



San Francisco Opera's Verdi's *La Traviata*

Curriculum Connections California Content Standards Grade 5 through Grade 12

LANGUAGE ARTS

WORD ANALYSIS, FLUENCY, AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Word origins

La Traviata ("via" means street or way in Italian) — woman who has lost her way, fallen woman

Consumption* — the word "consumption" has multiple definitions:

- 1) medical (illness / tuberculosis)
- 2) economic (the use of goods and services) *refer to "consumption" definition sheet

demimonde – (French) demi *half* + monde *world*

- 1) A class of women kept by wealthy protectors
- 2) A group having little respect or reputation

courtesan (from French *corte* 'court')

flapper — A young woman of the 1920s who flouted convention in her dress and behaviour/behavior.

"It" girl (*British*) A woman who is in vogue, typically as an actress, model, socialite, or the like. The term originally applied to actress Clara Bow, who starred in a film titled *It*.

Belle Epoque (French) Belle *Beautiful* Epoque *Era*

Fin-de-siecle (French) "end of the century"

Vocabulary Lists: Ex. Opera glossary, Music and Composition terms.

READING COMPREHENSION

Story Development: Character desires and motivation; Cause and effect: What made this happen?, sequencing of events, climax, resolution.

Read:

Opera source material: The novel, *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas, *filis* was based on real life people and events. Read stories about Marie du Plessis, Verdi and Giuseppina Strepponi.

Additional Jazz Age stories relevant to this production: *The Great Gatsby*, *Bernice Bobs her Hair*

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. Alfredo's theme *Un di felice*, first heard in the overture, is repeated throughout the opera.

“Misterioso, altero,
Croce e delizia al cor!”

“Mysterious, unattainable,
The torment and delight of my heart.”

In the aria *Sempre Libera*, Violetta is singing that she must be free. She hears Alfredo singing this phrase from offstage.

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:

The redemptive power of love

Love, loyalty, and duty (paternal, filial, friendship, class and love of self)

Self-Respect: Material vs. Moral Wealth & Status

Character actions and motives: how do characters' actions move story along?
What are characters' real motives? Contrasts of character traits drives story forward.

Symbolism/metaphors: The camellia is a symbol of the transience of life. Color can represent character and emotional states.

The language of flowers — How people use flowers to send messages.

Archetypes: The dying “fallen” woman who is more upstanding than the so-called “good” people, ardent young lover, paternal authority figure, entitled rich older man, fair weather friends, loyal servant.

Character Development: Growth & depth beyond expected roles of good and evil. Ex. Violetta proves to the father that she is a moral character.

Figurative Language: Simile, Metaphor, Hyperbole, Personification, Allegory.
Language style and music reflects emotion of characters (Violetta seems to think

out loud, and her feverish gaiety masks true feelings. Alfredo's language is much simpler, more straightforward.)

WRITING STRATEGIES

Analysis and Interpretation: *La Traviata* production materials: artist biographies, program and program notes, synopsis, expository writing, critiques/reviews, etc.

Persuasive Writing: Letter writing (Alfredo writing letter to Violetta, Giorgio writing letter to Violetta, Violetta writing letter to Giorgio); 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 (Violetta decides to give up Alfredo)—internal debate.

WRITTEN AND ORAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS

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

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 *La Traviata*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Giuseppe Verdi and Francesco Maria Piave (composer and librettist): biographies, timelines of work.

Alexandre Dumas *films*: biography, timeline of work.

Marie du Plessis: biography.

ACTIVITIES

Create a character sketch.

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

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

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

Read and report on program articles and reviews. Write your own review of a performance of *La Traviata*. Compare and contrast two different versions of *La Traviata* available on DVD.

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.

Read newspaper, magazine and web society pages and gossip columns:

- Have students create their own demimonde.
- Create a society magazine, web magazine, talk show/entertainment program detailing the lives and intrigues of characters.
- Create diary/blog pages/Twitter blasts/web avatars for the characters in *La Traviata*.
- Conduct debates between characters.