

AFTER A SERIES OF INTIMATE TRAGEDIES LIKE *RIGOLETTO* and *La Traviata*, historical epics like *Aida* and *Don Carlo*, and dense re-imaginings of Shakespeare in *Macbeth* and *Otello*, the last thing 19th-century opera-goers might have expected from Giuseppe Verdi was a rollicking, character-driven comedy. Yet that's what the composer, in his 79th year, chose for what would be his final opera. Inspired by the character of Sir John Falstaff, who appears in three of Shakespeare's plays, Verdi and his librettist, Arrigo Boito, created a work of sophisticated musical and dramatic invention, slapstick humor, and philosophical truth.

Part character study, part pure comedy, *Falstaff* pits the vain, aging aristocrat of the title against the good folk of middle-class Windsor. In Robert Carsen's new Met production, the comic clash of old nobility and "new money" is transferred from the Elizabethan era to the more familiar terrain of suburban England in the years after World War II.

This guide is intended to help students appreciate the dramatic wit and subtle musical detail of *Falstaff*. By paying close attention to Verdi's compositional choices, comparing the operatic Falstaff with Shakespeare's, and considering the different approaches of playwright and opera composer, the guide will give your students a better understanding of what makes *Falstaff* so remarkable. The activities on the following pages are designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of this *Live in HD* transmission.

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THE WORK *FALSTAFF*

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

An opera in three acts, sung in Italian

Libretto by Arrigo Boito, based on Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV, Part 1 and 2*

First performed on February 9, 1893 at La Scala, Milan, Italy

PRODUCTION

James Levine, Conductor

Robert Carsen, Production

Paul Steinberg, Set Designer

Brigitte Reiffenstuel, Costume Designer

Robert Carsen & Peter Van Praet, Lighting Designers

STARRING

(in order of vocal appearance)

Carlo Bosi
DR. CAIUS (tenor)

Ambrogio Maestri
FALSTAFF (baritone)

Keith Jameson
BARDOLFO (tenor)

Christian Van Horn
PISTOLA (bass)

Jennifer Johnson Cano
MEG PAGE (mezzo-soprano)

Angela Meade
ALICE FORD (soprano)

Stephanie Blythe
MISTRESS QUICKLY (mezzo-soprano)

Lisette Oropesa
NANNETTA (soprano)

Paolo Fanale
FENTON (tenor)

Franco Vassallo
FORD (baritone)



OROPESA



MEADE



BLYTHE



CANO



FANALE



MAESTRI



VASSALLO

The guide includes four types of activities. Reproducible student resources for the activities are available at the back of this guide.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

a full-length activity, designed to support your ongoing curriculum

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

opportunities to focus on notable moments in *Falstaff* to enhance familiarity with the work

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:

to be used during *The Met: Live in HD* transmission, calling attention to specific aspects of this production

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION:

a wrap-up activity, integrating the *Live in HD* experience into students' views of the performing arts and humanities

The activities in this guide address several aspects of *Falstaff*:

- The close relationship between text and music in Verdi's setting of Boito's libretto
- Similarity and differences in the character of Falstaff as depicted by Verdi and Boito and by Shakespeare
- Musical innovation in this late Verdi work
- Boito's reworking of Shakespeare's text and situations
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving a wide range of creative decisions by the composer, the librettist, and the artists of the Metropolitan Opera

The guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Falstaff* whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds, seeking to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts in general—as a medium of entertainment and creative expression.

ACT I *Scene 1: The Garter Inn, Windsor, England.* As the curtain rises, one Dr. Caius is accusing two associates of the venerable scoundrel Sir John Falstaff, Bardolfo and Pistola, of thievery. With trickster logic and wit verging on condescension, Falstaff shoos Caius away. Falstaff has money problems and chastises Bardolfo and Pistola for enjoying themselves at his expense. Falstaff lays out a scheme to wheedle cash out of two wealthy housewives, Alice Ford and Meg Page, by sending them both love letters. But Bardolfo and Pistola refuse to deliver them, claiming the scheme offends their sense of honor. Infuriated, Falstaff assails the thieves' "honor" and sends them packing.

Scene 2: The Garter Inn. When Meg Page excitedly tells Alice Ford that she's received a love note from the old knight Falstaff, she learns Alice is holding an identical note. The wives decide to teach Falstaff a lesson: Alice will accept his advances, then expose him. They enlist Alice's daughter, Nannetta, and their friend, Mistress Quickly, to help with their plan.

Meanwhile, Bardolfo and Pistola denounce Falstaff to Alice's husband, Ford. Also present are Dr. Caius, whom Ford has chosen as Nannetta's husband, and the young Fenton, whom Nannetta loves. The jealous Ford fears his wife will give in to Falstaff's



Ambrogio Maestri in a scene
from the Covent Garden
co-production of *Falstaff*
PHOTO: CATHERINE ASHMORE

VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO

the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO

the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto (Italian “mezzo” = middle, medium)

CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice, also called an alto

COUNTERTENOR

a male singing voice whose vocal range is equivalent to that of a contralto, mezzo-soprano, or (less frequently) a soprano, usually through use of falsetto

TENOR

the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

BARITONE

the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

BASS

the lowest male voice

overtures. He decides to double-trick the knight and test his wife’s fidelity by visiting Falstaff in disguise and asking him to seduce Alice. Three intrigues unfold at once: The women and men plan their schemes, while Fenton and Nannetta find a moment to kiss.

ACT II *Scene 1: The Garter Inn.* Falstaff holds court at the inn. First, Bardolfo and Pistola pretend to seek forgiveness and rejoin his service. Next, Mistress Quickly arrives with an invitation from Alice to visit her at home that afternoon. Falstaff is delighted. Then Bardolfo introduces a “Mister Brook”—Ford in disguise. “Brook” offers Falstaff money to seduce a certain virtuous Alice Ford, in order to clear the path for “Brook” to woo Alice himself. Falstaff reveals that he’s already set up an assignation with her. When he heads off to change his clothes, Ford erupts with jealousy.

Scene 2: The Fords’ home. Mistress Quickly, Alice, and Meg are preparing for Falstaff’s visit. Only Nannetta is upset because her father insists she marry Dr. Caius. Falstaff arrives and begins his seduction. Alice deters him, saying she knows he is also courting Meg. Meg suddenly arrives, as part of the plan, to warn Alice that her husband is approaching. At that moment, Quickly rushes in with news that Ford really is on his way.

As Ford, Dr. Caius, Bardolfo, Pistola, and Fenton burst in, Falstaff desperately looks for a hiding place. The women stuff him into a huge laundry basket while the men go off to search the rest of the house. Nannetta and Fenton manage to steal another kiss, which enrages Ford. Amid the confusion, Alice instructs her servants to empty the laundry basket out of the window. To everyone’s amusement, Falstaff is thrown into the Thames.

ACT III *Scene 1: Outside the Garter Inn.* Falstaff reflects on the wickedness of the world but is cheered up by a glass of mulled wine. Mistress Quickly appears, apologizing on Alice’s behalf, and invites him to another rendezvous—that night in Windsor Great Park. Alice, Meg, Ford, Dr. Caius, and Nannetta look on unseen as Falstaff accepts the invitation. Alice lays out a plan to ridicule the knight: they will scare him by pretending to be a band of woodland fairies. Ford secretly agrees to let Caius sneak Nannetta out of the forest and marry her.

Scene 2: Windsor Great Park. Alice, who is aware of Ford’s scheme, arranges to disguise Pistola as Nannetta. Caius will then abduct the wrong “girl,” and Nannetta can marry Fenton. Falstaff arrives at midnight to find Alice, as planned, but their meeting is interrupted by the arrival of the “fairies,” who first frighten, then prod, pinch, and make fun of Falstaff. At last, recognizing Bardolfo, whose mask has fallen off, he realizes he has been tricked—but takes it all in good humor. Dr. Caius approaches with his “bride,” only to discover “she” is Pistola. Alice escorts Nannetta and Fenton to the gathering, and Ford accepts Fenton as his future son-in-law. Falstaff leads everybody in a final ensemble, declaring that everything in the world is but a joke.

