at all—the safety of game fish caught for human consumption?	MS/HS
In the opera, Falstaff’s weight is an important part of his characterization. What is the range of “overweight” for a six-foot man? Using the fat-suit measurements, calculate a BMI for Falstaff. What is your own BMI?	MS/HS
Falstaff and his cronies spend most of their time drinking wine and beer. What are the effects of drinking alcohol on a person? How does a human body process alcohol? At what point is a person considered legally drunk? Falstaff would be considered a heavy drinker by modern standards. What are the effects on a body over time if a person is a consistent, heavy drinker? Can these effects be reversed if someone stops drinking? What is considered an alcohol addiction?	MS/HS
Verdi was a farmer as well as a composer. Would he have been more physically fit because of his outdoor work?	MS/HS

Verdi and Strepponi left Paris in 1849, due to an outbreak of cholera. What is cholera? How does someone become sick with cholera? How is cholera prevented? How is it treated? Is cholera still a disease of concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? If so, where and why? MS/HS

In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, Sigmund Freud published *The Psychic Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena*, the book that became the foundation for psychoanalysis. Investigate Freud's theories, complexes, and explanation for human behavior and attempt to "diagnose" Falstaff's outrageous behavior. HS

## History

State Standards: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4

Verdi's patriotic song "Va, pensiero" became Italy's unofficial political anthem. Do you know any patriotic songs that Americans like to sing? PreK

Sir John Fastolf, the historical Falstaff, was a knight who fought in some famous English battles, including the Battle of Agincourt. What weapons do you picture a knight using in battle? Are these weapons still used by modern soldiers? PreK

If Verdi were alive today, he would be more than 226 years old! Can you name any other famous Americans that lived more than 200 years ago? PreK

In addition to his operas, in 1874 Verdi also wrote what was to become a famous *Requiem*, and excerpts from this *Requiem* were sung at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997. Who was Princess Diana? How did she die? At the time of her death, was she still a princess? Why or why not? ES

The character of John Falstaff carries the title of "Sir"—a title of dignity that does not seem in keeping with his character. How does a person come to have this title? Who are some other unlikely "Sirs" in today's England? ES/MS

The character of Falstaff is based on an actual historical figure: Sir John Fastolf. Create a timeline that traces Fastolf's life and career, first as a soldier and then as a British government official working in France. ES/MS

In *Falstaff*, Bardolfo and Pistola mutiny against Falstaff and refuse to carry his letters to Alice Ford and Meg Page. What is a mutiny? When have mutinies occurred in history, as well as in literature? ES/MS

In what wars did John Fastolf, the historical Falstaff, fight? Locate that war's battlefields on a map of France. ES/MS

In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, the World's Columbian Exposition opened to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "discovery" of America. Develop a timeline of those 400 years, depicting the significant events that occurred in this hemisphere in those 400 years. ES/MS

As a famous celebrity composer and supporter of the <i>Risorgimento</i> , Verdi was elected to several public offices throughout his lifetime. In what offices did Verdi serve? Did he have any experience that would make him a good choice for those positions? Was he an active politician? What other celebrities do you know about that have also served as politicians? Do celebrities make good politicians? Why or why not?	ES/MS
John Fastolf, the historical Falstaff, also fought against Joan of Arc. Who was Joan of Arc? For what is she famous? How successful were her campaigns against the English? What happened to her?	ES/MS
In 1893, the year <i>Falstaff</i> premiered, Canada adopted women's suffrage. What is meant by suffrage? When did the United States and England adopt women's suffrage?	ES/MS
What important roles did servants play in 15 <sup>th</sup> -century society? To what class would those workers belong today? Has the need for these kinds of services provided by servants decreased or shifted to other workers?	MS/HS
The Shakespeare plays from which Verdi's <i>Falstaff</i> is drawn cover the reigns of King Henry IV and his son Henry V. Compare the reigns of both kings. What is notable and significant about each? Does the current King of England share any common ancestry with these kings? Why or why not?	MS/HS
Sir John Fastolf (the historical Falstaff) fought in the celebrated Battle of Agincourt, where a greatly outnumbered English army decimated the French. Most historians attribute the victory to the use of the English longbow. What is a longbow? How is it used? Why was it so effective against the French at Agincourt? What other weapons were used in battle then?	MS/HS
In 1813, the year of Verdi's birth, Detroit was re-occupied by the United States. Who controlled this area before 1813? What changes in population has Detroit had in the last 200 years? How has its economic base changed?	MS/HS
1813, the year Verdi was born, was full of international conflict. Which countries were engaged in hostilities, and with whom were they fighting? Create a graphic organizer to visually show the relationships among these conflicts, their root causes, and their outcomes.	MS/HS
In 1874, Verdi also wrote his famous <i>Requiem</i> , parts of which were performed at Princess Diana's funeral in 1997, but perhaps more significantly in 1943–1944 by Jewish prisoners held at the Terezin/Theresienstadt concentration camp. What is a requiem? Research the history of the Terezin performances. Why did the prisoners choose Verdi's <i>Requiem</i> to sing? How did the Nazis use their work as propaganda? Were the prisoners' efforts successful? Why or why not?	MS/HS
Verdi's funeral was an important historical event. Research the most-attended funerals throughout history and determine the situations.	HS

