



# STUDY GUIDE

Music by **FAYE CHIAO**  
Libretto by **ANTON DUDLEY**



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Inside the Brown Theater at  
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## What Is Opera?

Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States.

## About HGO Community & Learning

Since 2007, Houston Grand Opera has explored the intersection between the multi-disciplinary art form of opera and the needs of the people HGO serves by providing authentic and enriching experiences through collaborative partnerships with schools, families, community organizations, and curious members of society. Initiatives include developing new operatic works that resonate thematically with the Opera's audiences and, each season, offering popular, accessible programs like the Student Performance Series, Opera to Go!, and Storybook Opera in over 100 schools in Houston and throughout Texas.

## About HGO and New Works

In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art form to serve an ever-evolving audience, HGO leads the field in commissioning new operas with 75 world premieres to date.

Learn more by visiting [\*\*HGO.ORG/COMMUNITY\*\*](https://www.hgo.org/community)



# Synopsis

Based on the life of Austro-American weightlifter Katie (Brumbach) Sandwina, *Katie: The Strongest Of The Strong* is the charming and cheeky tale of Katie's rise to fame, as she outlifts the strongest man in the world then joins the circus and eventually finds her place as an icon of the women's suffrage movement. Told through the eyes of journalist Marina Martin, a chorus of circus women take on a multitude of characters in this operatic adventure, showing us that strength and beauty come in all shapes and sizes.

## Characters



### KATIE SANDWINA

**Character Description:** Strongwoman Katie Sandwina was a real-life suffragette, record breaker and world traveler. An Austrian by birth, she moved to the United States where she claimed the title of the world's strongest person and toured with Barnum and Bailey Circus.

**Character Question:** What can you find out about the real Katie Sandwina? Where was she from, when did she live, what was her legacy?



### MARINA

**Character Description:** A young Journalist in the 1900's who is writing a story about women of the future who have the right to vote. Marina loves the history of the suffrage movement and the impact it has had on our world today.

**Character Question:** Although Marina is a fictional character, she carries the traits of many modern-day journalists. Which journalists of today does Marina remind you of and why?

### BERNICE BARBELLE

**Character Description:** As part of *The Barbelles*, this incredible woman performs an amazing duet act with Bebe, as Strongman Sandow, and a trio as P.T Barnum. Don't you dare blink or you might miss her transform from one person to another!

**Character Question:** Can you name other famous trios (groups of singers or musicians)?

### BEBE BARBELLE

**Character Description:** The second half of strongman Sandow and one third of P.T Barnum, Bebe molds herself from one character to another. She is the 3rd member of *The Barbelles*, a circus group who will bring to life multiple characters in the opera.

**Character Question:** What term is used in opera when a woman plays the character of a man?

### BERYL BARBELLE

**Character Description:** As a member of The Barbelles, Beryl travels back in time with Marina to help tell Katie's story. Tricks up her sleeve include but are not limited to ventriloquism and puppeteering.

**Character Question:** Are there any shows you've seen where the actor has played more than one character? Why would the creative team think this is a good idea?



# Creators



## FAYE CHIAO, COMPOSER

Faye Chiao is a composer and performer of musical theater, opera, and concert music. Chiao has been honored with awards from The Presser Foundation, The Puffin Foundation and OPERA America. Chiao has also been an artist-in-residence at The John Duffy Institute for New Opera at the Virginia Arts Festival, the Boston Chamber Symphony, and a Labworks artist at The New Victory Theater. Chiao has also received residencies at Barrington Stage Company, Millay Arts, Bethany Arts Community and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Chiao's work has been commissioned, produced, and developed by Houston Grand Opera, Two River Theater, Syracuse Stage, Kenyon College, Manhattan School of Music, Prospect Theater, The Playwrights Realm, Single Carrot Theater, Hear Her Song, Pittsburgh Festival Opera, and the 24-Hour Musicals. Chiao is a member of Theatre Now New York's Musical Writers Lab ([tnny.org](http://tnny.org)), BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Advanced Workshop, Maestra ([maestramusic.org](http://maestramusic.org)) and MUSE ([museonline.org](http://museonline.org)). Chiao holds degrees from The Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University and is on faculty at BerkleeNYC. For more information about Faye Chiao, please visit her website: [fayechiao.com/home](http://fayechiao.com/home)



