

OPERA: MELODIES AS MEMORY

Teaching Belonging and Artistic Interpretation for *Loving v. Virginia*

Composer Damien Geter describes using **recurring musical themes to represent ideas such as home, trouble, and fear** throughout the opera, *Loving v. Virginia*. Combined with production clips and arts journalism, these resources invite students to explore how artists communicate memory, belonging, rupture, and justice through creative expression. The review, “[Virginia is for Lovers](#),” further supports classroom learning by helping students understand opera as a multidisciplinary art form that combines music, theater, design, history, and storytelling. It also models arts journalism and evidence-based criticism. You might also consider referencing an [interview](#) with Damien Geter, or another one of his works, such as “[THE TALK: Instructions for Black Children When They Interact With The Police](#).”

Discussion Questions

- What historical events are portrayed in the opera?
- What artistic choices were made, by whom, and for what purpose?
- How does the reviewer support opinions with evidence?
- How does music help tell a story?
- How does the creator communicate themes of home, separation, and belonging?
- After reading the review, what aspects of the opera would you pay closest attention to while watching it?

Student Analysis Topics

- Analyze how historical events are adapted into artistic works.
- Compare a creator's stated intentions with a critic's interpretation.
- Examine how music, staging, costumes, lighting, and performance contribute to storytelling and meaning.
- Identify recurring artistic devices and evaluate how they communicate themes such as home, conflict, belonging, and justice.



LOVING V. VIRGINIA OPERA

Teaching Civil Rights and Legal History With Black American Theater

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*“The opera starts with a bluegrass movement ... to give a sense of place ... The whole point of the opera is the fact that **this couple wanted to get back home**. As the composer, I need to figure **what this notion of ‘home’ is** – so there is a *home theme* that goes all through the opera ...*

*There’s also a *trouble theme*, which is simply morse code - **anytime a sheriff enters or the judge enters you hear this trouble theme** ... and the way they then sing is this very sort of straight, lack of emotion, almost robotic ...*

*Sometimes you hear the *home theme* and the *trouble theme* and the *law theme* coming together, which **means something that involves the law that is keeping them from being able to go home.**“*

-Damien Geter, acclaimed American composer



[View Bio](#)

MELODIES AS MEMORY

LOVING V. VIRGINIA OPERA

Teaching Belonging and Artistic Interpretation

Student Activities

Design for Meaning: Create a set design, costume concept, poster, or exhibit that communicates a theme such as belonging, exclusion, migration, memory, identity, or resilience.

Arts Journalism Project: Attend, watch, read, or experience a work of art and write an evidence-based review that evaluates how effectively artistic choices communicate meaning.

What Represents Home? Create a playlist, soundscape, collage, poem, artwork, or multimedia piece that represents a place, community, language, tradition, or memory associated with "home." Explain the artistic choices made.

Close Reading & Annotation: Analyze the review as a piece of arts journalism. Identify descriptive statements, interpretations, and evaluative judgments. Discuss how criticism shapes audience understanding of art. Compare Damien Geter's explanation of the opera with the reviewer's interpretation. Where do they agree? Where do they emphasize different aspects of the work?

Adapting History: Choose a historical event, family story, oral history, or community issue and adapt it into another artistic form (lyrics, score, play, graphic novel, zine, film, podcast, visual artwork, etc.). Explain the artistic decisions made and how they communicate meaning.

Home Across Texts: Identify examples in literature, history, music, or film where individuals seek, lose, leave, return to, or redefine home. Compare those experiences with themes explored in *Loving v. Virginia*.

Use Alongside SCOTUS Lesson Plans: After completing recommended lesson plans or activities on page 12, students create an artistic response (song, visual artwork, dramatic scene, poem, storyboard, or short video) that translates a legal principle or historical event into a creative form for a public audience.