THE TENDER LAND
Study Guide

Music by Aaron Copland
Libretto by Horace Everett

MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE
Department of Education and Community Programs
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An Introduction to Michigan Opera Theatre

Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT), the State of Michigan’s premier opera company, which, through its commitment to producing and presenting the very best professional productions of opera, dance, musical theater, and arts education programming, serves as a statewide cultural resource.

The vision of Founder and Artistic Director Dr. David DiChiera, and led by President and Chief Executive Officer Wayne S. Brown, MOT offers an essential, vibrant contribution to the quality of life for Detroit area residents and to communities throughout the region.

This dynamic cultural resource exemplifies artistic excellence. Since its founding in 1971, MOT has offered southeast Michigan the finest arts and cultural performances, concerts, education, and entertainment. By presenting culturally significant productions relative to the diverse populace of the region, such as “Porgy and Bess,” “Anoush,” “King Roger,” “Dead Man Walking” and the world premiere production of “Margaret Garner,” MOT has brought the magic of live theatre to thousands of people.

In 1963, Dr. DiChiera introduced a new civic enterprise in Detroit, the popular Overture to Opera series, a program of staged opera scenes and one-act operas he narrated and toured to hundreds of schools and community centers throughout the state. The success of the series over a period of years laid the groundwork for the creation of Michigan Opera Theatre in 1971.

In April of 1996, on the Company’s twenty-fifth anniversary, the ribbon was cut for the grand opening of the Detroit Opera House. Michigan Opera Theatre joined the ranks of major opera companies worldwide with the multi-million renovation of a 1922 movie palace. Michigan Opera Theatre is one of only a few opera companies in the United States to own its own opera house. The product of Dr. DiChiera’s dream, the Detroit Opera House, is comparable to the world’s greatest houses in visual and acoustical beauty.
Mission

Michigan Opera Theatre is the premier multi-disciplined producer and presenter for opera, musical theatre, and dance in the Great Lakes Region. Based in the city of Detroit, the organization engages artists of national and international stature for stellar main stage and outreach performances, and provides compelling cultural enrichment programs for the diverse audiences and communities that it serves, making it one of Detroit’s pillars of arts and culture.

Department of Education and Community Programs

Founded by Karen V. DiChiera, the Department of Education and Community Programs has served the entire state with quality entertainment and education for over 30 years. The Department of Education and Community Programs has brought its’ varied musical programs to every age group in Michigan, allowing artists to visit clubs, offices, schools, and community stages, and performing shows that range from lively children’s operas to musical revues to full length operas produced by the local community.

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The Tender Land:
Characters and Synopsis

Characters
LAURIE MOSS, the older sister, 17-19 years old (Soprano)
 MARTIN, a drifter (Tenor)
 TOP, a drifter (Baritone)
 MA MOSS (Contralto)
 GRANDPA MOSS (Bass)
 BETH MOSS, the younger sister, 8-12 years old (Speaking role)
 MR. SPLINTER, the postman (Tenor)
 MRS. SPLINTER (Mezzo-Soprano)
 MR. JENKS (Baritone)
 MRS. JENKS (Soprano)
 PARTY GUESTS

Setting
Spring, just before harvest, in the 1930s, a lower-middle class farm in the Midwest.

Synopsis
In the American heartland during the Great Depression, teenager Laurie Moss is about to become the first in her family to graduate from high school. On the eve of graduation, her mother, Ma Moss, and her protective Grandpa, are hosting a party to celebrate, while Laurie finds herself questioning her place in the world and wondering what kind of life she could lead if she were to leave the farm.

Two drifters come by looking for work, and despite his suspicions, Grandpa Moss hires them. Laurie, who is both tied to her homeland and aching to leave it, is intrigued by tales of their travels. The dashing smooth-talking Top, full of bluster, immediately eyes Laurie. But it’s the younger, bashful Martin for whom she falls.

While Ma and Grandpa Moss are suspicious of the strangers, Laurie is captivated by their vivid tales of travel, and she and Martin quickly fall in love, culminating in a tender kiss at Laurie’s graduation party. Grandpa Moss, furious, banishes the two men, leading Martin and Laurie to make plans to elope, but Martin quickly realizes that this would cause trouble for all involved, and reluctantly sneaks away before daybreak. Heartbroken, Laurie realizes that, though now alone, it is still time for her to go. She bids farewell to the farm, and sets off into the unknown. A weeping Ma Moss turns to her younger daughter, Beth, and the cycle of life continues.

A vivid portrait of the rural Midwest, The Tender Land is painted richly with Copland’s quintessentially American harmonies and tells a beautiful and simple story of a young woman’s coming of age.
The Composer: Aaron Copland

Aaron Copland (1900—1990) was one of the most respected American classical composers of the twentieth century. By incorporating popular forms of American music such as jazz and folk into his compositions, he created pieces both exceptional and innovative. More than two decades after his death, Copland’s life and work continue to inspire many of America’s young composers.

