



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

Curriculum Connections California Content Standards Grade 5 through Grade 12

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

MUSIC

STORYTELLING & MUSIC: WHAT IS AN OPERA?

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

Character and plot development through musical themes.

Instruments representing characters, repetition and variation of themes.

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

Listen for counterpoint in duets, especially duet between Alfredo and Violetta in Act I.

How do singing voices approximate human emotion? Especially coloratura soprano performance.

Study form of bel canto aria (i.e. Alfredo's Act II aria)

VOCABULARY

Musical Structure: Solos, duets, trios, choral numbers.

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

History of San Francisco Opera, the Adler Fellows program.

Research famous sopranos and tenors who have played the roles of Violetta and Alfredo.

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

ACTIVITIES

Listen to multiple recordings of *La Traviata* and study different interpretations.

Learn and memorize songs from *La Traviata*.

Create and perform songs for the characters/events of *La Traviata* using instruments and voices.

Compare structure of bel canto arias to structure of modern-day songs; examine for similar patterns.

Study score of *La Traviata*: [http://imslp.org/wiki/La_Traviata_\(Verdi,_Giuseppe\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/La_Traviata_(Verdi,_Giuseppe))

Explore the fallen woman persona through music. Research songs written in different time periods on this theme. Examples are songs by Coward, Porter, Ellington, et al. from the Jazz Age: *Lady is a Tramp*, *Love for Sale*, *Sophisticated Lady*, *Poor Little Rich Girl* and popular songs from later eras: Donna Summer's *Bad Girls*, Madonna's *Material Girl*, Lady Gaga's *The Fame*.

VISUAL ARTS

How are line, color, shape, and texture used in costumes and sets of *La Traviata*?

COLOR

Symbolism of color; color associated with particular characters.

Symmetry/contrast in character pairings.

Examine contrast of light and dark; use of lighting.

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.

ACTIVITIES

Free-association drawing to music. Use figure drawings by Degas, posters by Toulouse-Lautrec as inspiration.

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

Look at works of art from mid-19th century Paris, especially those depicting demimonde. Examine pictures of courtesans and actresses. Look for particular symbolism, colors, ways they are depicted.

Study the development of photography, how does photography affect painting (point of view, atmosphere). Take portraits in style of photographers Félix Nadar, Weegee, Gordon Parks, Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, Annie Leibowitz.

Study photos from *The Material World* by Peter Menzel: what kind of possessions define people? What kinds of things are people willing to do to acquire possessions?

Create celebrity collages or illustrations (inspired by Warhol) of characters in *La Traviata*. Express character traits through symbolism, fashion.

If studying the tradition of Day of the Dead, create an altar for Violetta.

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 *La Traviata*.

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

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

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Opera & Visual 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.

THEATRE

Explore culture of celebrity, stardom.

STAGING

Stage vocabulary: Upstage, downstage, levels, blocking.

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.

Research source material of *La Traviata*: play by Alexandre Dumas *fils*.

Research famous actresses who have played Camille/Violetta role.

ACTIVITIES

Create tableaux of scenes in *La Traviata*.

DANCE

Dance and Creative Movement in Stage-Blocking. Ex: Party scene in Act I, dance scene in Act III.

Fight Choreography. Ex. Fight in Act III.

ACTIVITIES

Character Dances: Mirror dancing—partners and symmetry.

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

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 and Act II party scenes.

Choose a dance style that best represents each character.

Study dances based on *La Dame aux Camélias*: Frederick Ashton's *Marguerite and Armand*; John Neumeier's *La Dame aux Camélias* set to Chopin.

Explore social dancing and dance etiquette of 19th century France and of Jazz Age (Charleston, Foxtrot, shimmy, rag).

MEDIA ARTS

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.

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 Wabbit of Seville*); Television (*Sesame Street*); Movies (*Pretty Woman*);

Commercials (Nike's 1993 ad *Charles Barkley of Seville*); Event themes (*Nessun Dorma - 1994 World Cup*).

Films & DVD of *La Traviata* and other operas, related films: *Camille*, *Pretty Woman*, *Gigi*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Sweet Charity*.

ACTIVITIES

Film and Animation: Explore photographic stopmotion techniques. Ex. Use digital media to create 1-minute scenes from *La Traviata*.

Use digital audio to record student readings, musical performances.

Create a 30-second audio spot, a one-minute podcast, and/or a *La Traviata* activities website.