

Questions to help the student understand a piece deeply

- Composer
- Language of the text
- Year piece was composed
- Composer's nationality
- Summarize the meaning of the text in your own words
- Have other composers set this same text?
- Discuss some important musical characteristics of this piece including tempo, accompaniment, key & time signatures, style, mood, form, harmony, text setting.
- Complete a word for word translation of the song/aria/choral text, if it's in a foreign language, written directly underneath the appropriate word in the music. What does this text mean in your own words (not the questionable singing translations that are printed in music)?
- What is the mood or atmosphere of the piece as indicated by the text and the music?
- If the song or aria is from a larger work such as a musical, an oratorio, an opera, or a song cycle, be sure the student watches, if possible, and listens to the entire work.
- What is the name of the character that is singing? What is the age, social status, level of education, and gender of the character? How might this effect the character?
- Where is the character coming from just previous to the piece? Where is s/he now, literally - in the next scene/song/movement and figuratively -in the entire work?
- What does the character want in the piece and in the whole work? What blocks the character from getting what s/he wants? How does the character overcome that barrier, or is it never accomplished? How does the character's action or lack of it influence how you see the character? Some of these questions cannot be answered with factual information, particularly in a song, but students can create their own back-story.
- How does the character feel about the environment in which he exists? Is he comfortable? Why or why not?
- What approximate year does the show take place and where? How might the political and social environment influence how this character behaves?
- Composer's birth and death dates
- Author of the text (Poet)
- Poet's Nationality
- Poet's birth and death dates