



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

Curriculum Connections

California Content Standards
Kindergarten through Grade 12

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

MUSIC

STORYTELLING & MUSIC: WHAT IS AN OPERA?

Character and plot development through musical themes. ("American Indian" music, comedic music in Act I).

Identify themes for different characters.

Instruments representing characters, repetition and variation of themes.

Key plot points: The composer and librettist determine the placement of arias within the libretto to heighten emotion in the story.

What were instruments used in orchestra during Puccini's time?

What instruments could have been found in a mining camp? What kinds of music?

Listen for musical themes and variations; how do variations elicit different responses?

Listen for counterpoint in duets, especially duet between Ramerrez and Minnie in Act I.

How do singing voices approximate human emotion?

Study history of verismo opera. How does Puccini try to use folk music of the West in opera?

Source material for Opera: Novels (Puccini's *La Bohème*, Tan & Wallace's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*); Films (*The Fly*), Real-life events (Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Adams' *Nixon in China*); Related genres – Musical Theater (*Sweeney Todd*, *Rent*), Rock Opera (*Tommy*), popular song versions of opera.

VOCABULARY

Musical Structure: Solos, duets, trios, choral numbers. Why are different forms used for different scenes?

Composition: Arias, recitative, overture, incidental music.

Musical Instructions: Tempo, legato; pianissimo; crescendo, etc.

Voice ranges: Soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone, bass-baritone, countertenor, bass.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Research the history of San Francisco Opera, the Adler Fellows program.

Research famous sopranos and tenors who have played the roles of Ramerrez and Minnie.

Giacomo Puccini: Biography, timeline of works, signature sound within genres: sonatas, symphonies, masses and requiem, operas.

ACTIVITIES

Listen to multiple recordings of *The Girl of the Golden West* and study different interpretations.

Learn and memorize songs from *The Girl of the Golden West*.

Create and perform songs for the characters/events of *The Girl of the Golden West* using instruments and voices.

Study score of *The Girl of the Golden West*. Does Puccini use any “American” themes in the opera?

What were types of music prevalent in mining camps? What kind of American musical styles would you use today to write this same story?

Research Gold Rush songs; songs about gold; work songs.

Research “American” sound in music (Gershwin, Copland, folk songs, jazz).

What instruments did different culture/ethnicities bring to Gold Country?

Hold a mock hearing representing both parties, Lloyd Weber and the Puccini estate, debating the charges of plagiarism involving *The Girl of the Golden West* and Andrew Lloyd Weber’s “The Music of the Night” from *Phantom of the Opera*.

VISUAL ARTS

How are line, color, shape, and texture used in costumes and sets of *The Girl of the Golden West*?

COLOR

Symbolism of color; color associated with particular characters.

The emotion of color. Ex. red=passionate, blue=calm, yellow=cheerful.

Personal associations with color.

How do you reveal character traits through the use of color?

Examine contrast of light and dark; use of lighting.

The use of lighting to establish mood and setting.

Symmetry/contrast in character pairings. Ex. Ramerrez/Rance.

SHAPE

The use of shape in character design.

Positive & Negative Space—the stage is a frame.

TEXTURE

Texture: Material use in sets and costumes.

Visual Texture: Pattern and repetition in sets and costumes.

SPACE

Set design: From 2D plans to 3D construction.

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Listen to the music and read the libretto prior to viewing the opera. Choose design elements based on the music and text.

Design paper dolls of characters. Dress them for different eras.

Create illustrations and storyboards outlining the plot of *The Girl of the Golden West*.

Design a production: dioramas, scale models, backdrops, props, costumes.

Design character make-up, costume, sets and props for classroom operas.

Study use of lighting in production design.

Study clothing of Gold Rush period. What materials would have been used?

ACTIVITIES

Free-association drawing to music. Ex. Figure drawings by Degas, posters by Toulouse-Lautrec.

Study portraiture, both photographic and painted/drawn. How do portraits communicate the character of the sitter? Create self-portraits and portraits of *The Girl of the Golden West* characters. Make decisions about how person will be portrayed.

Study history of photography; daguerrotypes used to attract pioneers to the West; Magic Lantern.

Study Native American artworks, designs, textiles of Gold Rush Country.

Use Native American designs to create artworks.

Create a quilt of the opera's story.

Study artists of Gold Rush period. What were influences of different cultures? What materials were used for painting?

Create a miner's sketch journal.

Draw a wanted poster for Ramerrez.

Find contemporary paintings/drawings of mining camps.

Create a deck of cards with images of the West/images of the opera.

Draw a treasure map location gold in mining camp.

Design currency for the mining camp.

Design a coin commemorating the Gold Rush. Ex. California Diamond Jubilee half-dollar

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Study the work of visual artists who have designed performing arts productions: Gerald Scarfe, David Hockney, Julie Taymor, Marc Chagall, Maurice Sendak, Oskar Kokoschka, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, William Kentridge, Gianni Versace, Bill Viola.