## ANTON DUDLEY, LIBRETTIST

Anton Dudley is a playwright, director, and librettist for both opera and musical theatre. His Off-Broadway premieres include *City Of* (Playwrights Realm directed by Stephen Brackett), *Substitution* (Playwrights Realm featuring Jan Maxwell), *17 Orchard Point* (co-written with Stephanie DiMaggio, Theatre Row featuring Tony-winner Michele Pawk), *Getting Home* (Second Stage Theater), and *Slag Heap* (Cherry Lane Theater featuring Vincent Kartheiser). Other productions include *Girlstar* (Signature Theater directed by Eric Shaeffer), *A Dram of Drumhiccit* (written with Pulitzer-finalist Arthur Kopit, LaJolla Playhouse directed by Tony-winner Christopher Ashley), *Katie: Strongest of the Strong* (written with Faye Chiao, Houston Grand Opera), *Honor and the River* (Walnut Street Theater), *Cold Hard Cash* (Williamstown Theater Festival), *The Lake's End* (Adirondack Theater Festival), *Marguerite* (Astoria Performing Arts Center featuring Tony winner Cady Huffman), *Home and Baba Yaga & the Firebird* (both written with Faye Chiao, New Victory Theater LabWorks), and *Davy & Stu* (Ensemble Studio Theater). His play *Letters to the End of the World* was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award in LGBT Drama and received its premiere at Theatre Row. Anton has had new play, musical & opera commissions from Houston Grand Opera, Manhattan Theater Club, Williamstown Theater Festival, Cherry Lane Theater, Keen Company, Baryshnikov Arts Center, The Z, Prospect Theater Company, Stella Adler Studio, and Toronto's Musical Stage Company. His works are published by Concord Theatricals, Playscripts, Applause, Heuer, Heinemann Press, Backstage Books, Smith & Kraus, People.com, and Vintage. Anton directed the DC regional premieres of Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*, Miguel Pinero's *Short Eyes*, and Tracy Letts' *Killer Joe*, and the North American premiere of Jim Cartwright's *I Licked a Slag's Deodorant*, and was co-director of the 30th Anniversary revival of *Hair*, which won Helen Hayes Awards for both Outstanding Resident Musical and Direction. Anton teaches directing at Kenyon College and performs drag cabarets as the Duchess Carpathia Bouffray, two of which stream on LGBTQ+ platform, HappiTV. For more information about Anton Dudley, please visit: [antondudley.net/](http://antondudley.net/)

# Who was Katie Sandwina?

Born Katharina Brumbach in 1884 Austria to circus performing parents, Katie Sandwina claimed the title of the world's strongest women in the 20th century. Taking the name "Sandwina" after outlifting her competitor, strong man Eugene Sandow, in a public strength competition in which she was able to lift 300 lbs. over her head when her competitor was only able to lift the weight up to his chest.

After emigrating to the United States in the early 1900s, she joined famous Barnum and Bailey Circus, gracing stages across the nation for nearly 60 years and dazzling crowds by showy feats of strength such as lifting her 165 lbs. husband above her head, bending metal bars, and resisting the pull of four horses.

In 1912, she became the vice-president of a Suffrage society within the Barnum and Bailey Circus, and helped give voice to the movement that forever changed the course of women's rights in the United States.

Learn more about Katie and watch this 30-minute online film: **The Rogue Legends Series: Sandwina Chapter 4**



## A Timeline of 100 Years Towards Women's Suffrage

**1919 MAY-JUNE**

The Nineteenth Amendment passes both House and Senate in a special session and goes to the **states for ratification**

**1920 AUG. 26**

Following ratification by the necessary thirty-six states, the Nineteenth Amendment is adopted.

**1965**

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 afforded crucial protections to Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color voters.

**1990**

Americans with Disabilities Act afforded women with disabilities protections.

**2023 JUN. 25**

Shelby County v. Holder was a landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling that gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by eliminating critical protections from discrimination.