WHO'S WHO IN FALSTAFF

CHARACTER		PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Sir John Falstaff	An aging knight of surprising wisdom but low morals	FAHL-stuff	baritone	Vain and self-important, Falstaff is a fundamentally decent person.
Alice Ford	The clever wife of an upstanding townsman	ah-LEE-chay	soprano	Wise Alice is a match for any trickster in Windsor.
Ford	Alice's jealous husband	as in English	baritone	Ford's sense of his own importance is his biggest flaw.
Nannetta	The Fords' teenage daughter	nun-NET-ah	soprano	Essential to the plot, since all Shakespearean comedy ends in weddings
Fenton	Nannetta's suitor	as in English	tenor	Nannetta's true—and age-appropriate—love
Mistress Quickly	A friend to Alice and Meg	as in English	mezzo-soprano	A mere go-between in the opera, Quickly has interests of her own in Shakespeare's play.
Meg Page	Alice's friend, another "merry wife" of Windsor	as in English	mezzo-soprano	In the opera, Meg mostly supports Alice. In the play, she has husband problems of her own.
Pistola	A low-life associate of Falstaff	pea-STOLE-ah	bass	Pistola and Bardolfo are more comic figures than bad guys.
Bardolfo	Another member of Falstaff's crew	bar-DOLE-foe	tenor	In Shakespeare, Pistol and Bardolph have a third buddy, Nym.
Dr. Caius	A friend of Ford's, and his choice for Nannetta's husband	KAH-yoos	tenor	Shakespeare's Dr. Caius speaks with a thick French accent.

Word of Honor: The Character of Falstaff in Verdi and Shakespeare

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide as well as the audio selections from *Falstaff* available online or on the accompanying CD.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts (character development in multiple genres; history of literature)

Music (form and composition)

Media Literacy (differences between genres of performance)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To gather evidence of a creator's intention in shaping a fictional character
- To compare the artistic devices available for portraying character development in two distinct genres
- To contrast related dramatic texts through close reading
- To prompt curiosity about the Met production's approach to this opera

Falstaff is the third of Verdi's operas based on Shakespeare, following the much earlier *Macbeth* and the immediately preceding *Otello*. Yet there are tremendous differences between this work and the other two. It isn't just that *Falstaff* is a comic opera. It's also that Shakespeare never wrote a play called *Falstaff*. Sir John Falstaff, that wise, witty rogue, is a secondary character in the two-part history play *Henry IV*. He proved so popular with audiences that Shakespeare brought him back as a comic foil in one of several subplots in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Verdi's librettist, Arrigo Boito, adapted that comedy's structure for their version of *Falstaff*, but it was never their intention to musicalize *Merry Wives*. Their subject was Falstaff himself—a character they understood as a consistent presence across all three Shakespeare plays.

But how did these two 19th-century Italian artists see Falstaff? And what would Shakespeare have thought of the way they portrayed him? These are the central questions in this activity. In it, students will:

- become acquainted with Elizabethan English
- analyze two conflicting passages from Shakespeare that were both incorporated into *Falstaff*
- compare and contrast the meanings of these two passages
- study the music and text of a passage from *Falstaff* to determine which Shakespeare source was more influential
- imagine the Falstaff who might have emerged if Verdi and Boito had stressed their other Shakespeare source

STEPS

Though he appears in one of Shakespeare's history plays, Sir John Falstaff is not a historical figure. (See the sidebar "A Real Sir John?") He's a work of pure imagination, and the only way for us to get to know him is through Shakespeare's words. This provides plenty of freedom for directors, actors, and theatergoers to imagine "their" Falstaff. Opera, on the other hand, leaves less room, since music makes a character much more specific. This activity offers students the opportunity to examine Falstaff as he appears in Shakespeare, to analyze Verdi and Boito's take on the character, and finally to draw alternative inferences from the source material.

STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING ELIZABETHAN ENGLISH

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

READING: Craft and Structure

Students will determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

To get to know Falstaff, students will need to develop a sense for and understanding of Shakespeare's language. The reproducible *Sidekick* provides an opportunity to

“translate” some challenging Elizabethan vocabulary into modern English, while reading an excerpt from Act I, Scene 2 of the first part of *Henry IV*, which includes Falstaff’s first appearance.

The scene begins with an apparently innocuous question: What time is it? Falstaff’s drinking companion, Prince Hal (the future King Henry V) launches into an acid response, mocking Falstaff thoroughly. Falstaff, however, is not intimidated by the future King’s jokes—he turns the tables on the Prince, giving as good as he gets. The wit of this fat, often drunk, generally lazy man is on clear display; Falstaff holds his own, even when the insults come from royalty.

Invite the class to work together to translate the italicized words in the first column of the reproducible. Then, individually or in pairs, students can figure out the gist of the statement, recording their results in the third column.

For your reference, here are standard renderings into modern English of the italicized words found on the reproducible:

thou art = you are

fat-witted = lazy, slow-minded (with a reference to Falstaff’s girth)

sack = a kind of wine with extra alcohol added

unbuttoning thee = undressing yourself, relaxing

thou hast = you have

demand = ask about

that truly = the actual subject

What a devil = What the heck?

capons = roast chickens

barods = drunkards

dials = refers to the dials of the clocks just mentioned

leaping-houses = brothels

wench = young woman (especially an immoral one)

taffeta = a delicate fabric

superfluous = wasteful, as if he were wasting his breath asking something he doesn’t care about

you come near me = you’re right about me

take purses = steal from people

go by = are awake, doing our business

Phoebus = the sun

“that wandering knight so fair” = a poetic reference to the sun

I prithe = I beg of you

wag = a witty person

thy grace = Here, Falstaff uses a term of honor for a member of royalty.

majesty = Here Falstaff decides to use a different term of honor.

grace = Falstaff is playing on the practice of using “Your Grace” to address a person of high rank, thereby insulting Prince Hal

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND FALSTAFF

This activity will help your students meet English Language Arts Common Core Standards for Reading, Speaking and Listening, and Writing. The activity promotes students’ understanding of **CRAFT AND STRUCTURE**, examining the use of language in Shakespeare and in *Falstaff*, and also focuses on **COMPREHENSION AND COLLABORATION**. In addition, students will practice skills related to **TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES**, particularly in writing arguments.

STEP 2: A CLOSE READ OF SHAKESPEARE'S FALSTAFF

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

READING: Craft and Structure

Students will determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

Below and opposite:
Costume sketches by
Brigitte Reiffenstuel



Students now should have a sense of the fundamentals of Falstaff's character: he's sharp-tongued, clever, sarcastic, and outspoken. But Shakespeare also gave Falstaff a philosophical side. In two different plays, he is seen reflecting on the concept of honor. The remainder of this activity explores Falstaff's statements in these scenes, the meaning of his words, and what Verdi and Boito drew from them.

Before engaging with Falstaff's view, students may find it useful to share their own thoughts and feelings about the idea of honor, both as a personal matter and as a matter of one's relationship with others. This will provide a background against which Falstaff's thoughts can be examined.

Next, present the context of the two passages, noting that they offer contrasting perspectives revealed under very different dramatic circumstances:

A Real Sir John?

Even with highly fictionalized movies like *Shakespeare in Love*, it may be hard for students to imagine that William Shakespeare was once a living playwright doing his best to churn out one more hit play in a competitive, highly political environment. But that's what he was, and if not for political pressure in Elizabethan London, the Met might be presenting a Verdi opera called *Oldcastle*.

In early versions of the first Henry IV play, the fat, cowardly mentor to young Prince Hal was called Sir John Oldcastle. But unfortunately there really had been a Sir John Oldcastle at the time of Kings Henry IV and V, and his descendants were powerful at the court of Queen Elizabeth. When their displeasure with Shakespeare's depiction of their ancestor's namesake was made known, the playwright plucked the name of a different cowardly Sir John from an earlier play, the first part of *Henry VI*. With a twist in spelling, the minor character Sir John Fastolfe (or Fastolf) became the timeless rogue Sir John Falstaff, and the show went on.

