

SAMSON AND DELILAH



OPERA
COLORADO

SAMSON AND DELILAH

Dear Teachers,

Opera Colorado is pleased to provide engaging educational programs and performances for students across Colorado. What follows is a guide that we hope you and your students find useful, as we explore Saint-Saëns's *Samson and Delilah*. In the spirit of exploration, we have included various lessons that connect *Samson and Delilah* with different subjects of learning.

The lessons reference the Colorado Department of Education's Academic Standards: specifically, focusing on the fifth-grade expectations. This does not mean, however, that these lessons should be limited to this age group. While we would be incredibly pleased if you used these lessons in the exact format provided, we encourage you to expand, alter, and adapt these lessons so that they best fit your students' abilities and development. After all, the teacher knows their students' needs best. We would appreciate your feedback on our teacher evaluation form emailed to you after the performance by our Manager of Education & Community Engagement. We hope that you enjoy all that Opera Colorado has to offer!

THANK YOU!

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DISCLAIMER

As we present *Samson and Delilah* this spring, and share this Guidebook as a learning tool, we want to acknowledge its historical and biblical context. The opera explores themes of love, betrayal, and human struggles. While conflicts between groups are portrayed, our production does not take a direct political stance on contemporary Middle East issues.

Our goal is to present a work of art that prompts reflection and appreciation for its rich musical and historical origins. Opera Colorado upholds the importance of our shared existence and rejection of any form of discrimination based on race, religion, or beliefs.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

MEET THE ARTISTS



KATHARINE GOELDNER

soprano
Delilah
“dah-lee-LAH”



RAFAEL DAVILA

tenor
Samson
“sam-SON”



NMON FORD

baritone
High Priest of Dagon
“dah-GOHN”



CHRISTIAN ZAREMBA

bass
Abimelech
“ah-bee-MEH-lek”



BEHIND THE SCENES While there are four main characters, known as “principal artists” in opera, there are many other people that “make the magic happen” including four secondary singers, four supers (non-speaking roles), six dancers, thirty-six chorus members, sixty-four orchestra members, over fifty production staff, six music staff, and fifteen administrative staff, to name a few. Overall, it takes hundreds of people to prepare and present an opera!

PHOTO | “Samson and Delilha,” San Diego Opera, 2012.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Samson and Delilah

Music by Camille Saint-Saëns

Libretto by Ferdinand Lemaire

Debuted on December 2, 1877, Ducal Theatre, Weimar

- **Delilah** (mezzo-soprano) – A priestess of Dagon who charms Samson into a trap.
- **Samson** (tenor) – Leader of the Israelites with super-human strength who falls in love with Delilah.
- **High Priest of Dagon** (baritone) – A religious official for the Philistines.
- **Abimelech** (bass) – A Philistine governor who battles Samson in act one.

DID YOU KNOW? Names have meaning!

The name Samson is believed to have come from the Hebrew word *Shamesh* for “sun” and Delilah has roots in the Hebrew word *Laylah* for “night.” This is symbolic of their characters—opposites attract!



PHOTO | Samson and Delilah by José Salomé Pina (1830-1909) from Fine Art America

SAMSON AND DELILAH

SYNOPSIS

Three acts. Sung in French.

SETTING: The Sorek Valley around 1200–1000 B.C.E.

SAMSON AND DELILAH — ACT I

The Israelites, also known as the Hebrew people, cry out in fear that their god has abandoned them, while their leader, **Samson**, encourages them to have faith.

The Israelites are enslaved under the Philistines, and Samson galvanizes them into fighting for their freedom. **Abimelech**, a Philistine governor, arrives and taunts the Hebrews, challenging them to believe his god, Dagon, is superior to their god. An aggravated Samson fights Abimelech who falls as the Hebrews flee. The **High Priest of Dagon** enters, outraged to find a slain Abimelech. He curses the missing Hebrews and plots revenge.

The next day, the Hebrews offer a humble prayer as **Delilah**, a Philistine priestess of Dagon, and other Philistine women emerge from a temple with flowers. Delilah dances with the other women and tells Samson he has claimed her heart. He admits to feeling tempted by her, but other Hebrew men try to convince him not to fall for Delilah's charm. Delilah

continues to dance and sings of the coming of spring and all its delights to further tempt Samson to come with her. The two catch each other's eyes and Samson appears to be spellbound.

