



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

Curriculum Connections

California Content Standards
Kindergarten through Grade 12

SOCIAL STUDIES

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Self-Identity.

Family: Immediate & Extended. Caring sisterly relationship. Why was Butterfly disowned by her family?

Roles of family members in your life and the choices you make.

What are the differences in families in Japan and America?

Time: Past, Present, Future.

Place: Neighborhood, City, State, Continent, World, Universe.

CIVICS

Social Hierarchy: Class, Status. Ex. royalty, servants. How is class indicated by the music, the costumes and other elements in *Madama Butterfly*?

Types of Government: Constitutional Monarchy (Japan) and Democracy (United States).

Study military hierarchy. What was Pinkerton's rank? How did it impact his world view?

Religion: Ritual and symbols.

Political events during Puccini's time.

GEOGRAPHY

The Opera's setting: Where is this place? What is this culture?

Research Japan as an archipelago.

How are spirits of Japanese Shintoism embodied in the land?

Map the locations mentioned in the opera.

Examine where you live; how does your environment represent your lifestyle or personality?

Location of Puccini's birth. Where else did he live?

Trace Puccini's travels and draw a map of the different places where he lived.

HISTORY

Research when Puccini was born and the time period when Puccini lived. What are the differences and similarities between Puccini's Europe and Europe today?

Examine class system during Puccini's time.

Research the development of *Madama Butterfly*. Why would an artist be commissioned to write an opera? How do new operas get made today?

Research the initial reception of *Madama Butterfly*, the play and the opera. Why did the opera initially fail and how was it revised?

How were David Belasco and librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa right about the Japanese culture at the time of the opera? How were they wrong?

Social structures and class relations

- Examine class system of Japan during Butterfly's time.
- Learn about the currency used in the time of *Madama Butterfly*. How did the Pinkerton make his money? How does he treat the servants who care for him in his house?

The System and Laws

- Research Japanese law. How could Pinkerton have married Butterfly for 999 years, with a monthly option to get out?
- Research samurai culture. What would have been the status of Butterfly's family before he committed seppuku?
- Research history of Japanese royalty. Why would Butterfly's father have committed seppuku at the behest of the Emperor?

Women in *Madama Butterfly*

- Research the roles for women in Japan.
- What were ideals of beauty in Japan during *Madama Butterfly*'s time, for both men and women? What would have clothes looked like for upper and lower classes?
- Compare and contrast wedding traditions in the United States and Japan.

Research the war and the role of the military.

- Research the history of relations between the U.S. and Japan. Read President Fillmore's letters to the Emperor of Japan. How did they change over time?
- Read the Kanagawa Treaty. Did all nations benefit? If so, how?
- Research the reasons why the Emperor did not want to open up Japan to the West. Based on what happened once they opened the country, was he justified?
- Research the history of American soldiers living abroad. How do they adjust, or not, to the local culture?
- Study American and Japanese imperialism.
- Examine the connections between Japan and San Francisco. Visit the Asian Art Museum's Early Japanese Ambassadors exhibition.
- Learn about the historical importance of the War Memorial Opera House as the place where the Treaty of Peace with Japan was signed by 48 nations in 1951, officially ending World War II.

History of Opera

- How Opera began, history of San Francisco Opera, history of the Adler Fellow Program.

ACTIVITIES

Map settings in which play and opera take place.

Create timelines of events in opera; Puccini's operas.

Research the story of *Madama Butterfly*. Was the story based on a real character?

Create an organizational chart of the character relationships in *Madama Butterfly*.

Research Japanese, Italian and American dress during the period of the opera. How does clothing indicate culture and status?

Examine the characters of Goro and Sharpless; how do they serve as translators between the two cultures? What are their costumes like?

Pick another time period in which to set *Madama Butterfly*. Research and design costumes and sets to reflect trends, society at that time.

Examine Western stereotypes of Japan; how are they manifested in the opera? Research American viewpoints of Japan and how they've changed over time. How might the opera be different if the composer and librettists were Japanese? What if they were Americans?

What was the status of women in Japan during the time of the opera? How were Japanese women perceived, by Japanese men and by Western men? How were American women perceived, by Japanese men and by Western men?

Research the culture of the geisha in Japan. What was their role in society? Who would be the geishas of today? What kind of social background or class did Butterfly come from? What would have been Butterfly's class, social status as a geisha?

What were ideals of beauty Japan and America, for both men and women at the time of the opera? What would have clothes looked like for upper and lower classes, in Japan and America?

How would servants like Suzuki have been educated during that time?

What are the jobs of the characters in the opera? Examine jobs in Japan during the time of the opera. Examine the guild system.

Study Japanese and American holidays; how are they different and how are they the same? What are the typical foods used to celebrate holidays?

Research Japanese theater traditions. Who were allowed to be actors?

Compare and contrast wedding traditions, in Japan and America. What were divorce laws in Japan and America?

Write a letter from one character to another using the writing materials used at the time of *Madama Butterfly* (quill pens, wax seals, parchment).