Shakespeare himself added a footnote in the epilogue of his follow-up play, *Henry IV's* second part. An actor steps forth and promises a new play featuring Sir John in which, "for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless he already be killed with your hard opinions." Then, as if to erase any doubts lingering after two plays featuring a Falstaff, the actor adds, "for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man."

- In *Henry IV, Part I*, Falstaff reflects on honor as he and Prince Hal are getting ready for a battle in which either of them may be killed.
- In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff has just asked two accomplices to help him with a scam by delivering a letter. When the men refuse, arguing that it would tarnish their honor, Falstaff launches into a discussion of the subject. (This exchange, adapted by Boito and Verdi for the first scene of *Falstaff*, is discussed below.)

Distribute the reproducible *Moment of Honor: Falstaff in Henry IV* to half the class and *Moment of Honor: Falstaff in The Merry Wives of Windsor* to the other half. Each reproducible provides space for students to

- “translate” the Elizabethan language
- write down the meaning of each line in their own words
- describe their understanding of Falstaff’s view of honor, based on this passage

After studying their respective passages, the groups will report back in Step 3.

For your reference, Falstaff’s views can be summarized as follows:

- In the scene from *Henry IV* Falstaff expresses dismay over the very concept of honor, in particular as a reason to go to one’s death. Honor, he states, is but a useless word.
- In the *Merry Wives* scene, Falstaff seems to see honor as a serious personal responsibility. First, he elaborates on how difficult it can be to maintain it. Then he scorns his associates for using honor as a mere excuse.

Here are standard renditions of the italicized words found on the reproducibles into modern English:

HENRY IV, PART I

’twere = it were

thou owest = you owe

forward = pushy, premature

pricks = pushes, motivates

prick me off = pluck me off (that is, kill me)

A trim reckoning! = a fine summing-up (that is, it adds up to nothing)

doth = does

insensible = cannot be felt, heard, seen, touched, or tasted

detraction = insults, detractors





Costume sketches by
Brigitte Reiffenstuel

suffer it = let it be in peace

I'll none = I will not have any

scutcheon = a decoration, a covering

catechism = a set of principles in terms that are easily recited

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

precise = clear, knowable (It is hard for Falstaff to know how to maintain his honor.)

fain = likely, prone

ensconce = cover

cat-a-mountain = narrow, feline

red-lattice = refers to an alehouse (specifically to the gridwork in alehouse windows)

STEP 3: COMPARE AND CONTRAST

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Students will present their findings in a coherent manner with relevant evidence and well-chosen details.

Each group should report back to the class on what they've learned about Falstaff's position on honor. Key points of difference include:

HENRY IV, PART I

Falstaff derides honor.

Falstaff treats honor as something pointless that follows death.

Falstaff insists he wants nothing to do with it.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

Falstaff cherishes honor.

Falstaff treats it as something that can be won in life, but with difficulty.

Falstaff says he struggles against all odds to maintain it.

In discussion, students should consider such questions as:

- What differences can be found by comparing and contrasting the two speeches?
- Do these differences seem surprising?
- How could they be explained?
- Might Shakespeare, writing *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, have forgotten what he wrote in *Henry IV*?
- Might he have changed his mind?
- Could the views be considered as two sides of the same coin?

Point out that such questions are not academic. They represent precisely the challenge Verdi and Boito faced in trying to forge a single character Falstaff from his appearances in three different plays.

STEP 4: VERDI'S FALSTAFF

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: Comprehension and Collaboration

Students will analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats.

With a solid idea of Shakespeare's Falstaff established, your students are ready to meet his operatic counterpart. Taking *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as their framework, Verdi and Boito were presented with a natural opportunity to address Falstaff's view of honor: their adaptation of the passage your students just discussed.

Surprisingly, though, the two authors decided to add material on the subject of honor from *Henry IV*—even though it seems to convey quite a different message. In this step, students will explore the ways they reconciled the contrasting views.

The main clues are in Verdi's music, illustrating a major distinction between spoken theatre and opera. Actors and directors have considerable freedom in interpreting the words on the page of a play. In opera the rhythms, melodies, tonalities, and harmonies chosen by the composer convey a wealth of information about a character that plays an essential role in guiding a singer's interpretation. In other words, it is the music that reveals the truth about Verdi's Falstaff.

The Lost Episode

In Verdi as in Shakespeare, Sir John's scheme to woo two merry wives of Windsor comically falls through, and the laughs continue with the wives' revenge. In the opera, the women get Falstaff dunked in the Thames, then scare him silly in Windsor Forest in the middle of the night. Verdi and Boito seem to have thought this punishment enough, for they left out another episode introduced by Shakespeare to humiliate Sir John.

In Act IV of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Alice Ford convinces Falstaff one more time that she is open to his solicitations. When, once again, Ford and the men of Windsor come hunting the errant knight, Alice and Meg Page dress him up to sneak out of the house disguised as "the fat woman of Brentford." What Alice neglects to mention is that her husband "cannot abide the old woman of Brentford; he swears she's a witch." As soon as Falstaff appears, Ford sets to beating him, crying "Out of my door, you witch, you hag, you baggage, you polecat, you runyon!"



The removal of this incident from the libretto of Falstaff is on more indication for the care Verdi and Boito took in constructing their opera. Although they took *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as their template, they understood that Shakespeare's play is a rambling burlesque, played for maximum laughter. *Falstaff*, on the other hand, is a precisely drawn portrait of a multi-dimensional figure. After one comic dunking, Boito's libretto skips to an incident in which Falstaff's own weaknesses prompt his comeuppance. The crowd-pleasing jokes that served Shakespeare's purposes so well had no place in the more complex and empathetic vision of *Falstaff*.

To provide an overall impression before diving into the discussion, play **Track 25**, Falstaff's monologue from Act I. Students will hear how quickly Verdi shifts from one musical mood and color to another, conveying the character's thoughts and feelings. They may want to take a moment to share their general impressions of this Falstaff: How does he compare to the one they imagined while reading the Shakespeare passages?

Now distribute the reproducible *Bringing It All Together: Verdi's Falstaff*, with texts and translations for each track. As students listen to each track, they should take notes in the column at the right of the page:

- What do they hear in the music?
- What do they understand from the words?
- How do text and music work together?

Then, after listening closely to the entire set of tracks, students should describe Verdi's Falstaff in their own words, in the space at the bottom of the reproducible.

For your convenience, here is a listening guide by track number:

Track 1. An impatient Falstaff sends off his page with the letters to Alice and Meg, while throwing an insult at Bardolfo and Pistola. The strings play a sharply accented, fast rhythm, conveying his temper and impatience, rushing up to a dramatic pause.

Track 2. Singing "*L'Onore!*" ("honor") on high pitches, at the top of his range, Falstaff expresses his indignation. Dropping an octave for "*Ladri!*" ("Thieves") he reveals his contempt.

Track 3. Contempt turns to disgust.

L'ONORE?
LADRI!



Track 4. Falstaff gathers himself and, by way of an ascending melodic line, tosses a rhetorical question—and implicit critique—at his accomplices.

Track 5. Now, in a more serious tone, Falstaff begins to compare himself to Bardolfo and Pistola. Students will notice by now that the melodies keep changing with each line of text—in other words, there are no repeated musical phrases or conventional tunes. Instead, Verdi carefully crafts a new melodic line for each line of text, so that the music reflects exactly what Verdi believes Falstaff is thinking at that very moment. This allows us to follow the music closely in order to understand Falstaff's character.

Track 6. Note the dignity with which Falstaff refers to "*nostro*" ("our own"), though he evades the word "honor". It might be reasonable to ask, "our own what, exactly?"