Copland was born in Brooklyn, New York, on November 14, 1900. At the age of sixteen he went to Manhattan to study with Rubin Goldmark, a respected private music instructor who taught Copland the fundamentals of counterpoint and composition. At the age of twenty, he left New York for the Summer School of Music for American Students at Fountainebleau, France.

In France, Copland found a musical community unlike any he had known. He studied under the legendary pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger, from 1921-24, and she became one of the most important influences on his compositional career. It was through Boulanger that Copland’s first composition was published: a work for piano solo, *The Cat and the Mouse* (“Scherzo Humoristique”), it was completed in March 1920, and published by Durand and Sons in 1921.

While in Europe, Copeland met many of the important artists of the time, including the famous composer Serge Koussevitsky, who requested that Copland write a piece for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The piece, “Symphony for Organ and Orchestra” (1925), was Copland’s entry into the life of professional American music. He followed this with “Music for the Theater” (1925) and “Piano Concerto” (1926), both of which relied heavily on the jazz idioms of the time. For Copland, jazz was the first genuinely American musical movement. From jazz he hoped to draw the inspiration for a new type of symphonic music, one that could distinguish itself from the music of Europe.
In the late 1920s, with his friend Roger Sessions, he began the Copland-Sessions concerts, dedicated to presenting the works of young composers. By the mid-1930s Copland had become not only one of the most popular composers in the country, but a leader of the community of American classical musicians.

In his search for the widest audience, Copland began composing for the movies and ballet. Among his most popular compositions for film are those for “Of Mice and Men” (1939), “Our Town” (1940), and “The Heiress” (1949), which won him an Academy Award for best score. He composed scores for a number of ballets, including two of the most popular of the time: Agnes DeMille’s *Rodeo* (1942) and Martha Graham’s *Appalachian Spring* (1944), for which he won the Pulitzer Prize. Both ballets presented views of American country life that corresponded to the folk traditions Copland was interested in. Probably the most important and successful composition from this time was his patriotic *Lincoln Portrait* (1942). The piece for voice and orchestra presents quotes from Lincoln’s writings narrated over Copland’s musical composition.

Throughout the 1950s, Copland slowed his work as a composer and began to try his hand at conducting. Over the next twenty years he traveled throughout the world, conducting live performances and creating an important collection of recorded work. In 1983 Copland conducted his last symphony. His generous work as a teacher at Tanglewood Music Center, Harvard University, and the New School for Social Research gained him a following of devoted musicians. As a scholar, he wrote more than sixty articles and essays on music, as well as five books. He traveled the world in an attempt to elevate the status of American music abroad, and to increase its popularity at home. Through these commitments to music and to his country, Aaron Copland became one of the most important figures in twentieth-century American music. On December 2, 1990, Aaron Copland died in North Tarrytown, New York.

*SOURCES: PBS*
The Librettist:
Horace Everett (Erik Johns)

Erik Johns was born Horace Eugene Johnston in Los Angeles, and was a dancer, painter, and poet. In 1946, when Johns was 19 years old, he met Aaron Copland at a New Year’s Eve party in New York. The two began a close relationship, and for the next several years, Mr. Johns was Copland’s secretary. The two eventually lived together for several years.

In 1952, Copland and Johns began work on an opera based on Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the James Agee and Walker Evans book of photographs of Depression-era sharecroppers. Johns devised the story of a poor farming family in the Midwest changed by the arrival of two drifters, and he wrote the libretto for The Tender Land under the pseudonym Horace Everett.

Copland and Johns parted in 1954 but remained close, and Johns served as an adviser to the board of Copland House, a composer’s retreat in Copland’s residence in Peekskill, N.Y.

In the 1950s Johns formed the company Party Decorators with Jack Kelly. The company decorated the inaugural dinner of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and the inaugural parties of President Jimmy Carter in 1977. The two men also ran an antiques business.

Johns later wrote the librettos for Tea Party, an opera by Jack Gottlieb, and Mission to the World, an oratorio by John Schlenck, commemorating the centenary of the Vedanta Society of New York. Erik Johns died at age 74 at his home in Fishkill, N.Y.

SOURCES:
The New York Times
The T ender Land:
Background and Inspiration

*The T ender Land* (composed 1952—1954) was commissioned by the League of Composers for the organization’s 30th anniversary. The librettist, “Horace Everett” (Erik Johns), was a young dancer, painter and poet who had never written a libretto or a play before. Based on a text by James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), it was originally intended as an opera for television. However, upon its completion, NBC reneged on the production without offering any substantive reasons, and the completed opera, nearly two years in the making, would have lain unperformed had New York City Opera (NYCO) not decided to present the premiere of this prominent composer’s work. The April 1, 1954 premiere was conducted by Thomas Schippers under the direction of Jerome Robbins. However, the cavernous space of City Center dwarfed the opera, intended for an intimate television production.