Study the art of George Caleb Bingham, Frederic Remington, and paintings from Oakland Museum & the Crocker Art Museum's joint exhibit "The Art of the Gold Rush!"

Enrico Caruso's caricature of the rehearsals for the world premiere of *La fanciulla del West*

THEATRE

STAGING

Stage vocabulary: Upstage, downstage, levels, blocking.

Practice staging a crowd scene.

Create entrances and exits for different characters in opera; what would their music be?

Theater Exercises: Tableaux, pantomime, improvisation, vocal projection.

Stage etiquette & audience behavior.

Opera Production Team: Director, stage manager, choreographer, designer, diction coach, choreographer, lighting, supernumeraries, etc.

In-House Personnel: Marketing, accounting, ticket takers, ushers etc.

ACTIVITIES

Create vignettes and tableaux of scenes in *The Girl of the Golden West*. Look at contemporary photographs for inspiration.

Research types of theater that might have come to miners' camp.

Research world of theater during time of Gold Rush, both in Gold Country and in the rest of North America.

Research popular stories of theater pieces during this time.

Research history of theater in San Francisco.

Create "deleted scenes" and "alternate endings" for the opera.

Create a show to entertain "boys" in the camp.

Act opera's story through different genres: melodrama, Western, soap opera.

Research source material of *The Girl of the Golden West*: play by David Belasco.

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Paint Your Wagon (1951) The Broadway musical, written by Alan Jay Lerner (lyrics) & Frederick Loewe (music), is set in a California mining camp during the Gold Rush

Stephen Sondheim's musical *Road Show* (2008) tells the story of the adventures of Addison and Wilson Mizner, from the beginning of the 20th century, from the Alaskan Gold Rush to the 1930's Florida real estate boom. The musical was also presented under the names of Gold!, Wise Guys, and Bounce in earlier incarnations.

DANCE

Study dance and creative movement in Stage-Blocking. Ex: Dancing scenes in Act I

Create crowd dances. Study how groups can move together or in contrast in a dance.

Fight Choreography. Ex. Fight in Act II.

ACTIVITIES

Create character dances: mirror dancing—partners and symmetry, with and without touching.

Create dances/movement based on character's emotion; use vocabulary to describe movement. Teach someone to do it.

Interpret emotions through dance. Ex. Joy, fear, sadness.

Interpreting the instruments through dance— improv to music.

Create a dance for scenes that need it. Ex. Act I dance scene.

Choose a dance style that best represents each character.

Explore social dancing and dance etiquette of Gold Rush: polka, quadrille, waltz, square dance, clogging.

Explore American choreographers, such as Agnes de Mille and Martha Graham.

MEDIA ARTS

Explore communication technologies: from smoke signals, pony express, phone, telegraph, and Twitter.

Research how innovations in technology have influenced the development of Opera: Acoustics and Lighting, Audio Recording, Film and Video, the development of Supertitles, Internet.

Learn about technology currently used by SF Opera: technology used in staging, SFO's Media Suite, podcasts, cinemacasts, simulcasts, opera vision, etc.

Explore jobs in the media arts at the Opera.

Learn about experiments in future technology use involving opera, such as the development of Personal Opera @ MIT Media Lab, *Death and the Powers*.

Use television, films, web content to teach media literacy.

Opera & Popular Culture: Cartoons (Bugs Bunny in *What's Opera, Doc?*, *The Rabbit of Seville*); Television (*Sesame Street*); Movies (*Pretty Woman*); Commercials (Nike's 1993 ad *Charles Barkley of Seville*); Event themes (*Nessun Dorma - 1994 World Cup*).

How is opera advertised? Research San Francisco Opera's advertising and media efforts.

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Films & DVD of *The Girl of the Golden West* and other operas, related films

Charlie Chaplin's silent classic, *The Gold Rush* (1925). The Little Tramp goes the Klondike in search of gold and finds it and more.

Girl of the Golden West (1938), a black and white movie starring Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald singing music by Sigmund Romberg and lyrics by Gus Kahn.

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre (1948) Humphrey Bogart, Walter Huston and Tim Holt star in John Huston's 3 time Oscar winning film.

Spaghetti Westerns, such as Sergio Leone's trilogy starring Clint Eastwood, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*.

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers (1954)

Paint Your Wagon (1969)

ACTIVITIES

Film and Animation: Explore photographic stopmotion techniques. Ex. Use digital media to create 1-minute scenes from *The Girl of the Golden West*.

Use digital audio to record student readings, musical performances.

Create a 30-second audio spot, a one-minute podcast, and/or a *The Girl of the Golden West* activities website.

Create a public service announcement alerting the public to be on the look out for Ramerrez. Study use of blue screen to put yourselves in different environments like hell.

Create a graphic treatment for the opera's title.