Track 7. Falstaff nonetheless takes his accomplices' act, and their purported explanation, quite personally.

Ambrogio Maestri in a scene
from the Covent Garden
co-production of *Falstaff*
PHOTO: CATHERINE ASHMORE

Track 8. Verdi provides Falstaff with the most extended snippet of melody in the entire number, as the knight recalls his own ethical suffering.

Track 9. The melody of Track 8 repeats, underlining Falstaff's sincerity. Note the anxious strings underneath Falstaff's melodic line – what do your students think this might imply?

Track 10. As he recalls his dishonorable behaviors, Falstaff reenacts them with a sneaky, mischievous melody. This section reflects how his actions might seem from the outside.

Track 11. In contrast, this section reveals how his actions feel within—not sneaky, but cunning and decisive.

Track 12. The recollections in Tracks 10 and 11 bring Falstaff back to comparison with his accomplices and their claim of honor. The fast, sharp rhythms in the orchestra carry and punctuate his fury. His verbal insults are largely taken from Shakespeare, but Verdi's scoring provides the breathless pulse of his repeated "*che onor?*" ("what honor?"), building towards an all but yelled "*che baia!*" ("what a joke").

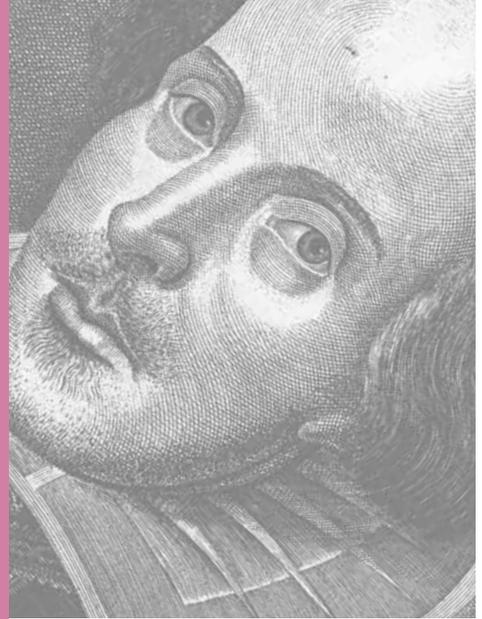
Track 13. This track is purely instrumental. A trill, first in the brass and timpani, then repeated by the woodwinds, expresses Falstaff's fury. Students may be interested in discussing the effect of this echo and the kind of musical image it paints of Falstaff's character in that moment. Could his stomach be fluttering (woodwinds) as the blood pounds in his temples (timpani)?



Shakespeare Sings

By one count, more than 350 operas have been adapted from the works of William Shakespeare, from Johann Mattheson's *Die unglückselige Cleopatra* (1704) and Francesco Gasparini's *Amleto* (1706) to Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra* (which opened the new Met at Lincoln Center in 1966) and Thomas Adès's *The Tempest* (2004, seen at the Met last season). At least ten of them, apart from Verdi's *Falstaff*, have featured the same plump ne'er-do-well as a major character. Antonio Salieri's *Falstaff* was first seen in 1799, and Otto Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* premiered in 1849. Gustav Holst depicted the Falstaff of the *Henry IV* plays in his 1925 *At the Boar's Head*. Three years later, fellow English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams took a more sentimental approach in *Sir John in Love* (1928).

Perhaps the most intriguing of all Shakespearean operas is one that will never be heard. For many years, Verdi toyed with the idea of adapting *King Lear* for the music theater stage. A draft libretto was written in the early 1850s by Antonio Somma (who later worked with the composer on *Un Ballo in Maschera*), and Verdi reportedly sketched some music. But in the end, he gave up the project, even though it continued to fascinate him to the end of his life.



Track 14. Falstaff's contemptuous question, borrowed from Shakespeare, is rich in melody, as he lingers on the word "onore" and punches out "pancia" ("belly"), almost turning this moment into a mini-aria.

Track 15. He responds to himself with a single word—an astonishingly efficient use of sound that completes the melody heard in Track 14.

Track 16. Here, the pattern of Tracks 14–15 repeats, amplifying Falstaff's line of questioning, and closing decisively with the assertion "Honor is not a surgeon."

Track 17. Falstaff is done fooling around. The time for witty metaphor is over.

FUN FACT: Astute operagoers can hear humorous references to at least two other Verdi operas in *Falstaff*. The text and music of Mistress Quickly’s ironic refrain “*Povera donna*” (“poor woman”) are borrowed from the tragic Violetta in *La Traviata*. Bardolfo’s “*Falstaff immenso!*” (“Falstaff the mighty”) and Pistola’s “*Enorme Falstaff*” (“Tremendous Falstaff”) share both rhythm and key with the priests’ praise of “*Immenso Fithà!*” (“Mighty Ptah”) in *Aida*.

Track 18. Verdi emphasizes Falstaff’s conclusion that “honor” is only a word by setting “*una parola*” on four brief, flighty eighth notes. The phrase mimics a speech pattern your students will surely find familiar—the last note suddenly drops to a c-flat, unmistakably communicating Falstaff’s dismissal and disdain.

Track 19. As before, like a prosecuting attorney, Falstaff sings out the follow-up question to which all know the answer already.

Track 20. In the orchestra, the winds answer his question first.

Track 21. Then Falstaff describes their answer. He laughs darkly at his own wit, but notice how the laughter dies away. For Falstaff, this is no joke.

Track 22. Returning for a moment to his earlier question-and-answer mode, Falstaff hones in on the ideas of honor, life, and death.

Track 23. The dispassion of Track 22 is explained by Falstaff’s own harsh experience with humankind. Verdi supports him with a background of affirming strings.

Track 24. This track serves as summation to Tracks 1–23, both textually and musically. Falstaff ends his discourse with a firm rejection of the idea of honor.

The passage can be heard without interruption on Track 25.

STEP 5: BOITO’S FALSTAFF

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: Comprehension and Collaboration

Students will engage effectively in collaborative discussions in groups, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Before proceeding, give students a moment to exchange their conclusions from the clues in Verdi’s music.

- Did Verdi and Boito succeed in creating a “unified” Falstaff?
- Does this character more closely resemble the Falstaff of *Henry IV* or the one in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*?

One last analytical task will help students decide. This time, the clues are in Arrigo Boito’s libretto. Using the two Shakespeare reproducibles and the reproducible of Boito’s text for *Falstaff*, students can determine which idea in Boito came from which Shakespearean source. On *Bringing It All Together: Verdi’s Falstaff*, they should mark the text for each track (1–24), with

- an **H**, if the text is based on *Henry IV* or
- a **W**, if it’s based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

If students can't identify a line of text, they should mark it with a circle for later reference.

Students will find that Tracks 1–12 are based on *The Merry Wives*, while Tracks 14–19 and 21–24 are based on *Henry IV*. (Tracks 13 and 20 are instrumental.) In other words, Verdi and Boito start off with the *Merry Wives* viewpoint and conclude with the more pessimistic one from *Henry IV*. In deciding whether Falstaff rejects honor as meaningless or struggles to uphold his honor in a complicated world, they seem to have chosen the former, setting ideas from *Henry IV* as the dramatic climax of this passage.

Students may enjoy concluding the activity by discussing this choice. Were the composer and librettist “right”? Who does your class think is the “real” Falstaff?