The result was a lukewarm initial response from the critics and the crowds. The music was praised while the libretto was criticized. Copland tried to take a philosophical attitude, but suffered some writer’s block in the wake of the disappointment, occasioning his wonderful witticism that for him opera was “la forme fatale.”

Johns felt that the disservice done to his drama by the ineffective premiere production had robbed Copland’s music of the hearing it deserved, and he convinced the composer to participate in revising it for performances at Boston’s Tanglewood Music Center in August 1954. The characters were more fully developed, and the love story gained more prominence. The original second act ballooned into two separate acts, with the big party scene in the middle balancing the outer acts in which only the principals take part. Further nips and tucks sought to enhance the opera’s appearance at Oberlin College in 1955.

With this college production, *The T ender Land* finally moved past its turbulent birthing pains and began, quietly at first, to find a life and an audience. Copland’s publisher published the score with a cover illustration by Johns, and Copland himself rendered a beautiful piano reduction and sanctioned its use in performance should an orchestra not be available, a populist gesture aimed at encouraging performances on any scale. Furthermore, three numbers were published separately and became well-known independently from the whole
work- “The Promise of Living” quintet that ends Act I, the square dance “Stomp Your Foot,” and most of all, “Laurie's Song,” a ubiquitous aria in young sopranos’ repertoire. In 1958, Copland arranged an orchestral suite from the opera’s highlights, giving broader exposure to the score’s musical merits.

SOURCE: DRAM
https://www.dramonline.org/albums/aaron-copland-the-tender-land/notes
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Prelude to an Opera

Aaron Copland drew inspiration for his opera from a book by James Agee and Walker Evans entitled *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. A collection of Evans’s photographs and Agee’s text, this book was a departure from traditional journalism, where images are usually placed to illuminate the text. Instead, roughly the first 30 pages of the book contain Evans’ stark photography without any text, captions, or quotations, followed by Agee’s written accounts of the lives of three sharecropping families.

The project began in the summer of 1936 with Agee’s assignment from *Fortune* magazine to explore the daily lives of sharecroppers in the South. Photographer Walker Evans, on a leave of absence from the Farm Security Administration where he worked to document the Great Depression, was hired to accompany him.

*Fortune* magazine was not unique in its concern for the tenant farmer; President Roosevelt himself appointed a Committee on Farm Tenancy to investigate the situation of the nation’s farming population. Agee and Evans examined the life of the tenant farmer as closely as the president’s committee, but from the perspective of artists, not New Deal politicians or economists. Proposing no economic solutions to the problem of tenant farming, they attempted only to describe the life of the families they photographed as accurately as possible.

Agee and Evans traveled for a month before they found themselves in Hale County, Alabama, with the subjects they wanted to photograph and write about. They spent three weeks with three families and then went back to New York to finalize the article and present it to the magazine’s editor.
The magazine did not publish it.

After the article was rejected, Agee expanded it into a book and set about to find a publisher. It was five years later that it was published to a resounding sound of silence. It sold 600 copies the first year, and it wasn’t until after Agee's death in 1955 that *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was re-published. This time, the book became an instant classic.

Suzanne A. Austgen of the Hanover College History Department says of the work:

> “*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is, in the same sense as Roosevelt’s New Deal, an experiment addressing the challenges of social responsibility and the salvaging of human dignity in the midst of the Great Depression… While the degree of success achieved by Agee and Evans can be argued as easily as the success of the New Deal, one thing remains certain: *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was the second great experiment to emerge from the 1930s.”

SOURCE:
Hanover College History Department
http://history.hanover.edu/hhr/hhr93_5.html

Walker Evans/Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC
The Setting:
Historical Context and Timeline

The 1930s in America were dominated by the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. In 1929 only 3% of Americans were without a job; by 1933, the unemployment rate had risen to 25%. This period of economic distress was compounded by natural calamities-drought throughout the Midwest turned the once-rich soil to dust, and winds whipped the loose soil into gigantic dust storms that ravaged the country from South Dakota to Texas. Thousands were forced to abandon their farms in the hopes of finding a better life.

Throughout the world, the political climate turned frightening. The rise of Hitler in Germany and Stalin in the Soviet Union, as well as the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, would eventually lead to the Second World War. Officially begun in 1939 after Germany invaded Poland, the United States initially declared itself a neutral party. This would change after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941.

