



Lesson:

Interpreting the Lyrics of *The Golden Queen*

OVERVIEW

The lyrics to *The Golden Queen* were written by two young students living in the same community as the composer René Clausen and the choir members from Discovery Middle School. The text and ideas in the poem are lyrical and imaginative. In an interview, Clausen recalled that his immediate response after reading the poem was a strong desire to compose music for this text.

Focusing on the lyrics before learning the piece will help students understand and interpret the story and bring more meaning and clarity to their performances of the song. The lyric study will be conducted using the Carousel Inquiry process.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will describe, analyze, and interpret the meaning of the lyrics, capturing and collecting their collaborative responses in writing on a set of charts. This activity is intended to lay the ground-work for rehearsing and performing *The Golden Queen*.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Copies of [The Text of The Golden Queen](#)
- Chart paper and markers of various colors
- (optional) Copies of the [Meet the Poets](#) article
- (optional) Copies or display of the [Narrative Analysis of The Golden Queen](#)
- (optional) Recording of *The Golden Queen* ([click link to download](#) or email ChoralQuest@composersforum.org for a free Catalog CD)

PROCESS

1. Read [the lyrics](#) out loud. Distribute copies of the song lyrics or display electronically. Tell students that the song lyrics started as a poem. Choose a format for reading the lyrics out loud. For example:
 - Ask sections of the choir to read specific lines of the poem as an informal choral reading.
 - Ask a small group of individual students to prepare a choral reading with solo and group lines read for the rest of the choir.
 - Whole choir reads together.
 - Another format of your choosing.
2. Brainstorm and generate many ideas about the meaning of the song lyrics using a Carousel process.
 - **Write and number** each question below as headings on separate sheets of chart paper. If you wish, adjust the questions to fit your teaching goals.

- #1 What do the words of make you think about? Describe ideas and images that come to mind when you read these words.
- #2 Make a list of the characters mentioned in the poem.
- #3 Generate a list of the events that occur in the poem.
- #4 Notice expressive words and phrases – the figurative language* used by the writers and post favorites on the chart.
- #5 What are you curious about? What questions do you have about the lyrics and story?
- #6 Speculate: What do you think the writers wanted you to know and understand?

- Post the questions in different areas of the classroom.
3. Divide students into as many groups as there are questions posted on the wall.
 - Provide each group with their own marker color and copies of the lyrics.
 - Assign a number to each group that corresponds to the one of the posted questions. This is where the group starts the process of writing a responses on the chart paper.
 - After a set amount of time, small groups move clockwise to the next posted question and read, brainstorm, and write responses on the chart. The color of the words they add to the charts will identify the origins of each response.
 - When a response from a prior group is the same or very similar, direct students to add a check mark.
 - Tell them that an important part of the task is to READ responses posted by other as they move from chart to chart.
 - Continue until the groups return to their first questions.
 4. Facilitate a large group summary discussion of the responses to each question, noting agreements and differences of opinions. Post the charts on the classroom wall for additional comments and later use.
 5. Optional: [Listen to a recording](#) of the piece and follow the Narrative Analysis of *The Golden Queen*.

* Figurative language is the use of words that go beyond their actual meaning so that readers/listeners gain new insights into the objects or subjects in the work. Similes, metaphors, hyperbole, personification, symbolism, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and idiom are all examples of figurative language. In *The Golden Queen*, figurative language starts with the title. The sun is an object in the sky – a star. In the title, is personified as a ruler (queen) clad in precious metal (gold).

EXTENSION

- Read the [one pager](#) about the authors of *The Golden Queen*, perhaps as homework posted on the class webpage.
- Collaborate with language arts teachers to help students dig more deeply into the figurative language of this text and to perhaps write original texts for future composition projects.
- Save carousel charts as materials for future use; for example, as a resource for writing program notes.