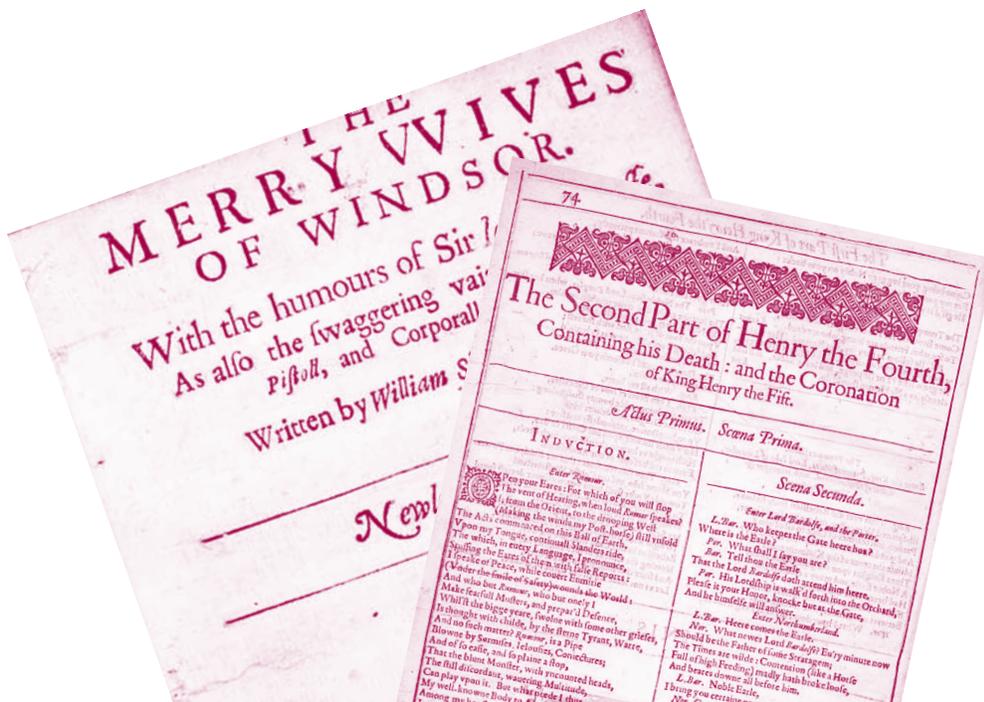
FOLLOW-UP

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

WRITING: Text Type and Purposes

Students will write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

Whether students agree with Verdi and Boito or not, they may enjoy an exercise designed to probe Boito's literary approach. How would the opera's Falstaff view the idea of honor if the sentiments expressed in *Henry IV* were mentioned first, with the viewpoint from *Merry Wives* governing the climax of the monologue? Might Falstaff sound more sorrowful than dismissive? In class or for homework, students can rearrange Boito's version of Falstaff's response to Bardolfo and Pistola, reversing the order of the speeches. They should then write a paragraph explaining in their own words their new reconciliation of these two conflicting views of honor.



Do You Get It?: A Close Look at Musical Humor in *Falstaff*

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS ARE BRIEF OPPORTUNITIES TO

- help students make sense of opera
- whet their interest in upcoming Live in HD transmissions.

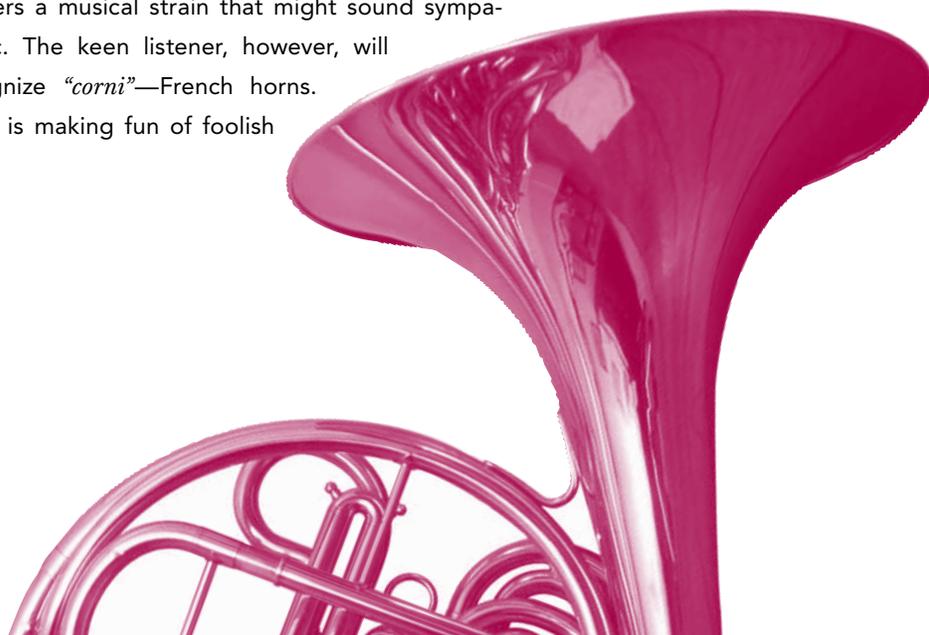
Each focuses on audio selections from *Falstaff* available online at metopera.org/education or the accompanying CD. For selections with texts, text and translation are provided on reproducibles in the back of this guide.

These “mini-lessons” will in practice take up no more than a few minutes of class time. They’re designed to help you bring opera into your classroom while minimizing interruption of your ongoing curriculum. Feel free to use as many as you like.

A sense of joy vibrates through Verdi’s music in *Falstaff*, not only in character and narrative but through flat-out musical wit. Many of the jokes are intended for an experienced audience, referring to the composer’s own previous works, including subtle echoes of *Aida*, *La Traviata*, and *Otello*. But others are accessible even to the non-expert. This of course isn’t the raucous kind of humor students may be used to from television, but the references are certainly winks to the audience, and they can help young people appreciate the complex devices employed by a composer of dramatic music.

An early example refers to the title character’s girth. At the beginning of Act I, rebuking Bardolfo and Pistola for over-spending, Falstaff expresses his fear of losing weight: “*Mi struggete le carni! Se Falstaff’s’assotiglia, no è più lui, nessuno più ama*” (“You guys are taking the food out of my mouth! If Falstaff gets skinny, he’s not himself, no one will love him anymore”). As the passage begins, heard in **Track 26**, violins pulse away nervously. This musical sense of worry continues into **Track 27**, where Verdi offers a musical specification of the fear: by scoring the phrase for the high piping of a piccolo and the low moan of cellos and basses, he illustrates just how wide the knight is, as the violins continue to communicate his anxiety.

Another joke involves the use of French horns, whose name in both English and Italian (“*corni*”) happens to suggest a cuckold’s horns—the classic image of a man betrayed by his wife. At the end of Act II, Scene 1, Falstaff is visited by Ford, who hopes to trick him into revealing his intentions towards Ford’s wife Alice. Instead, Ford becomes convinced Alice actually might be unfaithful. “*Mastro Ford! Mastro Ford! Dormi?*” he sings (“Mr. Ford! Are you asleep?”). As Ford works himself up with worry on **Track 28**, Verdi’s orchestra provides accompaniment worthy of a cataclysmic tragedy. This is itself a joke, since operagoers know the infidelity is entirely in Ford’s head. On **Track 29**, a single note lingers, indicating Ford’s deep sad thoughts. Then, as he announces his conclusion that he’s been cheated, Verdi delivers a musical strain that might sound sympathetic. The keen listener, however, will recognize “*corni*”—French horns. Verdi is making fun of foolish



Ford. The joke reaches its culmination at the end of Ford's monologue. In **Track 30**, Ford sings his impassioned conclusion, "*Laudata sempre sia nel fondo del mio cor la gelosia*" ("May jealousy always be praised from the bottom of my heart"). The setting is as rich in feeling as any in Verdi's *Il Trovatore* or *La Traviata*. The counter-image follows promptly in **Track 31**, where a single French horn snickers at Ford's fantasy of betrayal.

ALI. *pp*
Piz-zi-ca, piz-zi-ca, piz-zi-ca, stuz-zi-ca, spiz-zi-ca,

MEG *pp*
Piz-zi-ca, piz-zi-ca, piz-zi-ca, stuz-zi-ca, spiz-zi-ca,

QUIC *pp*
Piz-zi-ca, piz-zi-ca, piz-zi-ca, stuz-zi-ca, spiz-zi-ca,

Act III provides another example—one that doesn't require any prior knowledge of Verdi, musical range, or the symbols of cuckoldry. At the opera's climax, the townspeople of Windsor gather in the forest to trick Falstaff by pretending to be fairies. "*Pizzica, pizzica!*" ("Pinch, pinch") they sing—as they do exactly that to the benighted Falstaff. Verdi's music, heard in **Track 32**, replicates both the sound and feeling of a pinch. More obvious still is Falstaff's reaction on **Track 33**. The Italian libretto spells it "*Ahi! ah!*" but students may recognize this international call of distress—and the comedy it contains.

