



San Francisco Opera's Puccini's *THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST*

Curriculum Connections

California Content Standards
Kindergarten through Grade 12

LANGUAGE ARTS

WORD ANALYSIS, FLUENCY, AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Name Origins:

***La Fanciulla del West* (The Girl of the Golden West)** (la fan-CHOO-la del West)

Minnie (MIN-ee) — Diminutive of *Wilhelmina*. Dutch and German feminine form of *Wilhelm* or *Williahelm*, which was composed from *wil* "will, desire" and *helm* "helmet, protection."

Johnson (JAHN-suhn)— English and Scottish: surname from the personal name *John*, from the Hebrew personal name *Johanan*, meaning "may Jehovah favor (this child)"

Ramerez (rah-MIH-res) Spanish (Ramírez): surname from the personal name *Ramiro*, composed of the Germanic elements *ragin* 'counsel' + *mari, meri* 'fame'.

Rance (raens)— English: surname from the personal name *Rand*, a topographic name for someone who lived on the margin of a settlement or on the bank of a river (from Old English *rand* 'rim', used in a topographical sense).

Sonora — City in California, founded by Mexican miners during the Gold Rush. From the state of *Sonora, Mexico*.

Monterey — City on the coast of central Calif.: former capital (until 1846) of California. From *Puerto de Monterrey*, literally "port of Monterrey," after the viceroy of New Spain (1602)

Sacramento — The capital of California — Sacramento, California — from an Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese word meaning *sacrament*. From *sacrare* "to make sacred, consecrate"

The use of names in *The Golden Girl of the West*. Ex. Handsome, Happy, Wowkle, Billy Jackrabbit

What were common names of the time?

Top 5 names of the 1850 (from the Census of 1850):

Male: John, William, James, George, Charles.

Female: Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah, Ann, Martha.

What are some examples of American Indian Names?

- See names on photo collage of "Americanized" Native American's from the Smithsonian Institute Archives

Definitions:

(a.k.a): abbreviation for “also known as”

Alias (adverb): otherwise called : otherwise known as <Dick Johnson alias Ramerrez>

Gold Rush: (noun) Date: 1876

- 1 : a rush to newly discovered goldfields in pursuit of riches
- 2 : the headlong pursuit of sudden wealth in a new or lucrative field

Mine: (adjective) from the Middle English *min*, meaning “my”

(noun) Middle English *mine* "a pit or tunnel for digging out coal, gold, or diamonds," from early French *mine* (same meaning)

- 1 : a pit or tunnel from which minerals (as coal, gold, or diamonds) are taken
- 2 : a deposit of ore
- 3 : an underground passage dug beneath an enemy position
- 4 : an explosive device placed in the ground or water and set to explode when disturbed
- 5 : a rich source <a mine of information>

(verb)

- 1 : to dig or form mines under a place
- 2 : to obtain from a mine <mine coal>
- 3 : to lay military mines in or under <mine a harbor>
- 4 : to work in a mine

prospect: (verb) Date: 1841

- : to explore an area especially for mineral deposits
- : to inspect (a region) for mineral deposits

vigilante: a member of a group of volunteers who decide on their own to stop crime and to punish criminals

want/wanted: (verb/adverb)

- 1 : to be without : *lack* <this coat is wanting a button>
- 2 : to feel or have the need of : *require* <our house wants painting>
- 3 : to desire, wish, or long for something <wanted a chance to play>
- 4 : *ought* <you want to be very careful>
- 5 : to seek in order to arrest <was wanted for murder>

Phonics and Phonemic Awareness:

Letter Recognition: Name the letters in a word. Ex. **sing** = **s-i-n-g**.

Letter/Sound Association: Name the letters and the beginning and ending sound in a word. **F**-aus-**t**

Match and list words with the same beginning or ending sounds. Ex. **Rance** and **Ramerrez** have the same beginning letter “**r**” and sound /**r**/; but **Rance** and **Ramerrez** end with different letters and ending sounds.

Syllables: Count the syllables in a word. Ex.: Gol-den

Match and list words with the same number of syllables. Clap out syllables as beats. Ex.: 1 syllable 2 syllables 3 syllables **bass** = **bass** **tenor** = **ten-or** **soprano** = **so-pra-no**

Phoneme Substitution: Play with the beginning sounds to make silly words. What would a “boprano” sound like? (Also substitute middle and ending sounds.) Ex. **soprano**, **boprano**, **toprano**, **koprano**.

Phoneme Counting: How many sounds in a word? Ex. **sing** = **4**

Phoneme Segmentation: Which sounds do you hear in a word? Ex. **sing = s/i/n/g.**

Reading Skills: Build skills using related educator documents.

Concepts of Print: Sentence structure, punctuation, directionality.

Parts of speech: Noun, verb, adjective, adverb, prepositions.

Vocabulary Lists: Ex. *The Golden Girl of the West*, Opera glossary, Music and Composition terms

Reading Comprehension:

Story Development: Character desires and motivation; Cause and effect: What made this happen?

The sequencing of events, climax, and resolution.

Read:

Opera source material: Puccini's 1910 opera was based on David Belasco's 1905 play, *The Girl of the Golden West*, which in turn was based on real life people and events.