### SUGGESTED READING RESOURCES:

- **What Is the Women's Rights Movement?** by Deborah Hopkinson

### TIMELINE SOURCES:

- [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)
- [www.rockthevote.org](http://www.rockthevote.org)





## Before the Show: Class Activity

The following *Motivational Student Activity* was adapted from the Library of Congress resources page. [Click here](#) for related lessons.

### MOTIVATIONAL STUDENT ACTIVITY (10-15 MINUTES)

#### Recommended for grades 3-8

1. Conduct a class vote for a class president for the day with only one group (Group A) of students allowed to vote
  - a. Teacher can brainstorm various groupings of students ahead of time (i.e.: students with short hair, students who can play an instrument, students that are wearing a certain type of shoe, etc.)
2. Tally votes, but do not reveal results.
3. Conduct another vote but this time only with the students who did not vote originally (Group B).
4. Reveal the winner, based on Group A's vote.
5. Add Group B's vote to Group A's vote.
6. Discuss results. Did the vote change by adding Group B's vote?

#### Grade 3-5 extension activity:

- Ask students to use the [National Center for Educational Statistics website](#) to create bar graphs using the data collected from each group.

#### Grade 6-8 extension activity:

- Ask students to use post-its to offer insights and ideas at how this exercise might mirror scenarios in real American life (past or present)

# Design A Sign Activity: Advocate for Something You Believe In

Recommended for grades 4-8



## STEP 1: UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES

### *BACKGROUND ON THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT*

The Women's Suffrage Movement in the United States called for political reform demanding that the right to vote must include women, but the movement was also a major step in tackling gender inequities across the board. Prior to the Movement, women had no voice in lawmaking, no independent rights after marriage, no custody of children after a divorce, no right to a college education, and little to no opportunities to enter most professions. The protestors looking to change these inequities took to non-violent protest tactics which were so successful that the suffrage movement became THE model for political change that nearly all 20th century reform movements- such as the Civil Rights movement followed. One tactic used were peaceful marches, in which protestors would chant, sing, and hold signs declaring their message as they marched through the streets.

## STEP 2: THINK ABOUT HOW THE ISSUES MATTER TO YOU

### *CONNECT THE PAST TO TODAY*

- Consider the inequalities women faced prior to the 19th Amendment ratification. Look at their protest signs found here: [https://www.si.edu/search/collection-images?edan\\_q=women%20suffrage%20movement&](https://www.si.edu/search/collection-images?edan_q=women%20suffrage%20movement&)
- What types of movements are happening today? What kinds of inequalities or injustices are currently being protested in the United States? Search for images of their protest signs.

## STEP 3: DO SOMETHING

### *CALL TO ACTION*

- Choose a cause which feels important to you and create a protest sign in the style of past movements. Follow the directions below to make your protest sign and post pictures to social media or school pages to make your voice heard. <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-Protest-Signs>

### EXPLORE MORE ONLINE RESOURCES/LESSONS:

- **National Museum of American History** – The Suffragists' Educators Guide for Classroom (videos, lesson plans, and activities)
- **Khan Academy** – The Nineteenth Amendment (brief overview of the suffrage movement and questions to start engaging conversations)
- **NEA** – 19th Amendment (lesson plans, activities, background resources, and videos)
- **Education.com** – Voting Rights: Women's Suffrage Movement (complete reading guide, comprehension worksheet, and activities for 4th grade students)



# Class Activity: How the 19th amendment was achieved

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**Recommended for grades 4-8**

**KEYWORDS:** 19th amendment, women's rights, vote, suffragette, suffrage, inequality, poetry

Although Katie is a strong woman who has gained privilege from her physical power, she sees the women around her working toward a bigger goal of strength, the right to vote. Read through several of the suggested reading resources, then as a group create a collaborative poem using the instructions below about how votes for women were achieved.

## STEP 1:

Read books on Women's Suffrage and discuss the importance of voting.

## STEP 2:

Offer your students one prompt at a time to respond to, such as "Voting is \_\_\_\_" or "Womens right to vote is \_\_\_\_" or "Without the right to vote \_\_\_\_", or "Remember the names of \_\_\_\_" (women who fought for the 19th amendment)

## STEP 3:

Give students independent writing time and brainstorming time to write several phrases that complete your prompt. (3-5 minutes) repeat for each given prompt.

