



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

Curriculum Connections

California Content Standards
Kindergarten through Grade 12

LANGUAGE ARTS

WORD ANALYSIS, FLUENCY, AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Definitions:

Bonze — a Buddhist monk, from *bonso*, *bon* "ordinary" + *so* "monk"

Kami — "superior, lord"

kimono — *ki* "wear" + *mono* "thing"

Nagasaki — *naga* "long" + *saki* "headland, promontory."

Nakodo — "matchmaker" or a "go-between"

obi — the sash worn with a *kimono*

ottoké — small statues representing the souls of ancestors

samurai — "warrior, knight" from *sabura* "to be in attendance, to serve."

seppuku — "cut open the stomach," also referred to as *hari-kiri* from *hara* "belly" + *kiri* "to cut."

shoji (*shoshi* in opera) — barrier, screen

Search for additional words in *Madama Butterfly* that are unfamiliar and find definitions and roots.

Take lines from Italian libretto and translate phrases using program such as Google Translator or Babel Fish Translator. Do the supertitles match these translations exactly? If not, why not?

Examine contrasting vocabulary. What kinds of words does Pinkerton use as compared to Butterfly?

Research Japanese names. Why is the son named "Trouble"?

Find word analogies used in *Madama Butterfly*.

Reading Skills: Build skills using the subtitles on the video and related educator documents.

Concepts of Print: Sentence structure, punctuation, directionality.

Parts of speech: Noun, verb, adjective, adverb, prepositions.

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

Phonics and Phonemic Awareness:

Letter Recognition: Name the letters in a word. Ex. **Butterfly = B-u-t-t-e-r-f-l-y.**

Letter/Sound Association: Name the letters and the beginning and ending sound in a word. **P**-inkerto-**n**

Match and list words with the same beginning or ending sounds. Ex. **Sharpless** and **Suzuki** have the same beginning letter “s” and sound /s/; but end with different letters and ending sounds. Additional examples: Suzuki, Yamadori, Nagasaki; Cio-Cio-San, Pinkerton.

Syllables: Count the syllables in a word. Ex.: Pink-er-ton

Match and list words with the same number of syllables. Clap out syllables as beats. Ex.: 1 syllable 2 syllables 3 syllables **bass = bass tenor = ten-or soprano = so-pra-no**

Phoneme Substitution: Play with the beginning sounds to make silly words. What would a “boprano” sound like? (Also substitute middle and ending sounds.) Ex. **soprano, boprano, toprano, koprano.**

Phoneme Counting: How many sounds in a word? Ex. **sing = 4**

Phoneme Segmentation: Which sounds do you hear in a word? Ex. **sing = s/i/n/g.**

Reading Comprehension:

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

Creative writing: Interpret the story and create a new version. Create your own characters. Ex. The Broadway musical, *Miss Saigon* updates the story of *Madama Butterfly* by setting the story in Saigon in the 1970’s during the Vietnam War.

Types of text: Students can explore the story of *Madama Butterfly* by writing their own poetry, fairy tales, song text, libretto, script for media arts, biography, etc.

Read: Source material for *Madama Butterfly*, *Madama Butterfly* libretto, letter from Puccini, biographies, etc.

Read the letters President Fillmore wrote to the Emperor of Japan that were delivered by Commodore Perry when the Americans arrived in 1853 to open Japan to the West. Write a persuasive letter based on these letters.

Read the lyrics of “The Star-Spangled Banner”. Rewrite the words based on how the song is used in a scene in *Butterfly*.

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:

Tragedy: melodrama. Trace history of Greek tragedy to current day stories of doomed romance.

Romantic melodrama highlights the relations between men and women.

Themes:

The clash of cultures: East meets West, cultural assimilation

Love and Loyalty vs. Ownership and Power

Honor and Dishonor

Character Actions and Motives: How do characters' actions move story along? What are characters' real motives? Contrasts of character traits drive story forward. Compare the characters traits of Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San, as two people from different cultures.

Symbolism/metaphors: Explore the metaphors of the first act: Pinkerton comparing his marriage to the house. Why is Cio-Cio-San called "Madama Butterfly"?