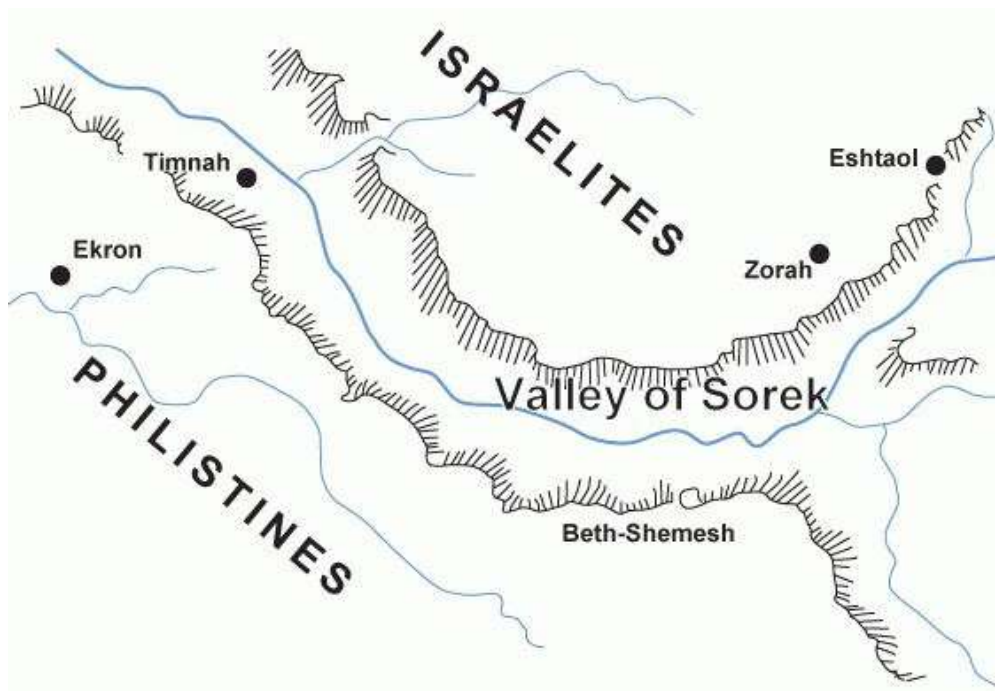


PHOTO | "Map of the Valley of Sorek in Ancient Philistia", Bible History

SAMSON AND DELILAH

SYNOPSIS (CONTINUED)

SAMSON AND DELILAH — ACT II

Delilah relaxes in her home, confident in her ability to lure Samson to her and trick him into capture. The High Priest of Dagon enters to praise her for enchanting Samson. He explains Samson was blessed with incredible strength, but it seems Delilah can weaken him with her charm. The two plot to use Delilah's influence over Samson to conquer their rival's strongest warrior. The High Priest of Dagon offers her gold for helping her people by taking down Samson. She refuses rewards, claiming revenge and victory over the Hebrews is her only motivation.

As the sky grows dark, Samson arrives to profess his love for Delilah. She claims to love him as well but states he must share the secret of his strength with her to solidify their connection. Samson hears thunder in the distance and, believing this to be a sign from god, refuses to divulge his secret. Delilah continues to pressure Samson and he succumbs to her charm, explaining that his hair is what gives Samson his strength. When Samson lets down his guard, the Philistine soldiers arrive to arrest him, and Samson cries out in anguish over Delilah's betrayal.

SAMSON AND DELILAH — ACT III

Samson is chained and his hair is cut off. He expresses his guilt for trusting Delilah, so he offers his life as a sacrifice in retribution for forsaking his god and his people.

