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# Sanctuary Song

## Study Guide 2013

*In the world of  
Sanctuary Song,* conceived by playwright Marjorie  
Chan and musically illuminated by composer Abigail  
Richardson, we imagine opera as a powerful language shared  
by elephants and one man.

This work is striking. The beautifully told story filled with  
beautiful and rich music has resonated with audiences that  
range in age from 8 years to 80.

The theme of friendship pervades every aspect of this  
theatrical offering, onstage and off. From the pairing of words  
and music to the partnership of a theatre and an opera  
company, *Sanctuary Song* testifies to what is possible when  
we reach beyond our boundaries toward something larger  
than ourselves.

*Enjoy the performance!*

# *what you'll find in this Study Guide*

## **The Performing Arts**

Are you or your students new to opera? Looking for some dance/movement exercises? Want to know about our production?

### **Activities :**

- The Watermelon Scene
- Post-Show Discussion
- Opera Quiz (online material)
- Walk Like an Elephant (online material)

**Elephants** Learn some facts about these huge and gentle creatures while exploring topics in Science, Geography, History, and Mathematics.

### **Activities:**

- Could You Take an Elephant Home?
- Where Did They Go? (online material)
- Elephant Glossary and Elephant Facts (online material)

In the **Communication and Friendship** section, we discover the incredible ways that elephants communicate with each other and the people they work with. We learn about friendships that come in all shapes and sizes. This section is great for Language Arts and Drama explorations.

- Calling All Elephants
- Move to the Groove of Friendship (online material)

**More Printables and Resources** can be found online at TheatreDirect.ca. There, you'll find all of the "online material" listed above. Printable activities, opera/drama and elephant glossaries, and more!

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# Characters in the Story

**Sydney** an aging female Asian elephant

**James** her zookeeper and friend

**Penny** Sydney's childhood elephant friend

**Hunter**

**Circus Owner**

**A young girl** who meets Sydney at the circus

## Synopsis

### *Through the eyes of an elephant...*

This moving family opera explores the themes of friendship and freedom inspired by the real-life story of an Asian elephant whose remarkable journey culminates in her release into a Tennessee sanctuary. Framed by the reluctant goodbye between Sydney and James, her African American keeper of 22 years, Sydney recounts, in a scene that moves from song to a luscious dance section, the destruction of her idyllic life in the jungles of Indonesia. When poachers abduct her she is wrenched from her dearest friend, Penny, who for Sydney is "like a baby sister".

Her years performing in a circus come to a dramatic end when Sydney is injured in a fire on a boat off Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. After being sold to the Louisiana Purchase Zoo, Sydney resigns herself to solitary life until she meets James, with whom she develops a wonderful trust and communication that lasts for decades.

In a deeply moving final scene, Sydney is released into sanctuary and soon encounters another elephant. Tension and fear among the human witnesses is replaced by astonishment and joy when the two elephants embrace and Sydney is reunited with her childhood friend, Penny. As they wander off together into the "hills of grass" she had dreamt of for so long, James looks on and ahead vowing to remember his many years of friendship with Sydney.

The story of *Sanctuary Song* drives home for audiences the delicate balance of the natural world and our relationship to its creatures. However, it is through the operatic form that the emotional power, beauty, and complexity of Sydney's life flows up and out and into our hearts.

## Scenes

**On a Train**

**In the Jungle**

**The Circus**

**Fire!**

**The Zoo**

**Arrival at the Sanctuary**

## Instruments

**Piano**

**Violin**

**Percussion instruments**

including: triangle, cymbals,  
wind chimes, a gendere,  
wood block, a gong, and a variety of  
unconventional instruments

***“When James meets Sydney, he tries talking to her but she doesn’t understand...so he tries singing; That’s how they can communicate!”***  
*Abigail Richardson, Composer*

Opera, with its stirring music, colourful costumes and elaborate sets and props, is the perfect medium for exposing children to different artistic expressions and the way all of the arts can be integrated into a dramatic performance. It can also bring a heightened awareness, and focused attention on the story and the issues explored in the performance.

**Opera is a story that is sung and told through music.** It differs from a play because the music and sung words carry us to a place of high emotion that words alone cannot accomplish.

The art form of opera is a larger than life experience for audience members, allowing them to approach big human issues through drama and music.

It takes the collaboration of two highly skilled creative artists to write an opera: the **librettist**, who creates the story and the words that the characters sing, and the **composer** who creates the music that carries the emotions. The best operas portray relationships and experiences that are universal and timeless.

An opera’s performing artists are professionally trained singers, who spend many years developing their voices and their acting skills. Because opera began in Europe, the singers also study many different languages and cultures in order to understand and correctly pronounce their lyrics.