Archetypes: The young lovers, disapproving elders, faithful friend, men of honor and dishonor (samurai and naval officer).

Character Development: Do the characters grow beyond their expected roles? What is the status of the women vs. the men? How do the characters change by the end of the opera? Examine the relationship between Pinkerton and Butterfly; how do they communicate and how do they miscommunicate?

What are Pinkerton and Butterfly's differing interpretations of the word "love"?

Alliteration: Recognize the similarities of sounds and rhythmic patterns in the libretto.

Figurative Language: Simile, Metaphor, Hyperbole, Personification, Allegory:

Language style and music reflects emotion of characters, and instrumental sounds or musical phrases can be used symbolize character.

WRITING

Explore different genres of writing: poetry, song text, libretto, script for media arts, biography, autobiography, short story, historical novel, etc.

Reinterpret the story by creating a new version using your own characters, time period and setting.

Write about what would happen to the characters if the story continued. Ex. Create a storyboard of *Madama Butterfly* as a soap opera.

Explore literary devices such as the use of point of view, internal/external conflict, repetition of phrases and foreshadowing.

Analysis and Interpretation:

Madama Butterfly production materials: artist biographies, program and program notes, synopsis, expository writing, critiques/reviews, etc.

Research different source materials for *Madama Butterfly*; how do they differ? What do they share in common?

Rewrite libretto using today as a setting. Use contemporary characters: Who would be the Count today? Figaro?

Write about the inscription on Butterfly's dagger, "He dies with honor who cannot live with honor." Can you write a phrase that you would have engraved on a precious object?

Write a passage expressing several characters' inner thoughts at the same time.

Write a passage using nature as a metaphor for something else.

Write instructions for a ritual: the wedding, pouring tea, taking off your shoes before entering a house.

Persuasive Writing:

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 (Cio-Cio-San decides that she will convince Pinkerton to return)—internal debate

Write a letter that Butterfly would write to her son to explain her decision at the end of the opera. It could be a letter she leaves for him to read years later.

Finish the letter that Pinkerton writes to Sharpless explaining his marriage.

Keep a shipboard journal for Pinkerton.

Keep a journal from Suzuki's point of view; what do the other characters look like from her point of view?

Write about what you would do if you were in Butterfly's place, or in Pinkerton's place.

Letter writing, copywriting: advertising, fundraising, press release.

Poetry:

Write a "me" poem for each of the characters: begin the poem with "I am" and list the characteristics of each person in separate phrases.

Write parrot poems from the point of view of the characters. Parrot poems are conversational poems in which partners write each line in turn.

Write a shape poem. Choose a Japanese character (*kanji*), and write a poem that explores the meaning of this word within the shape.

Write a haiku from the point of view of a particular character about a particular moment in the opera.

Write a ballad about nature inspired by the Cherry Blossom duet.

WRITTEN AND ORAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS

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

Write a monologue with two scenes based on the alternate points of view held by a single character.

Spelling: Spell the names of the characters in *Madama Butterfly*.

Facial cues, expressions, gestures can sometimes amplify message being delivered, or can sometimes run contrary to meaning of words (subtext).

Japanese is written vertically, from right to left. Try to write a sentence in this way and see if it is challenging to read in the opposite direction.

Explore the point of views found in the opera; how does Pinkerton perceive Butterfly's family? What is their impression of him?

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 *Madama Butterfly*.

Persuasive language: How does Pinkerton try to reassure Cio-Cio-San that he will return to her?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Giacomo Puccini (composer): biographies, timelines of work.

Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa (librettists): Biography, timeline of works.

ACTIVITIES

Create a character sketch.

Libretto writing: Adapt *Madama Butterfly* (existing source material) or create a new story/characters.

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

Using a letter from one character to another in the opera; edit the letter down to a tweet or Facebook post.

Write a blog post from the point of view of one character.

Write wedding vows for Butterfly and Pinkerton.

Story writing: Adapt existing source material; create story/characters.

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

Read and report on feature articles about *Madama Butterfly*.