“**Samson was blessed with incredible strength, but it seems Delilah can weaken him with her charm.**”



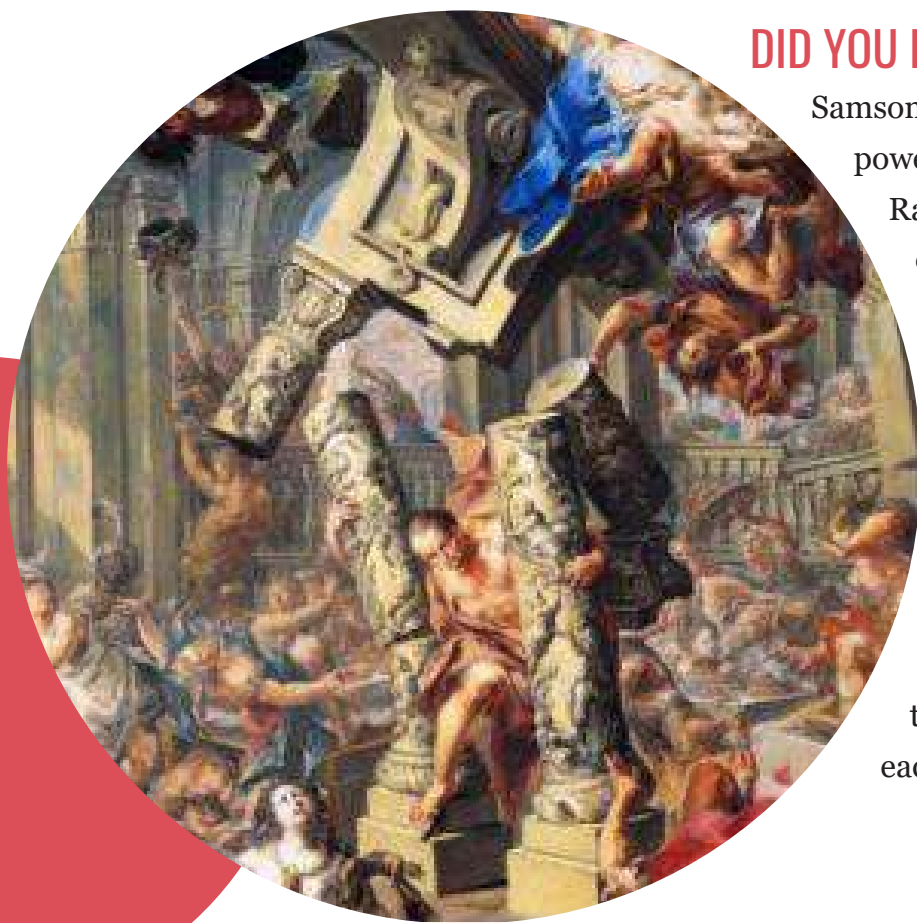
PHOTO | Engraving of Samson and Delilah by Gustave Dore ca. 1860

SAMSON AND DELILAH

SYNOPSIS (CONTINUED)

The Hebrew people feel hurt and confused as they try to understand how Samson, their strongest warrior, succumbed to desire for Delilah instead of staying loyal to his people. Samson is eventually dragged away. The Philistines prepare for their victory over the Hebrews and celebrate with an extravagant party.

Samson is dragged in front of the High Priest of Dagon and Delilah to be sacrificed. The High Priest ridicules Samson, and Delilah taunts him by revealing her affections had been a ruse. Samson is led to be chained between two pillars of the temple. As the High Priest and Delilah celebrate their impending victory, Samson calls upon god to briefly return his strength. He pulls at his bindings and brings down the temple, sacrificing himself and taking down his foes in the process.

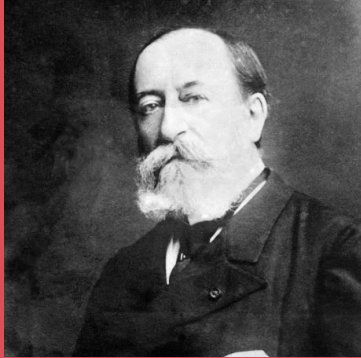


DID YOU KNOW? Delilah cuts Samson's hair in act three to take his power. To portray this on stage, Rafael Davila, who sings the role of Samson, will be wearing a wig which is created with the intention of being cut live on stage. This production is available to audiences for four mainstage shows and one dress rehearsal, which means the same wig needs to be made five times, one for each show!

PHOTO | Johann Georg Platzer (1704-1761), "The Death of Samson"

SAMSON AND DELILAH

MEET THE COMPOSER: CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS



WHO WROTE THE MUSIC?

Camille Saint-Saëns

Saint-Saëns based the opera on the biblical tale found in Chapter 16 of the Book of Judges in the Old Testament.