ASSESSMENT

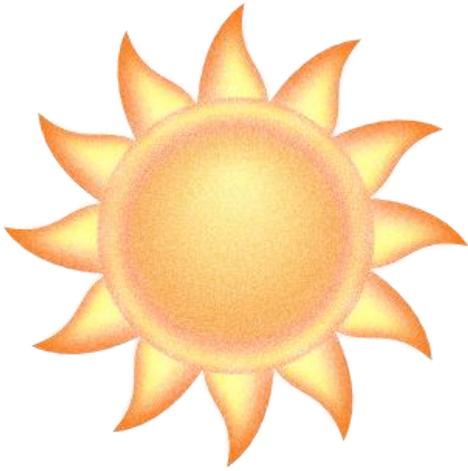
The content of the student brainstorming can be used to assess the whole class as it provides evidence of the classes' musical thinking and analysis of song lyrics. It provides clues about what students know and can articulate.



THE TEXT OF *THE GOLDEN QUEEN*

Written by Madison Hokstad & Stella Peterson

Adapted by René Clausen



The golden queen strides across the sky,
Gathering the people's eager eyes,
They stare in awe, they stare with love,
Until the light is diminished up above.
Their golden manes glint their last,
As the shadow of night is cast.
But the sun is revived, it glows again,
It shines its light across the glen.

A lone sunflower drops a healthy seed,
Trusting fate will be a supportive lead.
It plants itself in the warm, soil, asleep yet awake,
Preparing itself for the great path it will take.
A green sprout shoots out of the ground,
Growing and growing, safe and sound.

Beautiful petals begin to appear,
And the plant knew adulthood was near.
The plant watched the Golden Majesty,
Seeking guidance away from the growing catastrophe.
She fears death is close,
So she bears a seed to live,
And lives.



MEET THE POETS

Friends Madison Hokstad and Stella Peterson, from Fargo, North Dakota, love writing. Their poem, inspired composer René Clausen to write a new work for the Discovery Middle School seventh grade choir and the American Composers Forum ChoralQuest® series.



Stella on the left, Madison on the right the night of the premiere.

The poetic narrative about the life of a flower expresses their own love of bright sunflowers. In an article by reporter Archie Ingersoll in the Fargo INFORUM Stella was quoted as saying "I love how they're beautiful, and they always follow the sun, so you always know where it is. It's kind of like a person following their leader."

Clausen learned about the girls' creative work from Stella's father, a colleague at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN. After reading the poem, Clausen knew he wanted to set this powerful and expressive text to music. He called Stella and Madison writers with "deep spirits."

The girls were 5th graders at Clara Barton-Hawthorne Elementary School in south Fargo, when they wrote the poem. The topic actually came from Stella's mom. Out of ideas one day, they went to her for a jump-start. Mom said, "Write about sunflowers."

The writing partners supplied all the vocabulary for the poem with the exception of one tricky word, "glen," They consulted a thesaurus to find the right choice for this line.

Stella and Madison's words will be sung by choruses all over the country when students rehearse and perform *The Golden Queen* by Rene Clausen. And there at the top of the title page, singers will read this sentence: Text by Madison Hokstad and Stella Peterson. Pretty nice work for talented 5th graders!



A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE GOLDEN QUEEN

The music unfolds like a story in two chapters. The singers are the storytellers. They use their voices to “color” the text and make it come alive. The main characters are the sun, the sunflower, and the seed. The setting is out of doors in a warm, natural setting. The first chapter is about the Golden Queen – the sun – and how she moves across the sky above her awe-filled subjects. Chapter two introduces a sunflower and a seed. The flower drops the seed and the text recounts in figurative language the story of the life cycle of a plant. It is a very dramatic point of view with a ringing climax that ends on a hopeful note when a new seed is launched and life is assured once more.