## STEP 4:

On a large white board or piece of paper begin writing your first prompt and list out the student's responses in underneath. Repeat with as many prompts as you like.

## STEP 5:

Edit and revise the responses until the group feels like the poem is complete.

## STEP 6:

Recite the poem as a group or take turns with each student reading one line of the poem.

### SUGGESTED READING RESOURCES:

- **What Is the Women's Rights Movement?** by Deborah Hopkinson
- **How Women won the Vote** by Susan Campbell Bartoletti, Illustrated by Ziyue Chen
- **Lifting as We Climb Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box** by Dionne, Evette
- **Susan B. Anthony Her Fight for Equal Rights** by Kulling, Monica
- **Suffragette the Battle for Equality** by Roberts, David
- **You Wouldn't Want to Be a Suffragist! You Wouldn't Want to Be a Suffragist! a Protest Movement That's Rougher Than You Expected** by Macdonald, Fiona

# Puppetry Activity

## Recommended for grades K-3

In the opera *Katie: The Strongest of the Strong*, puppets play a big role in telling the story and portraying different characters.

Check out this great lesson plan from the great folks at PBS with [Puppet Play Lesson Plan | PINKALICIOUS & PETERRIFIC®](#) and explore the power puppets hold for children to express their creativity. (Lesson is also outlined below)

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Find out about different types of puppets
- Explore connections between facial expressions and emotions
- Create their own puppet
- Adapt a story as a puppet show
- Participate in a puppet show

## INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

- Show children a selection of puppets and ask them to share their experiences with puppets and puppet shows. Ask them about the kinds of puppets they've seen or used as well as the stage, settings, or costumes at a puppet play.
- Expand on the idea that there are many different types of puppets. Display the puppets you've brought and explain how they work. Introduce the word puppeteer. Explain that a puppeteer is the person who makes the puppet move and talk. Sometimes puppeteers also make the puppet, using various materials. If you have several examples of puppets, share the simplest puppet first, such as a finger puppet. Then share more complex puppets—hand, rod, or marionette. Show children how to manipulate the puppets to make them talk or move. Discuss how the puppets are similar and different

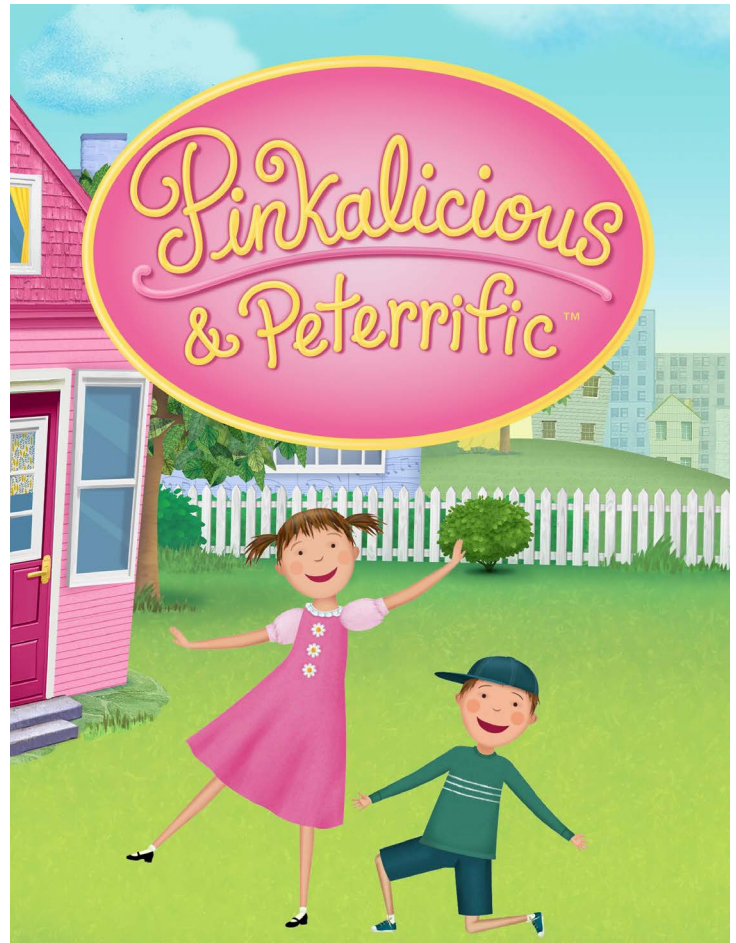
## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### 1. Before watching the video