In spite of the economic and political turbulence, many forms of entertainment flourished during this decade. With the addition of sound, movies became increasingly popular. Comedies, gangster movies, and musicals helped people forget their troubles. The Wizard of Oz, Gone With the Wind, Duck Soup, The Thin Man, and Mr. Smith Goes to Washington were some of the most popular films of their day. Disney pioneered full-length animated features with Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, and radio offered many kinds of programs, from sermons to soap operas. Board games such as Monopoly and Scrabble made their debuts in the ‘30s, and children read about Superman in Action Comics and followed the adventures of Flash Gordon and Dick Tracy in newspaper comic strips.

In the 1930s, big bands and swing music were popular, with Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, and Glenn Miller as popular bandleaders. Government programs to assist artists resulted in production of plays and artworks for all to enjoy.
September 14, 1930
The Nazi party becomes the second largest political party in Germany.

September 19, 1931
Britain leaves the gold standard, leading many in the U.S. to believe another stock market disaster is imminent. Over the next two months, hundreds of banks will close as Americans hastily close out their accounts.

September, 1931
Japan invades Manchuria, violating the Kellogg-Briand pact, setting it on the path to World War II.

March 4, 1933
Franklin Roosevelt’s first inauguration as President of the United States. In his first 100 days in office, Roosevelt launches the New Deal, including dozens of federal programs to help agriculture. FDR calls for social security, a fair tax system, and a host of federal jobs programs to get people back to work.

January 30, 1933
Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany, a critical turning point for Germany and for the world. Hitler proposes eliminating traditional party politics, creating a unified one-party state and eradicating all opposition to the Nazi party.

March 3, 1933
President Franklin D. Roosevelt gives his first radio "fireside chat," directly connecting to the American public. Radio allows Roosevelt to calmly explain his methods for social change, and gives a boost to his public standing. The radio also allows him to reach the American people while concealing his polio symptoms.

August 14, 1935
FDR signs the Social Security Act into law, establishing retirement insurance, a federal-state program of unemployment compensation, and federal grants for state welfare programs.

November 15, 1935
The Nazis revoke German citizenship for all Jews. With the 1936 Olympic games scheduled in Berlin, the German government tones down public anti-Jewish rhetoric over worries that international criticism of Hitler’s government could lead organizers to transfer the games to another country.
January 20, 1937
Roosevelt is inaugurated for the second time as a result of one of the greatest landslide victories in American history. As Americans tune in to their radios from all over the country, FDR focuses his inaugural address on the poor "forgotten" American.

June 25, 1938
FDR signs the Fair Labor Standards Act, creating a 44-hour workweek. Later, the act moved to a 40-hour week. Minimum wages start at 25 cents an hour and increase to 40 cents per hour within six years.

November 9-10, 1938
Nazis in Germany torched synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools, and businesses, and killed close to 100 Jews. In the aftermath of Kristallnacht, also called the “Night of Broken Glass,” some 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to Nazi concentration camps.

September 1, 1939
The German army, air force, and navy launch a concerted attack on Poland, utilizing Blitzkrieg tactics to annihilate the Polish army. Within four weeks, the Germans destroyed most of the Polish army and occupied the western and central regions of Poland.

September 3, 1939
British and French governments declare war against Germany.

November 4, 1939
U.S. passes Neutrality Act of 1939. In the end, the terms of the Neutrality Acts became irrelevant once the United States joined the Allies in the fight against Nazi Germany and Japan in December 1941.

— AMERICAN LIFE IN THE 1930s —

October, 1929
The Stock Market crashes, and fortunes of investors around the world are destroyed. President Herbert Hoover, an Iowa native, is President of the United States. Many eventually blame him for the plight of Americans. Unemployed and homeless people live in shantytowns they name “Hoovervilles.”

February 26, 1931
In response to resentment of "foreign" workers amidst rising unemployment, a team of armed Immigration and Naturalization Service agents seal off the small public park of La Placita, a popular gathering spot for Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles. The 400 men and women gathered there are taken into custody, kicking off a tidal wave of Mexican-Americans deportations. Between 300,000 and 500,000 Mexican-Americans are forced out of the United States in the 1930s.
May 11-13, 1934
A dust storm ravages several Midwestern and Western states including Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Colorado, forcing hundreds of families to leave their farms. These storms will plague the nation for the next nine years, causing devastating agricultural damage to America's prairie lands and leaving thousands homeless.

January 18, 1937
Record rainfall overflows the banks of the Ohio River, leaving 1 million Americans homeless, and $250 million in property damage. Radio stations around the nation broadcast news about the flood for weeks without commercial breaks. Most broadcasts are filled with messages for rescue crews, as many government agencies have no other means of communication.

May 1937
Another dust storm hits the West and Midwest. Economic recovery comes to a halt, sending the economy of the region into a second depression and local morale to a new low.

May 27, 1937
Construction finishes on San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge.