The roles in opera are written for specific voice types - soprano, mezzo soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, and bass. Sometimes an opera is even written with the vocal range of a specific singer in mind!

The particular vocal range can be used to signify the age of the character, their station in life, or the personality of the character.

# Different Voices heard in Opera

## The Performing Arts

Drama, Dance, Music

**Soprano** A woman with a high voice. Sopranos often portray young, innocent, beautiful women, and lead characters.  
**Range: C4 - A5**

**Mezzo Soprano** A woman with a medium voice. Mezzos often portray the soprano's trusted friend, maids or older women.  
**Range: A3 - F5**

**Contralto** A woman with a medium voice. Contraltos often portray older female characters.  
**Range: F3 - D5**

**Tenor** A man with a high voice. A tenor is often the young, handsome hero of an opera who loves the soprano.  
**Range: B2 - G4**

**Baritone** A man with a medium voice. Baritones can play older men, friends or advisors to the tenors, comic characters, or sometimes leading male characters.  
**Range: G2 - E4**

**Bass** A man with a low voice. Bass singers often portray villains or old men. They tend to be characterized as an "old fool".  
**Range: D2 - C4**

In *Sanctuary Song*, we hear two voice types; Sydney is portrayed by a soprano, James is played by a bass. To compare their relative vocal ranges, see the diagrams below, which approximate the ranges of the two singers you will see in our production.

\* Vocal ranges are from [www.library.yale.edu/cataloging/music/vocalrg.htm](http://www.library.yale.edu/cataloging/music/vocalrg.htm)

### Soprano



### Bass



In an opera, the audience gets lots of information about story and emotion through the music. We asked Abigail Richardson, the composer of *Sanctuary Song*, to give us the inside scoop on key storytelling elements from the score.

Here are her recommendations and some questions for classroom discussion.

**When you see *Sanctuary Song*, keep your ears open for:**

## The Jungle

“One of the more interesting things to listen for is the use of **percussion** and there are a few instruments that specifically help represent the jungle. **The "gendere"** is a really beautiful keyboard percussion instrument which is not quite in our [western] tuning system. It's close to the **pentatonic scale**, but with a few notes slightly higher or slightly lower. It has a very exotic sound and sounds to me like we're in another land when we hear it.

**The gong** represents the jungle and elephants to me. It's often used as a sign of the jungle, or that elephants are nearby, as in the hunter scene. **The bender gong** (used at the end of the hunter scene) is a gong which is lowered into a bucket of water in order to lower the pitch. This represents the elephant getting dizzy and losing consciousness.”

*“Those three instruments represent the jungle sounds, and they often return later when Sydney is in captivity and recalls her former life.”*

**Close your eyes and think of a jungle. What sorts of sounds do you imagine?**

Create a jungle soundscape within your classroom by creating the sounds of a jungle. Start with the sound of the jungle in the morning, before the animals are awake and slowly add in some animals, keeping the base, ‘morning’ sound throughout.

## The Violin

“The violin is central to this opera. If you listen to the violin, you'll hear the most obvious show of the emotions involved in the story. Director Linda Hill says that the violin seems to capture Sydney's soul.”

## Music Effects

“There are some interesting ways that instruments are used for different effects during the opera. Listen for the **rainstick**, which sounds like rain when tilted up and down.

“Just after Sydney meets James, both the violinist and percussionist blow into a tube to create a kind of **elephant trumpet**. These tubes are usually the ones people spin above their head to make a pitch. We just happened to stumble over this in rehearsal and loved it.”

**What are some unconventional instruments in your classroom?**

The orchestra discovered their elephant trumpets by experimenting with unconventional instruments. Gather some classroom items that could be used as instruments and experiment with the different sounds you can get from each item.



# The Watermelon Scene

# The Performing Arts

Drama, Music, Language Arts

**James: Well, I don't know anyone who doesn't like watermelon!**

**Sydney: Wa-ter-mel-on?**

**Both: Watermelon!**

Before seeing the performance of *Sanctuary Song*, introduce your students to one of the scenes from this tale. 'The Watermelon Scene' takes a look at the first time James and Sydney meet and is a great introduction to the poetic language of opera.

Read through The Watermelon Scene with your students.

Discuss the writing style. Does this sound like a regular conversation? Does it sound like a poem? Does it sound like song lyrics? Why do you think the text is written as it is? What does the repetition add to the telling of the story of this scene?