- Tell children that they're going to watch a video excerpt from a PINKALICIOUS & PETERRIFIC® episode called Mr. Socko.
- Ask children if they've read any books about Pinkalicious or watched the TV show. If needed, explain that Pinkalicious is a girl who loves to use her imagination to sing, dance, act, and make art. She has a brother, Peter, who always likes to join in and bring his own ideas.

### 2. Watch the video

- As children watch, have them think about how Mr. Socko helps Peter and Pinkalicious look for the missing sock.



### 3. After watching the video

- To check for understanding, ask students, What happened in the video? Clarify any misunderstandings.
- Ask students to describe how Mr. Socko talks and acts. (If students are unsure how to describe Mr. Socko, explain that he is helpful, smart, and has good ideas about how to find the missing sock. He asks Peter questions to help him think about everything he did the day he lost his sock.)
- Remind students of their previous experiences with puppets. Ask them about the characteristics of the puppets they know or have seen. What did the puppets look like? What did they say? What kind of voice did they have? Were they silly, serious, sad, helpful, or mischievous? How did the puppet's appearance or actions help tell you about its personality?
- You may want to play another video clip that shows puppeteers using a variety of materials to make and create personalities for their puppets, such as Clubhouse Theme: What Are Puppets | KIDS Clubhouse Adventures.

### 4. Activity #1: Make a Puppet

- Tell students that puppets are similar to characters in a book. They help tell a story by the way they talk and act, how they move, and how they are dressed. These things help make up the puppet's personality. Ask students how puppeteers might show that a puppet is happy, mad, or sad.
- Tell students that they will get to make their own puppets—based on a book! Gather children into a circle and show the book cover. Ask, What do you think this book is about?
- Read the book aloud. Afterward, point out the setting of the story and discuss the various characters. Explore how the different characters felt in different parts of the book. What did they do and say? How did they look? What personalities did they have?
- Explain that now children are going to use what they know about the characters and make their own puppets.
- Share your premade puppet as an example and talk about the materials you used to make it. What did you use for ears, eyes, and nose? Does the puppet have hair? What is it made of?
- Show how to move your hand inside the puppet to make it look like it's talking. Point out the flap on the paper bag or the part of the sock that will be the puppet's mouth. Explain that they will need to keep this in mind when creating their puppet.
- Ask children, Which character from the book would you like to make? Depending on the size of your class, there may be several puppets of the same animal. You can also add in other farm animals for more variety.
- Distribute the materials and give children time to make their puppets. Assist children as needed.

### 5. Activity #2: Create a Puppet Show

- Gather children in a circle and talk about how to adapt the book into a puppet show. Discuss the following ideas and write notes on a chalkboard, poster paper, or whiteboard.
  - What happens in the story?
  - When does each character speak? What does each one say?
  - Where does the story take place?
  - What other supplies (such as props) or backgrounds (for the setting) will we need to make? How should we make them?
  - How can we make a puppet theater or stage?
  - What else do we need for our puppet show?
- Reread the story aloud to find answers to the questions above. Help children focus on the plot by writing the sequence of events (and pictures if needed) on a chalkboard, poster paper, or whiteboard. If necessary, adapt the show to include more animals or multiple animals of the same type.
- List the order in which the animals talk. Simplify each animal's dialogue as needed. If you have nonreaders, find clip art of farm animals and attach them to the poster paper in the correct sequence. This will help children know when to say their lines during the performance.



- If making additional props or scenery, give children time to create them by drawing, painting, or pasting cutouts to the theater. Encourage children to creatively use recycled materials. (If time is limited, consider making the props beforehand.)
- Set up the puppet theater and practice the performance. As you read the narration aloud, stop to let each character or group of animals say their lines. Rehearse until children are ready to perform.

## 6. Culminating Activity

- Perform the show for an audience!