Verdi's "Va, pensiero" from his opera *Nabucco* became an unofficial anthem of the Italian *Risorgimento*, and even his name became a popular acronym for this movement: "Viva VERDI." What was the *Risorgimento*? What did "Viva VERDI" stand for? How successful was this political movement? How did it pave the way for a unified Italy? How did the *Risorgimento* eventually lead to changes that produced the Italian Republic in 1946?

HS

### Mathematics CORE

State Standards: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4

Falstaff asks his friends to give Meg and Alice his "love" letters. If Falstaff had to mail them today, what would he stick on the envelope to prove he had paid the postage? How much does it cost to mail a letter today?

PreK

Shakespeare wrote at least 36 plays. How many books has Dr. Seuss or David Shannon or Mo Willems written? How does that number compare to Shakespeare's 36? What series of books do you like? How many of those books do you have at home or in the classroom?

PreK

If you look at a simple floor plan of the Benedum stage, you'll see it is a shape with four sides. What other four-sided shapes can you name? This stage shape has a special name; it's called a trapezoid. What makes a trapezoid look different from other four-sided shapes?

PreK/ES

Verdi was born in 1813, What century would 1813 be in? Sir John Fastolf (the historical person on whom Falstaff is modeled) died in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. What years does that century encompass? Why are centuries' numbers different from the numerical years?

ES

What are the costs involved in running an inn? Create a weekly budget for an innkeeper such as Mistress Quickly.

ES

Look at this list of dates that are important to the opera *Falstaff*.

ES/MS

1597: Shakespeare writes *Sir John Falstaff and the Merry Wives of Windsor*

1813: Verdi is born

1893: *Falstaff's* premiere

1901: Verdi dies

1932: First audio recording of *Falstaff* is made.

Each of these dates contains at least one prime number. What is a prime number? Which numbers in these dates are prime? How many years since the year 1 BCE have been comprised only of prime numbers? When will the next date consisting of only prime numbers occur? Why and how are prime numbers important?

Research how much Verdi would have made from the Ricordi publishing house when he finished each opera. Is composing operas lucrative?

ES/MS

If an opera company rents a production (sets, costumes, etc.) from another opera company in a foreign country, how do different measurement systems impact the use of that production? What measurement systems are used in the United States? What measurement systems are used in much of the rest of the world? How are adjustments made to compensate for these differences?

ES/MS

For the opening night premiere of *Falstaff* at La Scala in 1893, the ticket prices were 30 times greater than the usual ticket prices, a phenomenon we now call “dynamic pricing.” What is the cost of a first run, opening night movie ticket for a brand-new movie? Is that price more than you would pay if you saw the same movie on another evening, and if so, by what factor? What would be the equivalent price if a movie theater raised its opening night ticket price by 30 times?

ES/MS

Measure and calculate the space needed to fit the singer in his *Falstaff* fat suit into the laundry basket prop. What size basket would be needed in which to hide this person? What shape should this basket be? What forms of measurement do we still use today to measure items sold in baskets?

ES/MS

How big does *Falstaff*'s prop letter need to be to be seen by all the audience, yet still look plausible? Is there a standard ratio that prop masters use to determine how big the props for productions need to be?

MS

Though attempts were made to switch the United States to the metric system, Congress defeated the movement in 1893 (the same year that *Falstaff* premiered). Since 1925, the United States is now the only country that does not use the metric system. Find the metric equivalents of the standard units of measure that the United States currently does use, such as yard, foot, inch, pound, ounce, gallon, peck, etc. What problems might this resistance to “going metric” create when it comes to international trade, science, and technology?

MS/HS

Verdi would have used the Italian currency called the *lira*. However, when Italy joined the European Union in 1999, it officially changed its currency to the *euro*, and as of 2002 the *lira* ceased to be considered legal tender. What was the exchange rate for *lira*-to-euros when the switch was made? What was the real and perceived impact of the switch on real Italians' incomes, savings, and spending? If people still had *lira* in their possession now, and wished to convert them to euros, what would the current exchange be?