FUN FACT: Boito

understood physics better than Shakespeare did: At the beginning of Act III, Falstaff comments that his huge belly enabled him to float when dumped into the Thames. Shakespeare's Falstaff (*Merry Wives*, III, 5) is grateful for shallow water, since his belly makes him sink swiftly.



Dueling Designs: A Close Look at Counterpoint in “Del tuo barbaro”

The second scene of *Falstaff’s* Act I is all about plots and planning. First the wives of Windsor, then their husbands conjure up schemes to punish Falstaff for his plan to woo Alice and Meg, while the young lovers Fenton and Nannetta sneak in some private time. The act draws to an end with a fantastic musical passage pulling these three sets of interests together—a piece carefully and masterfully constructed by Verdi to conjure the illusion of comic chaos. It’s impossible to do justice to it in a few sentences, but some technical knowledge and close listening to bits of the larger piece will allow students to enjoy and appreciate this complex composition.

The passage begins as the men of Windsor congratulate themselves on their plan to undermine Falstaff’s designs. In **Track 34**, the men sing quickly, with notes evenly spaced, four beats to the measure. The rhythm heard in this short snippet serves as a solid foundation for what’s to come. Moments later, across the stage, the women will begin their music with a different metric structure—six beats to a measure of the same duration. They’re heard at that point only very briefly; students can get a better sense of their part from a selection that comes a few seconds later, heard in **Track 35**. You may want to play these two tracks a few times, so students can hear the difference between the men’s straight rhythm and the women’s counterbeat.

Once students have a sense of these two basic components, return to the beginning with **Track 36**. This longer track reprises the men’s opening, followed by the women’s brief entrance. In context, the women’s part seems to slow and distort the progress of the passage. It’s interrupted as a single voice sings “*C’è nell’aria una malia*” (“There’s witchcraft in the air”). This is Fenton, who provides a third musical



component to the scene and acts as a counter to both the women and the larger group of men. (On stage, Fenton and Nannetta can be seen involved in their own business while the groups of adults, physically separate, collide musically.)

With all three parts in place by **Track 37**, vocal ensembles and orchestra rise and fall like a swelling tide, calmed for a moment by the women’s section heard in Track 35. Then, in the music heard in **Track 38**, Verdi lets loose—the flow becomes a mad rush and jumble. As one or another of the parts is stressed or deemphasized, and as all three are heard at once, in or out of sync, the music seems to stretch and bend and twist. It’s the kind of artistic confusion only a great composer can create by making music of a highly complex structure sound both chaotic and beautiful at the same time. The whole piece lasts barely a minute and a half, its brevity conveying the economy of an artist who knows he has even better tricks up his sleeve to conclude this act and thrill audiences through two more.

This passage can be heard without interruption on **Track 39**.

The Final Laugh: A Close Look at Falstaff's Closing Moments

Giuseppe Verdi was famously unimpressed by theoretical musical forms. While working on *Macbeth*, he even wrote a friend “You will laugh when you see that I have written a fugue for the battle!” But he chose exactly the same clearly defined compositional structure for the last piece of music in his final opera—the fugue that concludes *Falstaff*.

The history of this form reaches back through several centuries of Western music. A fugue—which shares certain characteristics with a canon—begins with a single voice, vocal or instrumental, introducing a theme. One by one, more voices enter, playing or singing the same theme, but each beginning their statement of the music on specific, different pitches. Once all the voices have been established, the composer starts to “develop” the theme with variations, countermelodies, and more repetition.

Verdi began work on the *Falstaff* fugue even before he received a libretto from Boito. “I’m amusing myself by writing fugues,” he wrote to him. “Yes sir, a fugue: and a comic fugue which would be suitable for *Falstaff*.” Boito provided a text that perfectly sums up this exuberant yet wise comedy: “*Tutto nel mondo è burla*”—“Everything in the world is a joke.” The title character introduces the theme in the music heard in **Track 40**. Fenton, Quickly, and Alice follow (**Track 41**), and finally the other members of the cast and orchestra join in (**Track 42**).

At this point, Verdi plucks another phrase from Boito’s text to begin a new section, “*Tutti gabbati*” (“We’re all deceived”). Verdi extends the equanimity of his Falstaff to all the other characters and, indeed, recommends it to his audience (**Track 43**).

In the following section, themes and voices leap and prance, join and sunder, double and triple. The orchestra plunges in, and sopranos soar above the other voices (**Track 44–45**), building to a percussive peak, heard in **Track 46**. With the orchestra momentarily silent, Falstaff, as if preaching, carefully pronounces once more, “*Tutti gabbati*” (**Track 47**), but the following reveals his seriousness to be a joke (**Track 48**), as the fugue—and the opera—come to a close in a circus of merriment.

The fugue can be heard without interruption on **Track 49**.

The image displays a musical score for the closing moments of Falstaff. It consists of eight staves of music, each with a vocal line and lyrics underneath. The first four staves show the vocal line for Falstaff, with the lyrics "tut - ti gab - ba - ti!" and a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo). The last four staves show the vocal line for the other characters, with the lyrics "tut - ti gab - ba - ti!" and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The music is written in a single melodic line on a five-line staff, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 4/4. The lyrics are written in a stylized font, with hyphens indicating syllables across notes.

Supporting students during *The Met: Live in HD Transmission*

Thanks to print and audio recording, much about opera can be enjoyed long before a performance. But performance itself brings vital layers of sound and color, pageantry and technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities are designed to help students tease apart different aspects of the experience, consider creative choices that have been made, and sharpen their own critical faculties.

Each Performance Activity incorporates a reproducible activity sheet. Students bring the activity sheet to the transmission to fill out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activities direct attention to characteristics of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed. Ratings matrices invite students to express their critique: use these ratings to spark discussions that call upon careful, critical thinking.

The basic activity sheet is called *My Highs & Lows*. Meant to be collected, opera by opera, over the course of the season, this sheet points students toward a consistent set of objects of observation. Its purposes are not only to help students articulate and express their opinions, but to support comparison and contrast, enriching understanding of the art form as a whole.

For *Falstaff*, the other activity sheet, *Falstaff in the 1950s*, directs students' attention to signs and symbols of the mid-20th century found in Robert Carsen's interpretation of a comedy originally set several centuries earlier.

The Performance Activity reproducibles can be found in the back of this guide. Either activity can provide the basis for class discussion after the transmission. On the next page, you'll find an activity created specifically for follow-up after the *Live in HD* transmission.

The Many Lives of Falstaff: Interpreting a Character Through the Ages

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

WRITING: Text Type and Purposes

Students will write narratives to develop imagined experiences or events using effective technique.

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What bothered them? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? This discussion will offer students an opportunity to review the notes on their *My Highs and Lows* sheet, as well as their thoughts about this Met production—in short, to see themselves as Falstaff experts.

As your students will by now understand, Falstaff is a character created in a specific dramatic context, who was transferred by his creator, Shakespeare, into another context, then reinterpreted in a different art form by Verdi and Boito. They may enjoy thinking of other characters whose “lives” have moved beyond their original contexts. Such movement can include:

- Further adventures, in which a known character meets new adversaries and challenges within fundamentally the same settings. Examples may include James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, or Lara Croft.
- New placements, in which a character finds himself in an entirely different setting, among people and places different from those in which he was introduced. Examples students might be familiar with include the novel and film *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* or the film *The Avengers* (in which a World War II-era superhero finds himself in 21st-century New York).