Divide students into groups of four - two actors and two sound artists. Performers will rehearse their lines together, focusing on showing the growing friendship between James and Sydney; the sound artists will discuss ideas for places to add musical elements and/or sound effects to the scene. They could use found objects, their own bodies and vocalizations, or proper instruments, depending on the teacher's preferences.

## Prompts for Performers:

How do you think Sydney and James feel when they first meet? How can you show that with your actions and how you speak? How would your actions change to show a change in how Sydney and James are feeling? How would YOU greet a new friend? How can you give a sense of how large Sydney is compared to James?

## Prompts for Sound Artists:

Where in the script would it be helpful to add sounds or music? What messages/clues could your sounds give the audience? Experiment with different ways to make each sound that you've identified.

Performers and sound artists regroup and rehearse all together. Invite groups to share their scenes (or portions of their scenes) with the class.

Follow up: Remind your students that this scene is a part of the opera, *Sanctuary Song*. Ask them to imagine how the composer, Abigail Richardson, used an orchestra of sounds to bring this scene musically alive. What would students have done differently in their own scenes if they had all possible instruments at their disposal?



# The Watermelon Scene

# The Performing Arts

Drama, Dance, Music

The following excerpt from *Sanctuary Song* is provided with permission from writer, Marjorie Chan, for educational, classroom use only. In this scene, Sydney, an elephant who dreams of living in the forest, is meeting her new zookeeper, James, for the first time. Over the years, Sydney and James become close friends; this is where their friendship begins.

*James approaches Sydney, slowly. He is afraid. As he approaches, he trips and falls at Sydney's feet. Sydney and James size each other up.*

*Sydney shakes her head, amused that she was afraid of a very small person. James laughs gently.*

James: **Hello, hello, hello. Hello. Hello.**

Sydney: **Hello?**

James: **Hello. I won't hurt you.**

*He slowly moves toward her and carefully removes her chain.*

Sydney: **Thank you.**

James: **A friend?**

Sydney: **Friend.**

James: **Uh-huh.**

Sydney: **You're a friend?**

James: **Uh huh.**

Sydney: **You're a friend.**

James: **Friend?**

Both: **Friend.**

James: **I've got something for ya. Don't be afraid.**

Sydney: **What is it?**

James: **Are you thirsty?**

Sydney: **Thirsty**

James: **Are you hungry?**

Sydney: **Hungry. What is it?**

James: **Thirsty? A watermelon.**

*She sniffs at it suspiciously. She likes the smell.*

James: **Well, I don't know anyone who doesn't like watermelon!**

Sydney: **wa-ter-mel-on?**

Both: **Watermelon...**

Sydney: **Smells like green. Smells like my dream.**

James: **Won't you...**

Sydney: **I'd like to...**

Both: **try some...watermelon.**

James: **Smells sweet.**

Sydney: **Smells like green.**

Both: **Smells like -**

James: **a dream.**

Sydney: **A dream.**

James: **My name is James.**

Sydney: **Sydney!**

*She looks at the watermelon.*

Sydney: **How do I get inside?**

James: **Step on it!**





*Sydney steps on the watermelon to open it.*

*End of scene.*

# Could You Take an Elephant Home?

The Natural World  
Science, Geography and Math

The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee has over 2,700 acres of land and lots of vegetation at its disposal to help care for their elephants. Could you take care of one at school?

-  Ask your class about the responsibilities that go along with owning a pet. Discuss a pet's need for space, food, companionship, waste disposal, etc.
-  Share the handout (page 9) about an elephant's daily needs with your class.
-  An elephant needs a space of 2 m x 4 m to stand and is about 3.5 m tall. Collect measurements of different areas of your school (playground, gym, classroom) to see if an elephant could be kept there. What about an elephant's food? What about an elephant's waste?
-  Using a map of your school's local area, determine different routes an elephant could take in order to get its proper daily exercise. Are there favourite destinations that students think an elephant should visit?



# Could You Take an Elephant Home?

## The Natural World Science, Geography and Math

In one day, an elephant eats an enormous amount of food. A full-grown elephant eats between 70 and 100 kg of food each day. Elephants eat only plant material, but they cannot digest the tough fibres of plants very efficiently. About 50% of what they take in passes through as waste. Elephants defacate about every 6 hours, leaving a pile of about 10kg each time.

An elephant drinks between 120 and 190 litres of water each day, depending on the season. *How many 2L pop bottles would that be? How much room would you need to store a week's worth of elephant water?*

In one day, an elephant might eat: 60 kg of hay, 2 kg of elephant chow, 1/2 kg of rolled oats, 1/4 kg of wheat bran and 5 kg of fruits and vegetables.