July 2, 1937
Amelia Earhart crashes off the coast of Howland Island in the Pacific Ocean in her attempt to become the first woman to fly around the world. The news media round-the-clock coverage of the event fascinates the American public.

April 20, 1939
New York City holds the World’s Fair, drawing on the theme "The World of Tomorrow." The fair includes the first exhibition of television, ushering in a new era of media and entertainment. The theme is meant to provide an escape from the realities of the Great Depression and looming World War.
January 13, 1930
The first Mickey Mouse comic strip is published in the New York Mirror.

February 18, 1930
Arizona scientists reveal their newest discovery -- a ninth planet they name Pluto, after the Greek God of the underworld. The discovery sparks public interest in space and inspires Walt Disney to introduce a new animated character, Pluto -- Mickey Mouse's canine companion.

April 1, 1930
For the first time, the 30th U.S. Census asks whether the respondents owned a radio, reflecting an increased interest in communication technology and consumer goods.

October 5, 1930
CBS broadcasts the New York Philharmonic live over the radio for the first time. Since the historic broadcast, the Philharmonic has continued to be a consistent presence on national radio.

March 3, 1931
Congress and President Hoover approve *The Star Spangled Banner* by Francis Scott Key as the U.S. national anthem.

April 25, 1935
The first around-the-world telephone conversation spans from New York to San Francisco, Indonesia, Holland, England and back to New York. The call marks a new era in technological advancement.

April 16, 1936
As part of the job stimulus program of the Works Project Administration, Orson Welles directs an all-black cast of *Macbeth* for the Negro People’s Theatre. Both the New York Times and the New York Daily News praise the production.

December 21, 1937
Disney releases *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The film is the first full-length animated feature (83 minutes in length) in color and with sound.

October 30, 1938
Orson Welles airs his famous “War of the Worlds” broadcast on CBS radio, shocking the nation with his realistic-sounding broadcast of a fictional alien invasion in Grovers Mill, New Jersey. By 1938, nearly 80% of American households own a radio.

Orson Welles broadcasting “War of the Worlds”. 
March 7, 1932
The Ford Hunger March (also called The Ford Massacre) begins as a demonstration of unemployed workers who aimed to present 14 demands to Henry Ford, among them health care, an end to racial discrimination, and the right to organize unions. Four people are killed and another 50 wounded at the hands of Dearborn police and Ford security guards. The funeral for those killed draws a crowd of 8,000 to 15,000 people, according to Detroit newspapers.

April, 1932
Diego Rivera arrives in Detroit, having been commissioned to paint the now-famous Detroit Industry murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts. He is joined by his wife, Frida Kahlo, who suffers a miscarriage and is cared for at Henry Ford Hospital. Her painting entitled "Henry Ford Hospital," also known as "The Flying Bed," is completed that year.

September 20, 1934
Detroit Tiger Hank Greenberg refuses to play a game on Yom Kippur, though his team is in the midst of a pennant race. Many fans are outraged, but Greenberg receives a standing ovation from congregants at the Shaarey Zedek synagogue when he arrives for services. Poet Edgar Guest publishes a poem in the Detroit Free Press that ends: “We shall miss him on the infield and shall miss him at the bat/But he’s true to his religion — and I honor him for that!” Greenberg’s Tigers compete against the St. Louis Cardinals in that year’s World Series.

September 9, 1935
Eleanor Roosevelt comes to Detroit to attend the groundbreaking ceremony for the Brewster Homes, the first federally funded housing project for African-Americans in the nation. The Brewster Homes were part of a bigger, thriving area that included Black Bottom, Brush Park, and the black entertainment district known as Paradise Valley. Joe Louis, Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson, and Lily Tomlin all spent part of their childhoods in the Brewster Homes (later known as the Brewster-Douglass Projects).

December 30, 1936
In one of the first sit-down strikes in the United States, autoworkers occupy the General Motors Fisher Body Plant Number One in Flint, Michigan, striking to win recognition of the United Auto Workers (UAW) as the only bargaining agent for GM’s workers; to make the company stop sending work to non-union plants; and to establish a fair minimum wage scale, a grievance system, and a set of procedures that would help protect assembly-line workers from injury. In all, the strike lasted 44 days.
January 1932
Hattie Carraway becomes first woman elected to the U.S. Senate (Arkansas).

March 4, 1933
FDR appoints Frances Perkins as Secretary of Labor, making her the first woman to hold a cabinet position.

June 18, 1934
The Indian Reorganization Act, also called Wheeler–Howard Act, is enacted by Congress, and decreases federal control of Native American affairs, allowing tribes to write constitutions and recognizing rights to self-government.

June 1936
Mary McLeod Bethune is named Director of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration. She is the first black woman to receive a major federal appointment.

August 3-9, 1936
African American athlete Jesse Owens wins four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics in front of Adolf Hitler, who has recently begun his campaign for the "dominance" of the Aryan race. News of Owens' accomplishment sparks public interest; however, Owens continues to face racial inequality at home.