MS/HS

In 1813, the year Verdi was born, the dice game called “craps” was introduced in New Orleans, Louisiana. How is this game of chance played? What are the rules? Calculate the probability of winning at craps. Test your calculations by playing a few rounds of craps.

MS/HS

Verdi funded his Casa di Riposo per Musicisti (known popularly as the Casa Verdi) through the royalties from his music. However, those royalties ended in 1962. The Casa di Riposo per Musicisti publishes its financial administrative documents on its website: <https://www.casaverdi.it/istituzione/fondazione-giuseppe-verdi/donazioni-e-lasciti> Look at the transparency records to determine what is needed to run an institution such as Casa Verdi. How is the Casa Verdi funded now? Is the Giuseppe Verdi Foundation able to meet those financial obligations, or is extra funding required? How do foundations make enough money to fund their charities? What are some of the general “rules of thumb” that guide foundations in raising and distributing money in the United States?

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

Falstaff hides in a laundry basket full of dirty clothes. What makes clothes dirty? Why is it important to keep your clothing clean? What do we use to clean our clothes? What do we use to clean ourselves?

PreK

Verdi loved living in the country and tending to his farm. What is a farm? What do farms provide? If you visited a farm, what would you expect to see there? Why?

PreK

If you, like Falstaff, wanted to write a love letter to someone but you didn't have a pencil or a pen, what else could you use?

PreK

How do we get messages to other people today? Brainstorm how many ways messages may be sent between people since Falstaff's time. How many of the old methods are still in use today?

ES

Doctor David Livingstone, a Scottish explorer, was born in 1813, the same year of Verdi's birth. Who was Dr. Livingstone, what did he explore, and what is the story that made his name part of a famous expression?

ES

In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, a devastating hurricane occurred in the southeastern section of the United States. What is a hurricane? Do hurricanes happen in Europe? What other devastating storms or weather systems have struck Europe?

ES

In Shakespeare's plays, the forest represented a wild place, separate from the rules of society, a place where anything could happen. How do we view and use forests today? Who owned the forests in England during Shakespeare's time? Who owns and manages forests in the United States? What does “forest management” entail?

ES/MS

Falstaff writes “love letters” to both Alice and Meg. What kind of paper would have been available to Falstaff? What would it have been made from? What would he have used to write the letters? How would the paper and ink have been made in those days?

ES/MS

Falstaff enjoys his wine and beer, usually to excess. How are wine and beer made? What is the process known as fermentation? Under what conditions does fermentation occur?

ES/MS

Much like the Thames River, the Monongahela, the Allegheny, and the Ohio Rivers are reliably navigable for commercial traffic through a series of locks and dams. What is a lock and dam system? How does it work? When was it invented? Why was it needed? Have you ever traveled through a lock? If so, what was the experience like?

ES/MS

In 1893, the same year that *Falstaff* premiered, Henry Ford built his first automobile. What other major science or technological breakthroughs occurred in 1893?

ES/MS

Design a counterweight and pulley system for smoothly and quietly flying sets on and off stage, or in stage terminology, “in” and “out.”

MS

What architectural style is London Bridge? Create a timeline of famous bridges to show the evolution of bridge design since Falstaff’s time. What materials and innovations have been instrumental in this evolution?

MS/HS

Falstaff is dumped into the Thames River, which is historically famous for its pollution. What is the history of the pollution problem with the Thames? What would have polluted the Thames in Falstaff’s time? How is contact with polluted water a danger to people? What kinds of illnesses or conditions can be contracted through swimming or ingesting polluted water?

MS/HS

Both the Thames and the Monongahela Rivers were essentially considered dead from industrial and human pollutants. However, through the passage of environmental laws and efforts of scientists and concerned communities, both rivers are in the process of being “cleaned.” What does it mean to clean a river? How is that done? Who is responsible for cleaning up the rivers, and who is monitoring this progress? What are the hallmarks of a “clean” river? Compare the recovery of both rivers: which has been more successful? Why? In each case, what species have returned? What still needs to be done? What future challenges do both rivers face?

MS/HS

In 1893, the year *Falstaff* premiered, a chemist named Leo H. Brakeland developed Velox, the first photographic paper sensitive enough to be printed by artificial light. How is artificial light used in a darkroom? What are the steps used to hand print a photograph? Prior to Brakeland’s development, how were photographs printed? What kind of paper was used for this process?