Elephants, like all animals, need to exercise in order to stay healthy. In the wild, they walk 50 to 80 kilometers each day to find enough food and water. Even in captivity where they don't need to find food, elephants still like to get their proper exercise. *If your elephant walked 80 km each day, starting and ending at your school, what is the farthest place she might walk to? How many days would it take her to walk to Ottawa?*

Elephant food comes in 25kg bags and its approximate costs are below:

1 bag of Elephant Chow:	\$17.50
1 bag of Rolled Oats:	\$8.90
1 bag of Ground Corn:	\$5.50
1 bag of Wheat Bran:	\$7.75
1 small bale of hay (15 kg) :	\$4.00

*How much food would it take to feed an elephant for a week? How much would that cost? How many bales of hay would you need?*

*Estimate the size of a hay bale. How many bales of hay could you fit in your class-room? How long would it take an elephant to eat a 'classroom full' of hay?*

*If your class were to sell the elephant waste as fertilizer (as many zoos do), how much fertilizer would you be able to sell after a day? a week? a year?*

Elephants communicate with each other in many of the same ways humans do: through sounds, physical actions and facial expressions! According to Elephant Voices, some of the common messages elephants give to each other are:

**Let's Go!** This is usually voiced by the matriarch of the herd and can be repeated until she convinces the rest of the group to start moving.

**Contact Call** This is a series of calls between two or more elephants. The first call says, "I'm here, where are you", the second is, "Here I am", and the third is a "message received" confirmation from the first elephant.

**Tusk Clicking** Elephants may click their tusks together during intense social interactions such as a Greeting Ceremony or during interactions in which an elephant wishes to express solidarity with a friend or family member.

**Trunk Twisting** Twisting the tip of the trunk back and forth in situations where an elephant is apprehensive or unsure of what action to take.



Share the above examples with your class (or additional ones from [www.elephantvoices.org](http://www.elephantvoices.org)) and discuss some of the universal ways that we humans communicate with each other (try to move beyond formal language structures and highlight nonverbal communication).



Identify one or two messages (i.e. 'greeting' and 'I'm hungry') and ask students to outline, in full sentences, how we humans convey those messages. This is an exercise to familiarize students with procedural-style writing.



Now divide the class into pairs or small groups. Using the handout provided (page 11), encourage students to create their own language using 'singing sounds' and actions. Students should decide upon what messages are the most important ones to their imaginary species.



Groups can now create a conversation script/song using their new communication system. Does their conversation make sense to an outsider? How do you think humans figured out what elephants mean when they communicate with each other?

Record your invented language on this chart. We included an example, but feel free to make up your own “I’m hungry” action.

Description of Sound/Action	Meaning
Tap your stomach twice while making a loud, low-pitched, “mmmm, mmmm” sound. The sound gets louder at the end of each “mmm”.	I’m hungry.



## Post-Show Discussion

## The Performing Arts

Drama, Dance, Music

The elephants in *Sanctuary Song* were portrayed by movement, rather than elaborate costuming. In what ways did the **performers' movements** help establish the characters they were playing?

Was this your first **experience with opera**?

How did this opera compare with your expectations or with other operas you have seen? What surprised you?

How did the **instrumentalists** help to tell the story of the opera?

There were many **locations** conveyed in *Sanctuary Song* as Sydney relived memories in her life. Can you remember some of the locations that were represented in the opera? What clues did the music give you about how Sydney felt about each of these locations?

## The True Story of Shirley

## The Performing Arts

Drama, Dance, Music

*Sanctuary Song* is based on the remarkable true story of an elephant named Shirley and her life-long journey that brought her from Sumatra to the ranks of the Carson and Barnes circus to the Louisiana Purchase Gardens Zoo and finally to the Elephant Sanctuary in Hohenwald, Tennessee.

In *Sanctuary Song*, the names Sydney, Penny, and James are inspired by the real-life Shirley, Jenny, and Solomon James, respectively.