September 1937
Chinese Workers' Mutual Aid Association is founded in San Francisco to help workers of all trades get organized, including those from restaurants, laundries, farms, canneries, and docks.

December 1938
Luisa Moreno spearheads El Congreso de Pueblos de Hablan Española (the Spanish-Speaking People's Congress) in California, aiming to improve labor conditions and civil rights for Latinos living in the United States. This marks first national effort to bring together Latino workers from different ethnic backgrounds: Cubans and Spaniards from Florida, Puerto Ricans from New York, Mexicans and Mexican Americans from the Southwest.

SOURCES:
The American History Online www.theamericanhistory.org
PBS http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americane experience/features/timeline/worlds/
Wessel's Living History http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/
American Studies at the University of Virginia http://xroads.virginia.edu/
Historic Detroit http://historicdetroit.org/
State of Michigan www.michigan.gov
The Tender Land: Discussion Questions

Part 1: Art in Our Lives

• What is art? What is music? How does these fit into our lives?
• What was your first exposure to opera? What do you remember about it?
• Do you consider yourself an artist? What is the criteria for being an artist?

Part 2: The Tender Land and Me

• What did you expect to experience with this opera? Were your predictions correct? In what ways were your expectations met or not met?
• What do you remember about your own high school graduation?
• Which character in the opera did you identify with most fully? Why do you think that is?
• What similarities to your own life did you see depicted on stage?
• Did the Moss family seem familiar to you? Have you seen those sorts of family dynamics in your own family, or other families you know? Why do you think this may or may not be?
• Did you, or family members that you know, live through the Great Depression? What experiences during this time period are part of your family’s background or history?
Part 3: About the Production

• How did you see the technical elements support the story? Did anything in particular stand out?

• What is the significance of the opera’s title? Why is the land “tender”?

• How does Copland manage to make the music of The Tender Land sound distinctly “American”? What do you hear in Copland’s music? What does it bring to mind?

• Aaron Copland has been referred to as the “Dean of American Composers.” Why was he granted that title? What does it indicate?

Part 4: Historical and Social Context

• Many of Roosevelt’s New Deal innovations stood the test of time (the Social Security Act) while others didn’t last (the Civilian Conservation Corps), and still others were declared unconstitutional (the National Recovery Administration). What was the lasting impact of New Deal programs and policies? Would these alone have guided America out of the Great Depression, if not for the increased industrial needs of World War II? Do you think there are any lasting New Deal programs that should no longer be utilized? What about those that you believe should still stand?

• Though set in the 1930s, Copland wrote The Tender Land in the early 1950s, during which time he was summoned before the House Un-American Activities Committee headed by Joseph McCarthy. How does a composer known for his creation of characteristically American music come to be labeled “un-American?” What other times in American history have similar tactics as those used by McCarthy been used by government officials or other groups? Is today’s America immune to this kind of political tactic? Why or why not?
Further Exploration Through the Arts

_The Tender Land_ showcases American farm life in the midst of the Great Depression, and touches on themes of family, coming of age, growth and change, fear and suspicion of outsiders, and the cycle of life. Below you will find suggestions for other works which explore similar ideas and settings, as well as a listing of other works by Aaron Copland.

— LITERATURE —

_The Grapes of Wrath_ by John Steinbeck (1939)
Steinbeck’s Pulitzer Prize-winning epic of the Great Depression chronicles the Dust Bowl migration of the 1930s and tells the story of one Oklahoma farm family, the Joads, driven from their homestead and forced to travel west to the promised land of California. This is a drama that is intensely human yet majestic in its scale and moral vision, elemental yet plainspoken, tragic but ultimately stirring in its human dignity.

_Of Mice and Men_ by John Steinbeck (1937)
The compelling story of two outsiders striving to find their place in an unforgiving world. Drifters in search of work, George and his simple-minded friend Lennie have nothing in the world except each other and a dream—a dream that one day they will have some land of their own. Eventually they find work on a ranch in California’s Salinas Valley, but their hopes are doomed as Lennie, struggling against extreme cruelty, misunderstanding, and feelings of jealousy, becomes a victim of his own strength.

_Let Us Now Praise Famous Men_ by James Agee and Walker Evans (1941)
The basis for the opera _The Tender Land_, this book is a record of place and of the people who shaped the land, and stands as one of the most influential books of the twentieth century.

_What to Listen For in Music_ by Aaron Copland (1939)
In this fascinating analysis of how to listen to music intelligently, Aaron Copland raises two basic questions: Are you hearing everything that is going on? Are you really being sensitive to it? Aaron Copland’s provocative suggestions for listening to music from his point of view will bring you a deeper appreciation of the most rewarding of all art forms.