Additional stories relevant to this production: *By the Great Horned Spoon* by Sid Fleishman, *Chang's Paper Pony* by Eleanor Coerr, *Tales from Gold Mountain* by Paul Yee, *Gold Fever!: Tales from the California Gold Rush* by Rosalyn Schanzer, *Seeds of Hope: The Gold Rush Diary of Susanna Fairchild, California Territory 1849* by Kristiana Gregory, *Digger: The Tragic Fate of the California Indians from the Missions to the Gold Rush* by Jerry Stanley, *The Luck of Roaring Camp* by Bret Harte.

Creative writing:

Reinterpret the story by creating a new version using your own characters, time period and setting.

Explore different genres of writing: poetry, song text, libretto, script for media arts, biography, autobiography, short story, historical novel, etc.

Explore literary devices such as the use of point of view, internal/external conflict, repetition of phrases and foreshadowing.

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Analysis and Interpretation: Expository writing, critiques/reviews.

Persuasive Writing: Letter writing, copywriting: advertising, fundraising, press release.

Write about what you would do in Ramerrez's place, or in Minnie's place.

Write about what would happen to the characters if the story continued.

Set the story in a different time and place. Update the dialogue.

LITERARY RESPONSE AND ANALYSIS

Elements of a Story:

Character, plot, setting, conflict.

Vocabulary:

Reading for understanding using the subtitles on videos and related educator documents.

Genres:

Fantasy vs. Reality, non-fiction, novel, play.

Themes:

Redemption, and the redemptive power of love

Jealousy/Trust/Betrayal

Unrequited love, mutual love

Forgiveness

Changing destiny, fate

Character Actions and Motives: How do characters' actions move story along? What are characters' real motives? Contrasts of character traits drive story forward. Contrast characters of Minnie and her servant as different types of women.

Symbolism/metaphors:

Gold as metaphor for trust; storm in Act II as metaphor for heightened emotions.

The use of the word "mine" as a double-entendre.

Archetypes: Aggressive sheriff, innocent yet tough woman, supportive band of brothers led by sympathetic Sonora, bad boy turned good.

Character Development: Growth & depth beyond expected roles of good and evil. Ex. Ramerrez is redeemed; Minnie stands up for herself; the men learn to forgive.

Alliteration: Recognize the similarities of sounds and rhythmic patterns in the libretto.

Figurative Language: Simile, Metaphor, Hyperbole, Personification, Allegory:

Language style and music reflects emotion of characters, and instrumental sounds or musical phrases can be used symbolize character.

Rance has short, clipped music with short lines.

Ramerrez' music is much more lyrical.

WRITING STRATEGIES**Analysis and Interpretation:**

The Girl of the Golden West production materials: artist biographies, program and program notes, synopsis, expository writing, critiques/reviews, etc.

Persuasive Writing:

Letter writing (Boys writing to parents to persuade them they're ok, or to ask for money; Ramerrez writing to boys for forgiveness; Minnie writing to boys to pardon Ramerrez; Rance writing to Minnie to convince her to marry him)

Copywriting: advertising, fundraising, press release.

Scenes, letters, diary or blog pages can be written from a particular character's point of view; make sure to take relationships between characters into account. Diary pages could focus on how characters convince themselves to do something (Minnie decides to hide Ramerrez)—internal debate.

WRITTEN AND ORAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS

Debates between characters. Deliver persuasive speeches, identify tactics used.

Write a monologue with two scenes based on the alternate points of view held by a single character.

Spelling: Spell the names of the characters in *The Girl of the Golden West*.

Facial cues, expressions, gestures can sometimes amplify message being delivered, or can sometimes run contrary to meaning of words (subtext).

LISTENING AND SPEAKING

Oral Speaking: Connection between the written words and oral interpretation (recitative and sung), the phrasing and musicality of speech.

Reflection: What did you see, think, hear and feel? Ex. Verbal & written responses to *The Girl of the Golden West*.

Persuasive language: How does Mimi distract Rance to protect Ramerrez?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Giacomo Puccini (composer): biographies, timelines of work.

David Belasco (playwright): biography, timeline of work.

ACTIVITIES

Libretto writing: Adapt *The Girl of the Golden West* to a different time and place.

Story writing: Adapt existing source material; create story/characters. Or write new endings, deleted scenes.

Choose a moment in the story to expand upon. Create your own libretto and music.

Read Belasco play and compare to translation of opera libretto.

Write a letter from one character to another; choose a moment in the story.

Write an “alternate ending,” in which story continues after Minnie and Ramerrez leave camp.

Create a character sketch.

Make a “Wanted” poster for Ramerrez.

Writing activity about what would make you change from a life of crime.

Write diary pages from point of view of gold miners. Write diary pages from point of view of kids who are left behind by gold miner parents.

Write letters home from miners. Write letters miners wrote to attract brides to camp.

Write newspaper articles for miners’ camp.

Write laws for miners’ camp.

Read and report on program articles and reviews. Write your own review of a performance of *The Girl of the Golden West*. Compare and contrast two different versions of *The Girl of the Golden West* available on DVD.

Watch a Western and write a comparison to the opera.

Design a fake facebook or myspace page for a character (exploring avatars—public vs. private persona). Write fake twitter log for characters over the course of 24 hours.

Create written copy: program, poster design, advertising, biography, etc.