Camille Saint-Saëns was a composer, organist, historian, and writer, contributing significantly to French music by writing **sonatas, chamber music, symphonies, concertos, and oratorios**. Born in Paris on October 9, 1835, he was musical from a very early age, learning to read music before he could read words.

A true prodigy, at only ten years of age, he debuted his piano skills at a prestigious concert hall in Paris. At 12, he began studies at the Paris Conservatory, focusing on **composition** and organ. This experience led to a twenty-year position as Chief Organist with a grand church from age 22 to 42. All the while, he composed music and won awards for his work.

He conceived of the idea for an **oratorio**, a large-scale choral work based on a biblical theme, and approached Ferdinand Lemaire, a poet, for collaboration on the **libretto** for the biblical story of *Samson and Delilah*.

Lemaire suggested they write the story as an opera, rather than an oratorio, and Saint-Saëns began composing excitedly. However, the project was ill-received by his friends and he left the project unfinished.

Three years later, while speaking with famous musician of the time, Franz Liszt, Saint-Saëns shared the old idea for the opera and Liszt persuaded him to revisit the project. With Liszt's encouragement, Saint-Saëns completed *Samson and Delilah* in 1876, only to be rejected by French opera houses who were unwilling to host the premiere due to the biblical subject matter. As luck would have it, Saint-Saëns's supporter, Liszt, lived in Weimar, Germany, and he organized for the opera's premiere to take place at the Weimar Grand Ducal Theater on

PHOTO | Saint-Saëns, Camille. Image. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (file no. LC-DIG-ggbain-18207).

SAMSON AND DELILAH

MEET THE COMPOSER: CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (CONTINUED)

December 2, 1877. It wasn't until 1890, a full thirteen years after its debut, that *Samson and Delilah* was performed in France.

Saint-Saëns is well-known for many of his works including the Third ("Organ") Symphony, Op. 78 (1866), the oratorio "Le deluge" Op. 45 (1875), and the Third Violin Concerto, Op. 61 (1880), to name a few. The opera *Samson and Delilah* is still performed on stages world-wide today. Saint-Saëns died in Algiers on December 16, 1921 at the age of 86. His memorial was celebrated at the church in Paris where he was an organist for two decades early in his career.

MEET THE LIBRETTIST: FERDINAND LEMAIRE

Ferdinand Lemaire was born in 1832 in Martinique, France. Little is known about the life of this French poet and librettist who is most famous for creating the libretto for *Samson and Delilah* in partnership with Camille Saint-Saëns. He is credited with the inspiration for Saint-Saëns composition to be written as an opera rather than a choral work. A number of his poems were written to music including "Tristesse" (1868) and "Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix" (1877). Lemaire died in 1879.



PHOTOS | Samson et Dalila (Samson and Delilah)-French and English Text 1895. Grand Opera Librettos. Oliver Ditson Company.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

LESSON ONE: MOVEMENT

- **Colorado Academic Standard: Dance: Fifth Grade, Movement, Technique, and Performance**
- **GLE: Explore strategies to perform a specific intent in a performed dance.**

Outcomes: Dancers convey meaning through movement (Interpersonal Communication). Dancers analyze and are aware of personal strengths that contribute to an ensemble (Self-Awareness).

In this opera, the singers, orchestra, and dancers come together to tell a story of love, betrayal, and loyalty. Together, they portray to an audience the emotions and actions of the characters on stage. For this lesson, we will explore how dancers can express emotion through movement.

Step 1: Watch Opera Colorado's introductory video about dance in opera [HERE>>](#)

Step 2: The most famous dance in *Samson and Delilah* is called the Bacchanale, which takes place in act three. During this scene, Delilah is wooing Samson to try and make him fall in love with her amongst a dazzling party. An impressive dance takes place on stage.