SOURCE: www.goodreads.com
— THEATRE —

Our Town by Thornton Wilder (1938)
Winner of the 1938 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, Our Town tells the story of the fictional American small town of Grover’s Corners between 1901 and 1913 through the everyday lives of its citizens. A 1940 movie adaption (starring William Holden as George Gibbs) had an original score composed by Aaron Copland.

Oklahoma! by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II (1931)
Based on Lynn Riggs’ 1931 play, Green Grow the Lilacs, Oklahoma! tells the story of cowboy Curly McLain and his romance with farm girl Laurey Williams, and is the first musical written by the team of composer Richard Rodgers and librettist Oscar Hammerstein II. The musical is considered one of the most influential works in the American musical theatre, owing to its full integration of song, character, plot, and dance. The original production was choreographed by Agnes de Mille, who collaborated with Aaron Copland on Rodeo in 1942.

Waiting For Lefty by Clifford Odets (1935)
This 1935 play consists of a series of related vignettes concerning a group of cab drivers who are planning a labor strike. It was staged by the Group Theatre, a New York theatre company focused on producing new plays, particularly those that mirrored the social and political climate of the day. Playwright Clifford Odets and Aaron Copland were good friends, and both were called to testify in Senator Joseph McCarthy’s anticommunist hearings.

Annie by Charles Strouse and Martin Charnin (1977)
A Broadway musical set during the Great Depression and based on the popular Harold Gray comic strip Little Orphan Annie. This popular family musical has had three Broadway productions, two movies, and a television adaptation. The stage version draws heavily from its Great Depression setting, and includes the songs “We’d Like to Thank You, Herbert Hoover” and “A New Deal For Christmas.”

— DANCE —

Rodeo (1942)
Dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille felt that the traditional Russian style of ballet was stale and out of touch, especially with American audiences. In her view, dance needed to speak to people here and now. With that in mind, she choreographed Rodeo as the first ballet to feature American tap dancing and indigenous folk dance, along with classical ballet technique. The music for Rodeo was written by Aaron Copland, and the piece premiered in 1942.
Appalachian Spring (1944)

One of choreographer Martha Graham’s most celebrated works, Appalachian Spring explores the lives of a young pioneer husband and his bride beginning a life together on the American frontier. The music was composed by Aaron Copland, who had been commissioned by Graham and Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge to write a ballet with "an American theme." Copland won the 1945 Pulitzer Prize for Music for Appalachian Spring.

SOURCE: http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/

— MUSIC —

More by Aaron Copland:

El Salón México (1936)

Copland said, “I was attracted by the spirit of the place and by the Mexican people. Using Mexican melodies seemed appropriate. My purpose was not merely to quote literally, but to heighten without in any way falsifying the natural simplicity of Mexican tunes.” Much to Copland’s surprise and delight, El Salón México was welcomed warmly in Mexico and has consistently been one of his most performed pieces.

Billy the Kid Ballet Suite (1938)

Lincoln Kirstein and Eugene Loring of Ballet Caravan asked Copland to compose music for a cowboy ballet. According to Copland, “Lincoln tempted me with several books of western tunes, and Loring wrote a scenario about the notorious bandit of the Southwest, Billy the Kid. I became intrigued with using tunes such as ‘Git Along Little Dogies,’ ‘The Old Chisholm Trail’, and ‘Goodbye Old Paint’.” The ballet is still performed regularly, and the orchestral suite of six connecting movements is one of Copland’s most popular works.

Fanfare for the Common Man (1942)

Fanfare for the Common Man was written in response to a solicitation from Eugene Goosens, conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, for a musical tribute honoring those engaged in World War II. Copland later wrote, "The challenge was to compose a traditional fanfare, direct and powerful, yet with a contemporary sound." To the ultimate delight of audiences, Copland managed to weave musical complexity with popular style.

Lincoln Portrait (1942)

One of Copland’s most popular pieces, Lincoln Portrait was commissioned during the early years of World War II for a program of three new works by American composers. Copland chose excerpts from Lincoln’s own words for the narration. The piece has been performed on many significant occasions and with innumerable narrators, among them Carl Sandburg, William Warfield, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Copland himself.
Copland’s Contemporaries:

George Gershwin

George Gershwin was one of the most significant American composers of the 20th century, known for popular stage and screen numbers as well as jazz and classical compositions. His most ambitious work, *Porgy and Bess*, is considered to be among the most important American musical compositions of the 20th century. In writing what he called his “folk opera”, Gershwin drew from both popular and classical influences. Many of his works are now standards, including “Someone to Watch Over Me”, “Summertime”, and what is perhaps his best-known work, “Rhapsody in Blue.”

