



San Francisco Opera's Puccini's *MADAMA BUTTERFLY*

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. What is the difference between major and minor keys and how do changes between keys help tell the story?

How does orchestral music enhance what characters are singing? How does it act as another character?

How does music associated with a particular character enhance their class status?

How does Puccini use ensembles to tell the story?

Did Puccini add coded messages to the opera through the music?

How does music associated with a particular character enhance their class status?

What kind of music would Puccini's Italian audience have expected at the time? How did he write a "Japanese tragedy" for them?

What kinds of instruments does Puccini use in the opera to create a "Japanese" sound? How was Puccini right or wrong about the sound of Japanese music?

Is the music different when Butterfly is speaking Japanese and English?

Research shamisen and other Japanese instruments. How are contemporary musicians in San Francisco using traditional Japanese instruments such as the shamisen?

Identify American and Japanese melodies that Puccini uses throughout the opera.

Examine the formal differences between Japanese music and Western music, i.e. use of pentatonic scales

How do instruments represent characters? Identify 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.

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*, *Miss Saigon*), Rock Opera (*Tommy*), popular song versions of opera.

VOCABULARY

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

Composition: Arias, recitative, overture, incidental music. Identify characters who have arias in the opera.

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

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

Research traditional instruments like a harpsichord that would have been used in Mozart's time.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Giacomo Puccini: Biography, timeline of works, signature sound within genres: symphonic works, string quartets, requiems, operas.

Research other musicians working before or at the same time as Puccini; how was he different from everyone else? What kinds of composers came after Puccini?

What were common topics of operas during Puccini's time?

ACTIVITIES

Listen to multiple recordings of *Madama Butterfly* and study different interpretations.

Learn and memorize songs from *Madama Butterfly*.

Create and perform songs for the characters/events of *Madama Butterfly* using instruments and voices.

Research Japanese traditional instruments.

Create a model of a shamisen.

Graph out characters in the opera; while watching a clip of the opera, fill out chart describing look, movement, voice of each character. How does the director tell the story through these details?

VISUAL ARTS

How are line, color, shape, and texture used in costumes and sets of *Madama Butterfly*?

LINE

Use of line qualities: soft or hard, wavy or angular, spirals.

COLOR

Symbolism of color; color associated with particular characters.

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

Personal associations with color.

Revealing character traits through the use of color—how do the characters' costumes, including fabrics and colors, reflect their status?

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. How is texture used to convey status?

SPACE

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

LIGHT

The use of lighting to establish mood and setting.

Examine contrast of light and dark; use of lighting.

The use of lighting to establish mood and setting.

How does time of day affect the lighting and the mood on the stage?

How are shadows and shading used in the opera to convey meaning?

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.

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 the time and setting for *Madama Butterfly*. What materials would have been used?

ACTIVITIES

Create illustrations and storyboards outlining the plot of *Madama Butterfly*.

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

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

Listen to audio-only examples prior to viewing the opera. Choose design elements based on the music and text.

Draw silhouettes of characters; draw characters in other styles, like anime.

Design kimonos for Butterfly, for the happy and sad moments of the opera. What colors would she wear?

Research Japanese, Italian and American dress during the period of the opera. What would Butterfly have worn if she had moved to America?

Puppetry: Create your own version of *Madama Butterfly* using puppets (paper bags, stick puppets, shadow puppets, marionettes, and bunraku).

Masks: Create masks of *Madama Butterfly* characters.

Research traditional Japanese crafts like ceramics and fabric-weaving.

Create origami for the characters in the opera.

Create ottoke of your ancestors.

Look at Japanese depictions of nature. Draw your own view of nature drawing upon Japanese compositional conventions.

Design a garden for Butterfly's house.

Explore the language of flowers.

Study historic and current Japanese artists like Utamaro (1753-1806), Hokusai (1760-1849), Hiroshige (1797-1858), Hiroshi Sugimoto (b. 1948), Hiyao Miyazaki (b. 1941). How have these artists influenced Western perspectives about Japan?

Study visual depictions of Westerners in Japanese art.

Study Japanese-American artists like Chiura Obata, Ruth Asawa, and Isamu Noguchi. How is their cultural heritage reflected in their art?

Explore the history of Western collection of Japanese art.

Examine the sets that Obata designed for the San Francisco Opera Production of *Madama Butterfly* in 1924.

Create an advertisement for a performance of *Madama Butterfly*.

Compare two different filmed versions of *Madama Butterfly*; which visualization is more effective and why?

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Illustrated children's books of *Madama Butterfly* and other operas.

Free-association drawing to music. Ex. Maurice Sendak's *Fantasy Sketches*.

Study Boris Aronson's set designs for the 1976 Sondheim musical *Pacific Overtures*, directed by Harold Prince.

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

STAGING

Stage vocabulary: Upstage, downstage, levels, blocking.

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

Practice walking like Butterfly and Pinkerton. How are their walks different?

Practice walking like a member of the opposite sex. How do you carry yourself differently?

How do directors make someone stand out in a crowd scene? (Cherubino among girls chorus)

How do performers move onstage differently than offstage? How do they have to move so that the audience can translate their movements?

How do the performers act when they're singing their thoughts vs. singing to each other?

Stage a crowd scene.

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

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

Research how Westerners were portrayed in Japanese theater.

Research Japanese theater styles: noh, kyogen and kabuki, and Bunraku and shadow puppetry.

Research Japanese theater make-up and costume (including masks).

Research the design of a typical Japanese theater.

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Research additional theatrical works with similar themes, such as the Sondheim musical *Pacific Overtures*.

DANCE

Dance and Creative Movement in Stage-Blocking. Ex: wedding scene.

Research dances of Puccini's time: wedding dances, promenades.

How is dance incorporated into the opera, into the music of the opera?

How is age, gender and nationality communicated through the way performers move in a dance?

How have modern choreographers used Mozart's music?

What are the roles of choreographers, dance captains and dancers?

ACTIVITIES

Character Dances: Mirror dancing—partners and symmetry.

Match movement with vocabulary. Ex. glide, slither, leap, tremble.

Interpret emotions through dance. Ex. Joy, fear.

Interpreting the instruments through dance— improv to music.

Study geisha dances and Japanese festival dances. Compare to contemporary American dances.

Choreograph a fan dance.

Choose a dance style that best represents each character. Ex. Butterfly and Pinkerton.

Research to see how choreographers have used Puccini's music for dance. Ex: *Puccini Passion!* Dances choreographed by Nilas Martins.

MEDIA ARTS

Watch DVD of *Madama Butterfly* and other operas. Watch different productions and compare.

Watch selections from the movie version of *Madama Butterfly* directed by Frederic Mitterand.

Look at filmed versions of the *Madama Butterfly* story, like *M Butterfly* and *Miss Saigon*.

Research how the music from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* has been used in film and commercials.

Research clips of *Madama Butterfly* found on the Internet, including Opera Imaginaire's animated short, *Un Bel Di*, or Mary Martin and Noel Coward's comedic version of *One Fine Day*.

Research Japanese samurai films such as Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*.

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.

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

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*).

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Films & DVD of *Madama Butterfly* and other Puccini operas, related films

Opera Imaginaire, a collection of animated interpretations of twelve of opera's most popular arias, features "Un Bel Di".

ACTIVITIES

Film and Animation: Explore photographic stop motion techniques. Ex. Use digital media to create 1-minute scenes from *Madama Butterfly*.

Create a poster to advertise a performance of *Madama Butterfly*. What information needs to be included?

Use digital audio to record student readings, musical performances.

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

Create a graphic treatment for the opera's title.

Create a fake blog or Facebook page for one of the characters.