- Watch the dance of the Bacchanale from *Samson and Delilah* choreographed by Kenneth von Heidecke [HERE>>](#)
 - Each opera is directed and choreographed differently. For the Opera Colorado production, our choreographer, Rachael Harding, has made choreography decisions that are different from the video you just saw. In this way, each new production of an opera is different from the last.
- After watching the video, create a list of words, either individually or as a class, to describe the emotions and themes you saw through the dance and heard in the music. Include at least six descriptive words before moving on.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

LESSON ONE: MOVEMENT (CONTINUED)

Step 3: Listen to the Berlin Philharmonic play the Bacchanale that you will hear in act three. Conducted by Gustavo Dudamel and filmed at the Berlin Philharmonic Hall on December 31, 2020. Link [HERE>>](#)

***You may play this recording as many times as necessary for students.*

- Instruct students to break into groups of two and share their list of words. Have them listen to the piece again and remove words they disagree on, and add new descriptors they do agree on.
- Next, ask them to come up with three distinct dance movements that align with their descriptors. These can be in any style (hip-hop, swing, tap, etc.)
- Have them practice and flush out those movements. They can be individual, or flow together.
- Once each group has practiced their movements gather again as a group.

Step 4: You may have the pairs share with the whole class or in smaller groups, depending upon comfort level. Have each pair share their three moves first, then have the class take three guesses as to what the descriptors are.

- Are they close? Did the movements portray the thematic words the dancers chose?
Do the movements fit with the orchestra's music?
- Have all groups share and then gather for reflection questions.

Reflection:

- What does intent mean in dance and how is it communicated in a dance performance?
- What techniques can dancers use to portray emotion?
- How is it possible to communicate without words in a dance performance?
- How do music and dance work together to tell a story?

DID YOU KNOW? Classical ballet as we know it today was born within the Paris Opera Ballet over time. French opera and ballet are intrinsically linked. Our Director, Keturah Stickann, is a former dancer! Read about her thoughts and experience on the relationship between opera and dance in her Director's Notes [HERE>>](#)

SAMSON AND DELILAH

LESSON TWO: DESIGN CONCEPTS

- **Colorado Academic Standard: Visual Arts: Fifth Grade, Invent and Discover to Create**
- **GLE: Plan works of visual art and design where intended meaning is communicated to viewers.**

Outcomes: Make decisions during the creative process that best supports the intended point of view. Discuss with others to determine if intended meaning was effectively communicated.

The opera of *Samson and Delilah* is often produced with extravagant sets, props, and costumes which transport the audience into a different time period and place. The design choices are intended to create a spectacle for the audience and relay information about the characters or groups of people on stage such as their social status, culture, and personal characteristics.

Step 1: Review the following examples of images from various interpretations of *Samson and Delilah* from works of art, performance, and film. Take note of the similarities and differences between them.



ONE: Painting by José Salomé Pina, 1851

TWO: “Samson and Delilah,” 1949. An American film directed by Cecil B. DeMile starring Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr.

THREE: “Samson and Delilah,” 2009. An Australian film directed by Warwick Thornton, starring Rowan McNamara and Marissa Gibson.

FOUR: Yonghoon Lee as Samson and J’Nai Bridges as Delilah in Seattle Opera’s “Samson and Delilah” in Concert. 2023. Photograph by Sunny Martini.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

LESSON TWO: DESIGN CONCEPTS (CONTINUED)



Step 2: Reflect on what you know about the two main characters.

Samson is a leader of the Israelites with super-human strength he maintains from hair he has never cut. Delilah is a Philistine priestess of Dagon, whose mission is to trick Samson and diminish his strength to win the war between peoples.

Step 3: Consider what design and style choices you would make for each character.

How would you portray them? Take five minutes and write a list of specific qualities and appearance choices you would give to them.

Step 4: Design two costumes for your ‘principal artists’ for the next performance of *Samson and Delilah* on the Ellie Caulkins Opera House stage! They should be complete with clothing, shoes, wigs, accessories, and makeup.

You may write a descriptive summary of each, create a digital mood board from examples found online, or draw your characters. Consider the following design elements:

- Materials
- Colors
- Textures
- Patterns
- Hair style

Step 5: Share your reasoning. Why did you make those design choices? How do those visual clues help us understand each character’s traits and intentions?

PHOTOS | *Samson and Delilah* Stage Director Keturah Stickann in rehearsals. Jamie Kraus/Opera Colorado

SAMSON AND DELILAH

LESSON THREE: DUALITY EXPLORED

- **Colorado Academic Standard: Writing: Fifth Grade, Writing and Composition**
- **GLE: Write engaging, real or imagined narratives using literary techniques.**

Outcomes: Orient the reader by using narrative techniques to introduce a character or characters and an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

**This lesson is intended to be completed after students have seen the performance. Share the exercise with students in advance for preparation.*

Did you catch the fun fact on page five (Cast of Characters)? In case you missed it, the name Samson comes from the Hebrew word *Shamesh* for “sun” and Delilah has roots in the Hebrew word *Laylah* for “night.” This is symbolic of their characters—opposites attract!