Leonard Bernstein

Bernstein was one of the first American-born conductors to receive worldwide fame. Flamboyant, inspired, and voracious in his conducting style, Bernstein got his big break conducting the New York Philharmonic in 1943. He composed the scores for the musical *West Side Story* and the operetta *Candide*.

Music of the 1930s:

Benny Goodman

Also known as "The King of Swing", Benny Goodman was a clarinetist, composer, and band leader from the 1920s and 1930s. At the height of his popularity in the 1930’s, his was the first jazz band to play Carnegie Hall. In 1947, Goodman commissioned Aaron Copland to compose a clarinet concerto, which would premiere on an NBC radio broadcast on November 6, 1950.

Woody Guthrie

Many of Guthrie’s early songs are based on his experiences in the Dust Bowl era during the Great Depression, which earned him the nickname "The Dust Bowl Troubadour". His most famous songs include “This Land is Your Land” and “Talking Dust Bowl Blues.”

Marian Anderson

Deemed one of the finest contraltos of her time, Marian Anderson’s voice made her famous on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1939 she was invited by President Roosevelt to perform at the White House. However, Constitution Hall, where Anderson was scheduled to perform, was open only to white performers. Eleanor Roosevelt instead invited Anderson to perform on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday. In front of a crowd of more than 75,000, Anderson offered up a riveting performance that was broadcast live for millions of radio listeners.

Billie Holiday

Billie Holiday is considered one of the best jazz vocalists of all time. Discovered at the age of 18 in a Harlem jazz club, Holiday went on to record with Benny Goodman, Teddy Wilson, Duke Ellington,
Count Basie, Artie Show, and Lester Young, who gave Holiday her nickname "Lady Day". In 1939, Holiday debuted two of her most famous songs "God Bless the Child" and "Strange Fruit."

**Alan Lomax and the 1938 Library of Congress Folk-Song Expedition**

Acting as “Assistant in Charge” for the Library of Congress, Lomax toured Michigan in 1938, recording the music of people across the state. A selection of Lomax’s recordings have been compiled under the name “Michigan-I-O”, and is available for download or purchase on CD. The full scope of recordings available can be found at the Library of Congress online at [https://www.loc.gov/collections/alan-lomax-in-michigan/](https://www.loc.gov/collections/alan-lomax-in-michigan/)

**SOURCES:**

Library of Congress:
[http://memory.loc.gov/digibib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.200000006/default.html](http://memory.loc.gov/digibib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.200000006/default.html)

Boosey & Hawkes: The Classical Music Specialists
[http://www.boosey.com/cr/composer/Aaron+Copland](http://www.boosey.com/cr/composer/Aaron+Copland)

Conscience vs. McCarthy: The Political Aaron Copland by Bill Morelock
[http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/05/03_morelockb_unamerican/](http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/05/03_morelockb_unamerican/)

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**VISUAL ARTS**

**American Regionalism**

Regionalism, or American Scene painting, is an American realist modern art movement that was popular from the 1920s through the 1950s in the United States. The artistic focus was from artists who shunned city life and rapidly developing technological advances to create scenes of rural life. Regionalist style was at its height from 1930 to 1935, and is best known through the so-called "Regionalist Triumvirate" of Grant Wood in Iowa, Thomas Hart Benton in Missouri, and John Steuart Curry in Kansas. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Regionalist art was widely appreciated for its reassuring images of the American heartland. Probably the most famous piece from the American Regionalism movement is Grant Wood’s “American Gothic”. Other well-known paintings include Wood’s “Daughters of the American Revolution”, Thomas Hart Benton’s “Cradling Wheat” and “Achelous and Hercules”, and John Steuart Curry’s “Baptism in Kansas” and “Tornado Over Kansas”.

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“Cradling Wheat” by Thomas Hart Benton (1938)
Art from the Works Progress Administration

On May 6, 1935, the Works Progress Administration was created to help provide economic relief to the citizens of the United States who were suffering through the Great Depression. Certain visionary U.S. politicians decided to combine the creativity of the new art movements with the values of the American people. The Federal Art Project (FAP) created over 5,000 jobs for artists and produced over 225,000 works of art for the American people. Many of these works of art have been lost or destroyed, but some works can be found on display at the Smithsonian Museum and the Illinois State Museum. A great number can also be viewed digitally via The Library of Congress website.

— FILM —

Movies from the 1930s

*The Wizard of Oz*

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*

*Modern Times*

*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

*Paper Moon*

*The Purple Rose of Cairo*

*Bonnie and Clyde*

*The Cradle Will Rock*

*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

Movies set in/about the 1930s
MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE

THE TENDER LAND
Aaron Copland

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MACOMB CENTER FOR THE
PERFORMING ARTS
Saturday, March 12, 2016 | 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, March 13, 2016 | 2:30 p.m.

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Saturday, March 19, 2016 | 7:30 p.m.
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