MS/HS

In recent years, sewage pollution from discarded wet wipes overflowed into the Thames River and formed an actual island near the Hammersmith Bridge. How did this “island” come to be formed? What were the effects of this “island” on the river’s flow? What have been the impacts on the aquatic and avian life that lives in and near this section of the Thames? How is this problem currently being addressed? Do other places also have sewage concerns caused mostly by wet wipes? If so, how are those concerns being addressed?

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)

Numbers have different names in other languages. For example, the number 1 in Italian is “uno.” Learn to count to ten in Italian.

PreK

In Italy when you answer the telephone, you say “Pronto” or “Ciao,” but when you greet someone in person you say “Ciao,” or “Salve,” or even “Buon giorno.” What do you say when you answer a telephone in the United States? What do you say when you greet someone in person? How is answering a phone different from greeting someone in person? Why might different words be needed?

PreK

Italian names often have an English equivalent. For example, Giuseppe is the Italian name for Joseph. Look at these other Italian first names of people associated with this opera:

PreK/ES

**Giuseppina** (Strepponi): Verdi’s wife

**Edouardo** (Mascheroni): conducted *Falstaff’s* premiere at La Scala

**Antonio** (Scotti): Sang the role of Falstaff in 1893

**Arturo** (Toscanini): Conducted *Falstaff* at La Scala for years

Can you guess what the English equivalents are of these first names?

Verdi wrote his *Falstaff* in Italian. Into how many other languages has this opera been translated and performed around the world?

ES

How are English names pronounced in Italian? For example, how is the character name of Alice Ford pronounced? Is Falstaff pronounced differently?

ES

Though *Falstaff* is an English character and story, the opera is sung in Italian. How many letters are in the Italian alphabet? What are the vowels and vowel sounds? Are any of the consonants pronounced differently from how they might be in English?

ES

Why didn’t Verdi simply translate Shakespeare’s words into Italian for his opera?

ES/MS

On a map, locate the various Italian regions where different dialects of Italian are spoken. Create your own color-coded map to show where these Italian dialects are spoken. ES/MS

Dame Quickly's name is a pun. What is a pun? Translate her name into other languages. Are any of these puns, too? ES/MS

What is the funniest line in the opera? Translate it into another language. Is the line still funny, or has something been lost in translation? ES/MS

In how many languages can you say the word "love"? Do these words all represent romantic love or are there different words for different kinds of love? MS

"Tutto nel mondo è burla" is the name of the fugue at the end of *Falstaff*. What does this phrase translate to in English? Is there a common English language equivalent of this saying? MS

A proverb is a common saying that conveys a truth or a piece of advice. Translate these Italian proverbs word-for-word into English, then identify the common English proverbs they share a connection with, and what each saying means: MS/HS

- Meglio tardi che mai.
- Chi dorme non piglia pesci.
- A caval donato non si guarda in bocca.
- Hai volute la bicicletta? E adesso pedala!

The historical Falstaff—Sir John Fastolf—served in France as governor of Hondleur. What languages or dialects would he have had to know to be an effective leader for Britain? How common was it for leaders in the 15<sup>th</sup> century to be multilingual? To what extent was it necessary? HS

The English spoken by Sir John Falstaff and his contemporaries was a different kind of English than would have been spoken by other famous English rascals in the *Canterbury Tales*. What accounts for this shift in the English language? Have there been other shifts, especially in pronunciation, in more recent years? Create a chart to show these shifts in the English language, including those occurring today. HS

### Character Themes for *Falstaff*

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 *Falstaff*.

1. On the surface, the characters in this opera seem to demonstrate absolutely none of these universal character attributes. Yet even within Falstaff, traces of honesty and courage exist below his self-serving surface. In what ways might Falstaff's persistent wooing of both Meg and Alice, despite his lack of progress with either, demonstrate a kind of honesty and/or a kind of courage?

2. What might an "honest" solution to Falstaff's love letters have been? How do you categorize the group's pledge to "take the fat knight down a peg or two"? Will this act require courage by the group?

3. Why do audiences find Falstaff's lack of positive character attributes funny? This opera's comedy relies on disguises and manipulation by misinformation. Does the use of disguise and subterfuge fit with the concepts of courage and honesty?

4. The historical character of Sir Falstaff—Sir Fastolf—was actually a military hero, yet the popular portrayal of him in his older years is one of dissipation and self-service. To what extent might a person's notions of courage and honesty change with age and experience? What might have caused such a change in Falstaff's character?

5. At the conclusion of this opera, harmony is restored by masquerading in Windsor woods to publicly humiliate both Falstaff and Ford, both of whom take their punishment with good humor. Is there a meta-message about human behavior and ethics in this comedy's conclusion?