Like the hidden symbolism of the main character’s names, there are numerous examples of duality in the story of Samson and Delilah. **Duality** is an instance of contrast with the quality or attribute of being two. Another way to think about this are opposites. Think, good and evil, hot and cold, yin and yang.



PHOTOS | “Duality.” Design by Ben Kocinski. Accessed via Pinterest April 19, 2024.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

LESSON THREE: DUALITY EXPLORED (CONTINUED)

Step 1: Now that you have seen *Samson and Delilah* on stage, reflect on the narrative.

Where did you witness duality in the narrative and music?

- Write down as many instances as you can think of.
- For example, love and betrayal are present in the trickery of Delilah who betrays Samson's love for her. This is also prevalent when Samson, who loves his Hebrew people, betrays them by falling for Delilah.

Step 2: You have just broken down a very common literary device that you are already extremely familiar with from stories you already know and love. Duality in storytelling often leads to conflict and is used in a multitude of ways to show the human experience. Let's consider where else you have seen storytellers leverage duality in pop culture.

Here are two examples to get you started:

- *Emperor's New Groove*. Kronk's Dilemma. Watch [HERE>>](#)
- *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. Gollum and Smeagol. Watch [HERE>>](#)

What other examples come to mind? Consider songs, music videos, movies, comics, novels, dance, performance art, paintings, and more.



PHOTOS | Katharine Goeldner (Delilah) and Rafael Davila (Samson) in rehearsals. Jamie Kraus/Opera Colorado

SAMSON AND DELILAH

LESSON THREE: DUALITY EXPLORED (CONTINUED)

Step 3: Write your own character or characters using the concept of duality.

- Think of your favorite thing. For example, ice cream. Now write the qualities of that thing down.
 - For example: Ice cream - cold, delicious, sticky, flavorful, colorful, happy.
- Now write down the opposites of those descriptors.
 - For example: hot, gross, smooth, bland, plain, sad.
- Use those two themes to create one or two characters in a short story using the literary device duality. Consider what they look like, their personalities, and the conflict that their differences cause. Spend twenty minutes writing your story.
- Make revisions as necessary to have a final story.

Step 4: Let's reflect. As a class, discuss how this concept presents itself in human nature.

- Where do we see duality in our daily lives?
- Can this concept help us build empathy for others? How so?
- How could a writer, artist, or dancer use this tool to connect with others? Or share ideas?



PHOTOS | Katharine Goeldner (Delilah) and Nmon Ford (High Priest of Dagon) in rehearsals. Jamie Kraus/Opera Colorado

SAMSON AND DELILAH

ACTIVITY: CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Use the clues to fill in the words on the next page.

Words can go across or down. Letters are shared when the words intersect.

ACROSS

2. A Philistine governor who battles Samson in act one and dies
4. The Hebrew word for “sun”
5. An instance of contrast with the quality or attribute of being two; opposites
7. The text of a work (such as an opera) for musical theater
9. The Hebrew word for “night”
10. Leader of the Israelites with super-human strength who falls in love with Delilah