Intro and Chapter 1

	THE TEXT	MUSICAL ELEMENTS & CHARACTERISTICS
INTRO mm 1-4		Piano plays a lilting 6/8 even eighth note pattern twice, rising from low bass notes to extend across almost 3 octaves in G major.
mm 5-22 Chapter 1 The sun and the people who love her	 <p><i>The golden queen strides across the sky,</i></p> <p><i>Gathering the people's eager eyes,</i></p> <p><i>They stare in awe,</i></p> <p><i>they stare with love,</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High voices introduce the main character of the song as they sing an ascending legato phrase in unison, then two parts in parallel 3rds mm. 4-8. • The melody's rhythmic motive is <i>long-short long</i> pattern.  • Piano continues lilting rising pattern in the accompaniment. • High voices descend in parallel 3rds, echoed by unison males on “gathering” - then move to a homophonic texture and a long tone at the end of the phrase mm. 9-12. • Thicker texture in piano with moving chords m.12-17. • Voices ascend for two short phrases, low voices echoing high voices. • The text is emphasized through low pitches, repetition, homophonic texture, and longer dotted quarter notes mm. 17-22.
mm 22-36 Chapter 1 continues as the sun sets	<p><i>Until the light is diminished up above.</i></p> <p><i>Their golden manes glint their last,</i> <i>As the shadow of night is cast.</i> <i>But the sun is revived, it glows again,</i> <i>It shines its light across the glen.</i></p> <p><i>It shines. It shines.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key change to E major at m. 21, anticipating the diminishing light of a sunset. High voices sing step-wise melody in parallel 3rds as shadows of evening fall. • BUT WAIT! The sun is revived in the low voices, shining final full rays of sun light. • High voices sing in full high notes as those final rays cut through the dusk. • All voices sing out, first in unison, then a full rich chord. • Meter changes to 4/4 at m. 35.



Chapter 2 and Coda

<p>mm 37- 58 Chapter 2 The sunflower character starts the life cycle.</p>	 <p><i>A lone sunflower drops a healthy seed, Trusting fate will be a supportive lead. It plants itself in the warm, soil, asleep yet awake, Preparing itself for the great path it will take. A green sprout shoots out of the ground, Growing and growing, safe and sound.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singing in duple meter now, voices introduce new characters – the sunflower and the seed she drops. • High voices sing in 3rds (mm. 38 – 41), low voices continue the thought, singing a response also in 3rds. • Unison voices sing a descending melody decrescendo, metaphorically “planting” the seed in the earth. • Soft dynamics begin to build (m. 47) as all voices sing softly in unison – then break into multiple parts as the melody rises upwards to a mini-climax on “awake.” Voices have divided into multiple parts. • Singing <i>forte</i> and in unison, the singers energize the emerging sprouting seed! (mm 52-53). • Interestingly, the voices descend as they sing “growing, growing,” as it to assure that new plant is grounded and very “safe and sound.” • Meter returns to 6/8 at m. 58.
<p>mm 59-77 The life cycle continues</p>	<p><i>Beautiful petals begin to appear, And the plant knew adulthood was near.</i></p> <p><i>The plant watched the Golden Majesty, Seeking guidance away from the growing catastrophe.</i></p> <p><i>She fears death is close,</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lilting melody in 6/8 and 9/8 supports the continuing story of the growing plant. Mm 59 & 60 sing a warm, unison melody to accompany growing petals. • Low voices in 3rds. • The music begins building to a climax. Twice the singers tell of the plant’s call for guidance as higher voices sing the unison line and low voices sing of an alarming “catastrophe.” • A crescendo builds as death approaches. Four times the singers sing the text “she fears death is close” emphasizing the nearness of the sunflower’s end. • The phrase collapses into two words: “she fears” sung and echoed many times.
<p>Mm 78-85 Coda</p>	<p><i>So she bears a seed to live,</i></p> <p><i>And lives.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key signature returns to B major and meter returns to duple (4/4). • A strong homophonic section emphasizes the hope of bearing new live from the old – a new plant from a dying one. • A fermata draws out the final triumphant chord.