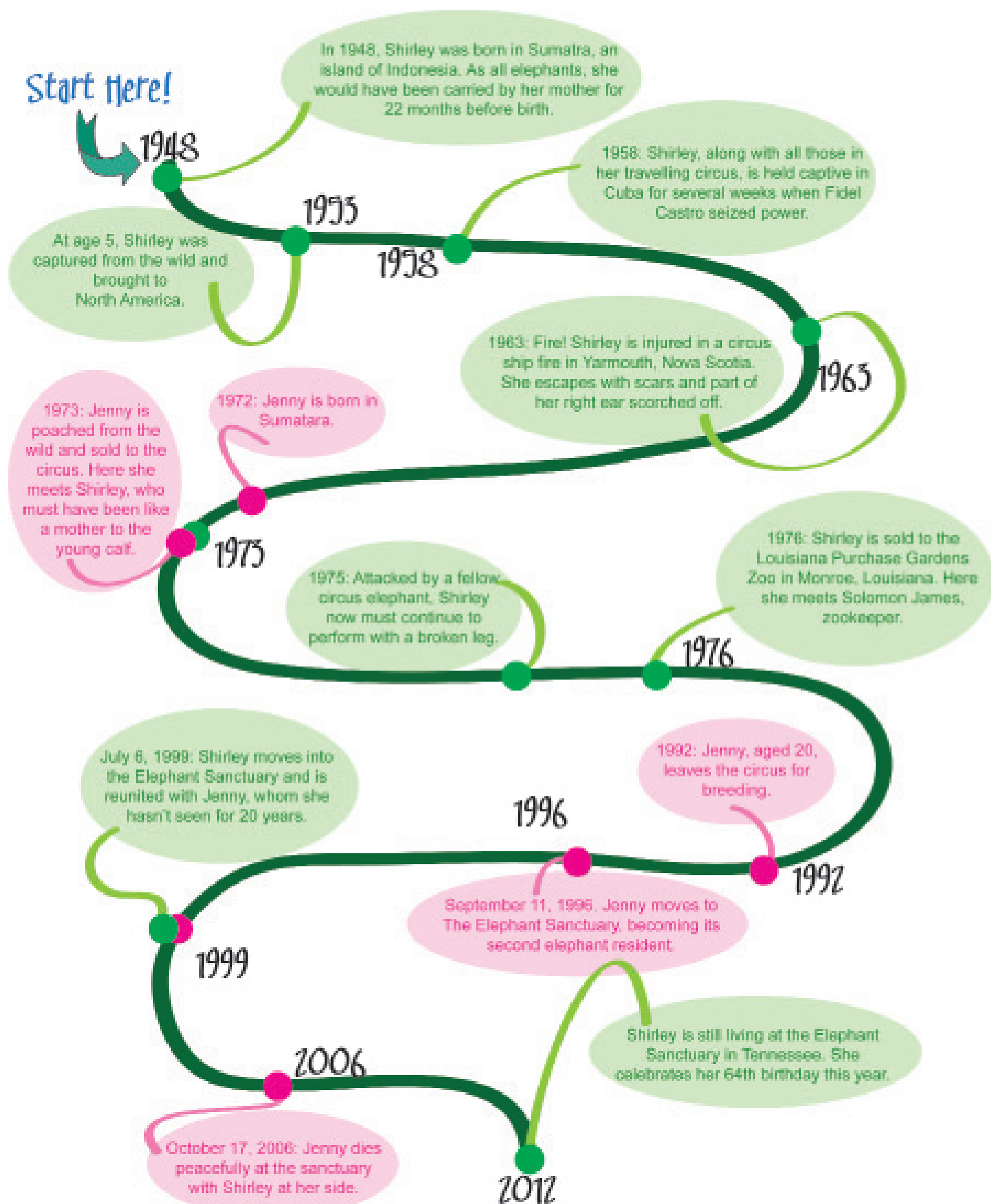
Jenny was with the Carson and Barnes circus at the same time as Shirley and this is where they became friends. In *Sanctuary Song*, the writers chose to have Sydney and Penny first meet in the wild. In real life, Shirley is about 25 years older than Jenny, but the characters in the opera are closer in age.

Solomon James is a real zookeeper, who cared for Shirley for 22 years at the Louisiana Purchase Gardens Zoo before accompanying Shirley on her truck ride to The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. You can see how much Solomon James loves Shirley in The Urban Elephant documentary.

To see The Urban Elephant, search YouTube.com for: "Nature (PBS) - Shirley the Elephant".

**After seeing *Sanctuary Song*, discuss with your class the differences between the libretto and the true story.**

# Sanctuary Song: Our Elephants' Timeline





# Sanctuary Song

Composed by **Abigail Richardson-Schulte**

Written by **Marjorie Chan**

Director **Lynda Hill**

Music Director **Reza Jacobs**

Original Set & Costume Design **Kelly Wolf**

Lighting Design **Michelle Ramsey**

Choreographer **Viv Moore**

Cast **Anne Marie Ramos, Soprano**  
**Alvin Crawford, Baritone**  
**with Sharmila Dey & Sean Arbuckle**

Orchestra **Violin: Andrea Tyniec**  
**Piano: Reza Jacobs**  
**Percussion: Jamie Drake**

Stage Manager **Isolde Pleasants-Faulkner**

Production Manager **Caroline Hollway**

Through the  
eyes of an  
elephant...

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