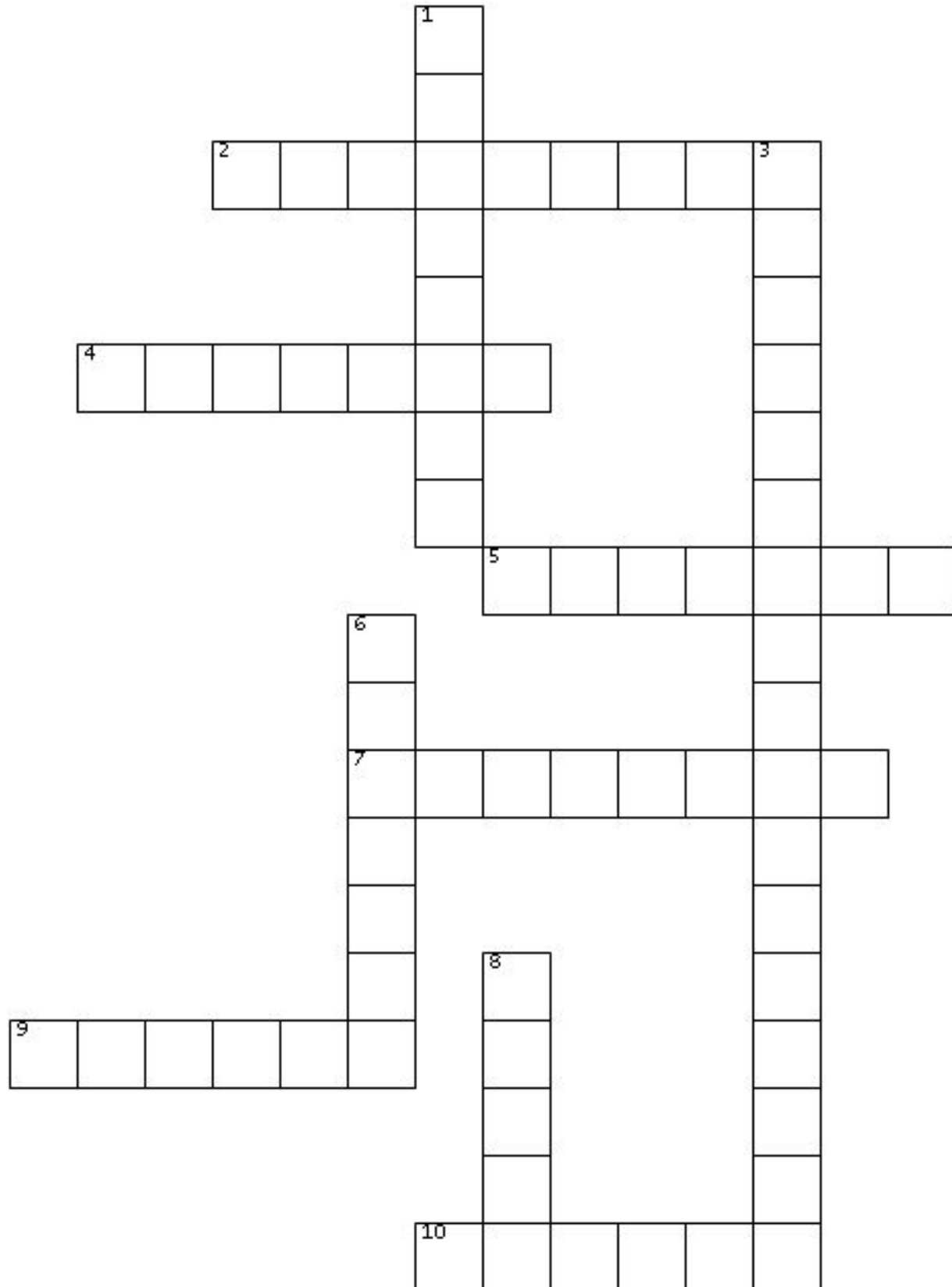
DOWN

1. A person who writes music
3. A religious official for the Philistines
6. A priestess of Dagon who charms Samson into a trap
8. A drama set to music and made up of vocal pieces with orchestral accompaniment

Generated by Discovery Education Puzzle Maker

SAMSON AND DELILAH

ACTIVITY: CROSSWORD PUZZLE (CONTINUED)



SAMSON AND DELILAH

VOCABULARY

All definitions are sourced from the Miriam-Webster dictionary.

Librettist: the writer of a libretto: the text of a work (such as an opera) for musical theater

Composer: a person who writes music

Composition: written piece of music especially of considerable size and complexity

Oratorio: a large-scale choral work based on a biblical theme

Sonata: an instrumental musical composition typically of three or four movements in contrasting forms and keys

Movement: a distinct structural unit or division having its own key, rhythmic structure, and themes forming part of an extended musical composition

Chamber music: instrumental ensemble music intended for performance in a small room or auditorium and usually having one performer for each part

Symphony: symphony orchestra concert; a musical composition of complexity or variety

Concerto: a piece for one or more soloists and orchestra with three contrasting movements

Opera: a drama set to music and made up of vocal pieces with orchestral accompaniment

SAMSON AND DELILAH

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