IN PREPARATION:

This activity requires no preparation other than attendance at the *Live in HD* transmission of *Falstaff*.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:

- Language Arts (character development)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To review and consolidate students’ understanding of consistencies and differences in the Falstaff character as portrayed by Shakespeare and Verdi/Boito
- To explore the relationship between elements of fiction, including character, plot, and setting
- To distinguish among overall theme and individual details in a literary work



- Placement at an earlier or later stage of life. Examples familiar to students may include the character of Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

From a creator's point of view, this kind of re-placement begs an intriguing question: What keeps a character who has been transferred into a new context the same character? What, beyond a name, makes a character consistent? Consistencies students might identify include:

- the way he or she looks, talks, or thinks,
- the way he or she approaches challenges,
- the way he or she behaves toward others.

In working with characters already well established, Shakespeare, Verdi, and Boito needed to balance such consistency with enough novelty to keep the character believable and engaging. A fun way to explore the challenge these artists undertook is to go ahead and try it for yourself. Each student can:

- pick a favorite character from literature, film, or television
- develop a list of characteristics that distinguish the character
- specify incidents in the story where the character first appeared that reveal or exemplify these characteristics
- brainstorm a list of new incidents and situations that might call upon these traits
- outline a story or screenplay in which this character finds him- or herself in new circumstances and navigates a new adventure in ways entirely consistent with his or her behavior in more familiar settings.

In readings, performance, or screenings, students will enjoy sharing their creations with one another and, of course, discussing each others' success in bringing new life to an existing character.

FALSTAFF

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Sidekick: Shakespeare’s Falstaff

FALSTAFF: Now Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

PRINCE HAL: Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack and unbuttoning thee after supper and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack and minutes capons and clocks the tongues of bawds and dials the signs of leaping-houses and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day.

THIS CHARACTER IS SAYING...

Three horizontal lines for writing.

FALSTAFF: Indeed, you come near me now, Hal; for we that take purses go by the moon and the seven stars, and not by Phoebus, he, that wandering knight so fair.’ And, I prithee, sweet wag, when thou art king, as, God save thy grace—majesty I should say—for grace thou wilt have none...

PRINCE HAL: What, none?

THIS CHARACTER IS SAYING...

Three horizontal lines for writing.

DESCRIBE FALSTAFF IN YOUR OWN WORDS: _____

A horizontal line for writing.

Thou art means _____

fat-witted means _____

sack means _____

unbuttoning thee means _____

thou has means _____

demand means _____

that truly means _____

What a devil means _____

capons means _____

bawds means _____

dials means _____

leaping-houses means _____

wench means _____

taffeta means _____

superfluous means _____

You come near me means _____

take purses means _____

go by means _____

Phoebus means _____

that wandering knight so fair means _____

I prithee means _____

wag means _____

thy grace means _____

majesty means _____

grace means _____

FALSTAFF

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Moment of Honor: Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part I*

PRINCE HENRY: Say thy prayers, and farewell.

FALSTAFF: I would *'twere* bed-time, Hal, and all well.

PRINCE HENRY: Why, *thou owest* God a death.

Exit Prince Hal

FALSTAFF: 'Tis not due yet; I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I *forward* with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honour *pricks* me on.

Yea, but how if honour *prick* me off when I come on? how then? Can honour set to a leg? no: or an arm? no: or take away the grief of a wound? no. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? no. What is honour? a word. What is in that word honour? what is that honour? air. A *trim reckoning!*

Who hath it? he that died o' Wednesday. *Doth* he feel it? no. Doth he hear it? no. 'Tis *insensible*, then. Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? *detraction* will not *suffer it*. Therefore *I'll none* of it. Honour is a mere *scutcheon*: and so ends my *catechism*.

'twere means _____

thou owest means _____

forward means _____

pricks means _____

prick means _____

trim reckoning means _____

doth means _____

Insensible means _____

detraction means _____

suffer it means _____

I'll none means _____

scutcheon means _____

catechism means _____

THIS CHARACTER IS SAYING...

HOW DOES THIS SCENE AFFECT YOUR VIEW OF SIR JOHN FALSTAFF? _____

FALSTAFF

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Moment of Honor: Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

FALSTAFF: Go. You'll not bear a letter for me, you rogue! you stand upon your honour! Why, thou unconfined baseness, it is as much as I can do to keep the terms of my honour **precise**: I, I, I myself sometimes, leaving the fear of God on the left hand and hiding mine honour in my necessity, am **fain** to shuffle, to hedge and to lurch; and yet you, rogue, will **ensconce** your rags, your **cat-a-mountain** looks, your **red-lattice** phrases, and your bold-beating oaths under the shelter of your honour!

precise means _____

fain means _____

ensconce means _____

cat-a-mountain means _____

red-lattice means _____

THIS CHARACTER IS SAYING...

HOW DOES THIS SCENE AFFECT YOUR VIEW OF SIR JOHN FALSTAFF? _____

FALSTAFF

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Bringing It All Together: Verdi's Falstaff

TRACK 1

FALSTAFF: Eh! paggio!
Andate a impendervi ma non più a me.
Due lettere, prendi, per due signore.
Consegna tosto, corri,
via, lesto, va!

Hey, boy! (*to Bardolfo and Pistola*) You two, go hang yourselves, but not on me. (*to the servant boy*) Two letters for two ladies—take them. Deliver them quickly! Run! Get going! Swiftly! Go!

What do you hear in the music?
What do you understand from the words?
How do text and music work together?
Does this sound like the Falstaff from *Henry IV* or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*?

TRACK 2

L'Onore! Ladri!

Honor! Thieves!

TRACK 3

Eh.

Eh

TRACK 4

Voi state ligi all'onor vostro, voi!

You two are true to your honour!

TRACK 5

Cloache d'ignominia,
quando, non sempre, noi...

You cesspools of disgrace!
When we ourselves aren't always...

TRACK 6

...possiam star ligi al nostro.

...able to be faithful to our own.

TRACK 7

Io stesso, sì, io, io...

I myself, yes, I, I...

TRACK 8

...devo talor da un lato porre il timor di Dio...

...sometimes must put the fear of God to one side...

TRACK 9

...e, per necessità, sviar l'onore...

and, by necessity, put aside my honor...

TRACK 10

...usare stratagemmi ed equivoci...

...and use tricks and lies...

TRACK 11

...destreggiar, bordeggiare.

...to get by, to avoid trouble.

FALSTAFF

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Bringing It All Together: Verdi's Falstaff (CONTINUED)

What do you hear in the music?
What do you understand from the words?
How do text and music work together?
Does this sound like the Falstaff from
Henry IV or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*?

TRACK 22

L'onore lo può sentire chi é morto? No.
Vive sol coi vivi?

Can honor know who is dead? No.
Does it only live with the living?

TRACK 23

Neppure: perchè a torto lo gonfian
le lusinghe, lo corrompe l'orgoglio,
L'ammorban le calunnie...

Not that either, because flattery
inflates it, pride corrupts it,
and lies taint it...

TRACK 24

e per me non ne voglio!

and as for me, I don't want any of it!

Track 25 reprises Tracks 1–24 without
interruption.

FALSTAFF

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Do You Get It?

TRACK 26

FALSTAFF: Mi struggete le carni!

You guys are taking the food out of my mouth!

TRACK 27

FALSTAFF: Se Falstaff s'assottiglia, non è più lui,
nessuno più l'ama.

If Falstaff gets skinny, he won't be himself anymore;
no one will love him anymore.

TRACK 28

FORD: Mastro Ford! Mastro Ford! Dormi?
Svegliati! Su! Ti desta!
Tua moglie sgarra e mette in mal assetto
l'onore tuo, la casa ed il tuo letto!

Mr. Ford! Mr. Ford! Are you asleep?
Wake up! Get up! Rouse yourself!
Your wife is getting out of line, and she's wrecking
your honor, your house, and your bed!

TRACK 29

FORD: L'ora è fissata, tramato l'inganno;
Sei gabbato e truffato!

The time is set. The trick is all planned.
You are cheated and swindled!

TRACK 30

FORD: Laudata sempre sia nel fondo del mio cor la gelosia!

May jealousy always be praised from the bottom of my heart!

TRACK 31

Instrumental.

TRACK 32

ALICE, MEG, AND QUICKLY: Pizzica, pizzica, pizzica, stuzzica,
spizzica, spizzica, pungi, spilluzzica finch'egli abba!

Pinch, pinch, pinch, poke,
nip, nip, prick, peck, as long as he keeps howling!

TRACK 33

FALSTAFF: Ahi! Ahi! Ahi! Ahi!

Ay! Ay! Ay! Ay!



MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Dueling Designs

TRACK 34

DR. CAIUS: Del tuo barbaro diagnostico
forse il male è assai men barbaro.
Ti convien tentar la prova
molestissima del ver.

PISTOLA: Voi dovete empirgli il calice
tratto, tratto interrogandolo
per tentar se vi riesca
di trovar del nodo il bandolo.

FORD: Tu vedrai se bene adopera
l'arte mia con quell'infame;
e sarà prezzo dell'opera
s'io discopro le sue trame.

BARDOLFO: Messer Ford, un infortunio
marital in voi si incorpora.
Se non siete astuto e cauto
quel sir John vi tradirà.

Perhaps the illness is
worse than your cure.
You should attempt a most tedious
examination of the truth.

You have to get him drunk,
pouring drink after drink, asking him questions
to see if you can find a way
to unravel this knot.

You will see how well I employ
my art with that scoundrel,
and there will be reward for
the work if I discover his plans.

Mr. Ford, you have gotten dragged
into some marital trouble.
If you are not astute and cautious,
that Sir John will betray you.

TRACK 35

ALICE: ...quel grosso compar
più lesto d'un guindolo
lo faccio girar.

MEG: ...lo udremo strillar,
e allor la sua fregola
vedremo svampar.

NANNETTA: ...sapremo adoprar,
vedremo a rigagnoli
quell'orco sudar.

...that fat fellow,
I'll make him spin
faster than a top.

...we'll hear him scream
and then we'll see
his fire extinguished.

...we'll know how,
we'll see him
sweat like a pig.

TRACKS 36 & 37

DR. CAIUS: Del tuo barbaro diagnostico
forse il male è assai men barbaro.
Ti convien tentar la prova
molestissima del ver.

PISTOLA: Voi dovete empirgli il calice,
tratto tratto, interrogandolo,
per tentar se vi riesca
di trovar del nodo il bandolo.

FORD: Tu vedrai se bene adopera
l'arte mia con quell'infame;
e sarà prezzo dell'opera
s'io discopro le sue trame.

Perhaps the illness is
worse than your cure.
You should attempt a most tedious
examination of the truth.

You have to get him drunk,
pouring drink after drink, asking him questions
to see if you can find a way
to unravel this knot.

You will see how well I employ
my art with that scoundrel,
and there will be reward for
the work if I discover his plans.

FALSTAFF

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Dueling Designs (CONTINUED)

BARDOLFO: Messer Ford, un infortunio marital in voi si incorpora.
Se non siete astuto e cauto
quel sir John vi tradirà.

ALICE: Vedrai che, se abbindolo
quel grosso compar
più lesto d'un guindolo
lo faccio girar.

MEG: Se il vischio lo impegola
lo udremo strillar,
e allor la sua fregola
vedremo svampar.

NANNETTA: E se i scilinguagnoli
sapremo adoprar,
vedremo a rigagnoli
quell'orco sudar.

FENTON: Qua borbotta un crocchio d'uomini,
C'è nell'aria una malia.

Mr. Ford, you have gotten dragged
into some marital trouble.
If you are not astute and cautious,
that Sir John will betray you.

You will see that by attracting
that fat fellow,
I'll make him spin
faster than a top.

If the trap works,
we'll hear him scream
and then we'll see
his fire extinguished.

And if we know how to
use our wiles,
we'll see him
sweat like a pig.

Here, grumbles a bunch of men.
There's witchcraft in the air.

TRACK 37

adds the following to Track 36

FENTON: Là cinguetta un stuol di femine.,
Spira un vento agitator.

There, chatters a flock of women.
Trouble is brewing.

TRACK 38

adds the following to Track 37

FENTON: Ma colei che in cor mi nomini,
Dolce amor, vuol esser mia!

Noi saremo come due gemine
Stelle unite in un ardor.

But she who calls sweet love's name
to me in my heart wants to be mine!

We will be like two twin stars
united in passion.

TRACK 39

reprises Tracks 34–38, in order and without interruption

FALSTAFF

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

The Final Laugh

TRACKS 40–42

FALSTAFF, FENTON, QUICKLY AND ALICE: Tutto nel mondo è burla.
L'uom è nato burlone.
Nel suo cervello ciurla sempre la sua ragione.

Everything in the world is a joke.
Everyone is born a jokester.
Their reason always falters in their minds.

TRACK 43

ALL: Tutti gabbati!
Irride l'un l'altro ogni mortal.
Ma ride ben chi ride
la risata final.

We're all deceived!
Everyone mocks each other.
But the one who laughs
last laughs best.

Tracks 44–48 reprise the texts of Tracks 40–42 and 43.

Track 49 reprises Tracks 40–48 without interruption.

At the Met: *Falstaff* in the 1950s

Shakespeare's Falstaff was a favorite of theatre audiences during the last years of the reign of England's Queen Elizabeth I. Robert Carsen's Met production of Verdi's *Falstaff* takes place in early 1950s, just as another Elizabeth was taking the throne: Elizabeth II, who has remained queen into the 21st century. Though the music and texts are unchanged, Carsen and his colleagues have introduced locations, objects, and actions that bring *Falstaff* into this new era. See how many you can identify!

ARCHITECTURE

CLOTHING

INTERIOR DECORATION (FURNITURE, APPLIANCES, ETC.)

BEHAVIORS AND GESTURES

Falstaff: My Highs & Lows

DECEMBER 14, 2013

CONDUCTED BY JAMES LEVINE

REVIEWED BY _____

THE STARS	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
AMBROGIO MAESTRI AS FALSTAFF	* * * * *	
ANGELA MEADE AS ALICE FORD	* * * * *	
STEPHANIE BLYTHE AS MISTRESS QUICKLY	* * * * *	
LISETTE OROPESA AS NANNETTA	* * * * *	
FRANCO VASSALLO AS FORD	* * * * *	
JENNIFER JOHNSON CANO AS MEG PAGE	* * * * *	
PAOLO FANALE AS FENTON	* * * * *	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
DR. CAIUS TRIES TO GET HIS MONEY BACK MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FALSTAFF RESPONDS TO CAIUS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-
FALSTAFF ACCUSES BARDOLFO AND PISTOLA OF OVERSPENDING MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-
FALSTAFF'S PLAN TO RAISE MONEY MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-
BARDOLFO AND PISTOLA'S RESPONSE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-
FALSTAFF'S MONOLOGUE ON HONOR MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-
THE WIVES OF WINDSOR DISCUSS FALSTAFF'S LETTERS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-
BARDOLFO AND PISTOLA REPORT ON FALSTAFF'S PLAN MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5

Falstaff: My Highs & Lows

(CONTINUED)

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
THE WIVES AND HUSBANDS DEVELOP THEIR OWN SCHEMES MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
MISTRESS QUICKLY'S VISIT TO FALSTAFF MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FALSTAFF MEETS "BROOK" MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FORD'S MONOLOGUE OF JEALOUSY MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FALSTAFF ARRIVES TO MEET ALICE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE HUSBANDS ARRIVE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FALSTAFF'S "ESCAPE" MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FALSTAFF REFLECTS ON BEING DUMPED MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FALSTAFF RECEIVES A NEW INVITATION MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ALICE'S NEW PLAN MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE GATHERING IN THE FOREST MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
FALSTAFF REALIZES THE TRUTH MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE ENTIRE COMPANY COMES TOGETHER FOR A FINAL LAUGH MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5