Met School Membership Program

La Bohème

Elementary School Teacher Study Guide

The Metropolitan Opera Guild
Metropolitan Opera Guild
Education Department
70 Lincoln Center Plaza
New York, NY 10023
www.operaed.org
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The invention of opera
Opera is a play in which the words are sung. It is different from other art forms, because rather than developing gradually, opera was invented. Here’s how it happened. In the town of Florence in Italy in the 1500s, a group of men, who were later known as the Florentine Camerata, got together and decided to re-create the western world’s first plays: ancient Greek dramas. They knew that the characters in the drama sang or chanted their words and that there was a chorus whose role was to comment on the action in the story. The sound of the Greek music had been lost, but the Camerata didn’t let this put them off.

The Camerata were used to composing songs (arias) sharing characters’ inner feelings with the audience, so that was no problem. But they hit a snag when it came to moving the story forward. Characters must do more than just sing elaborate and beautiful songs to let the audience know how they are feeling – they must also interact, fall in love, plot, and fight. The Camerata were determined that Opera should not be just a few songs linked together with spoken dialogue, so they invented recitative and with that, opera was born. Recitative is what makes opera possible, as it allows for everyday conversation to be sung. In arias, a short sentence is often repeated over and over, with the emphasis being on the beauty of the song and often the virtuosity of the singer. Recitative is more like an exaggerated way of speaking; words tend not to be repeated, and characters imitate real conversation.

Opera spreads like wildfire across Europe
When opera was invented, no one had seen anything like it. It was so new and spectacular that it was an instant hit. In the space of just twenty years, 35 opera houses were built – and that was just in the town of Florence! Opera spread across Europe and a composer called Mozart brought German into the previously Italian-dominated opera scene. He wrote many operas in both German and Italian that are still extremely popular because of their fast-moving plots, interesting stories, and stunning music.

Opera splits in two
During the late 1700s, opera broke into two genres: opera seria (grand, serious opera) and opera buffa (comic opera). Opera buffa eventually evolved into operetta (eg, Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Mikado). Operetta is the predecessor of modern musical theater, like today’s Broadway musicals.

Verdi and Wagner arrive on the scene
It wasn’t until the Romantic period (late 1700s to the mid 1800s) that the image of the fat, loud, opera-singing woman became associated with opera. In all the
European arts, a new spirit of emotionalism, rebellion, and high drama was flowered into the Romantic movement. Not all of the Romantic composers wrote in such a dramatic style, but two composers dominated the opera scene. They were Richard Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi. The German, Wagner, broke away from the tradition of splitting operas into recitatives and arias, and decided to write a particular fragment of music for each character or theme (called a leitmotif). He wove these fragments together to help tell the story of the drama. His operas are very complex and can be daunting even for the most experienced opera lovers – partly because they are incredibly long. However, those who rise to the challenge sometimes end up refusing to listen to anything else because they think Wagner is so brilliant. Wagner’s character Brünnhilde is the prototype for the famous fat lady with horns. Verdi earned his reputation for excellence through his ability to fuse music and drama into a single whole. He was the composer who excited Puccini enough to try his own hand at composition.

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1 Pronounced “VAHG-ner”
What a mouthful!
Puccini, or to give him his full name, Giacomo2 Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini3 (phew! SIX first names!) was born into a musical family in the Italian town of Lucca in 1858. Four generations of his family had been organists at the cathedral, and Puccini learned the family business early. When his father died, Puccini took over his position as organist at the church of San Martino.

Puccini the thief!
To supplement his income and help support his mother, Puccini played piano in local taverns. To bring in extra cash, he even had his younger brother and some friends, who were operating the bellows that powered the church organ, steal some of the organ pipes so that he could sell them. Perhaps this helped him to decide that he wanted to become a composer—he would have had to improvise new harmonies so that the missing pipes (notes) would not be discovered!

Real Life Bohemian
Puccini was a bit of a late starter when it came to composition. It wasn’t until he was 18 and saw a performance of Verdi’s Aida that he realized that he wanted to write music. He went to study at the Milan Conservatory of Music. Puccini’s experiences as a “starving student” influenced La Bohème, which became his most famous opera. La Bohème tells the story of a group of loveable bohemians just like Puccini and his friends Leoncavallo, Mascagni, and Franchetti—who were all composers, too. Just like the bohemians in La Bohème, Puccini and his friends had problems with their landlord; since cooking wasn’t allowed in their building, they used to play piano very loudly to cover up the sound of cooking!

Puccini the Composer
Puccini’s first attempt at opera, Le Villi, was not a huge success, but nonetheless, the music publisher, Giulio Ricordi, offered him a generous contract after the first performance. In those days, publishers were like sponsors, and Ricordi continued to provide encouragement and an allowance to Puccini, in spite of the fact that his next show, Edgar, was also a flop. Puccini went on to write a string of masterpieces, including La Bohème, Tosca, Madama Butterfly, La Fanciulla del West, Gianni Schicchi and Turandot. He is now considered one of the great composers in the history of opera.

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2 Pronounced “Jah–KOH–moh”
3 Pronounced “Pooh–CHEE–nee”
The word “Bohémien” (Bohemian) is French for “gypsy.” It was originally used to describe the nomadic Roma people, whose wanderings took them from their native India through the Middle East, Turkey, Eastern Europe, Spain, and beyond. In the 15th century, Roma from Bohemia (today part of the Czech Republic) migrated to France. Living on the fringes of society, never fully integrating themselves into French culture, they were seen by outsiders as exotic, carefree, and exciting—even a little dangerous. Eventually “Bohemian” came to mean any poor vagabond living for the moment: students, writers, painters, and philosophers included. Bohemians rejected the comforts of bourgeois society, choosing poverty and freedom over stifling success and respectability.

Spirit of the Age
The Bohemians of the nineteenth century embodied their age’s spirit of individualism. After the French Revolution toppled France’s monarchy, and Napoleon’s whirlwind transformed French society, French citizens were suddenly free to choose their own destinies. The grandsons of serfs could now move to cities, start businesses, enter the civil service, even buy their way into the nobility! The power of the individual was hailed everywhere—and Bohemians, who lived by nobody’s rules but their own, were the ultimate individuals.

Bohemian Life in Paris
Parisian Bohemians lived chiefly in the student quarter on the Seine’s left bank, where students and artists crowded together in tiny streets, eating at cheap cafés and sleeping in little attic garrets. They lived well when they could, cheaply when they couldn’t, dressed flamboyantly, and had outrageous affairs. The women of this world couldn’t afford to become students or artists: they were either “grisettes,” working class girls like Mimi who made a living sewing or embroidering, or “lorettes,” who were supported by wealthy lovers.

But the giddy freedom of Bohemian life could sometimes mask its dangers. Before the revolution, artists were supported by wealthy or noble patrons. Bohemian artists, who wanted to challenge the wealthy, not work for them, lived hard lives. Without jobs or patrons, young artists lived for art, scraping together money however they could. We see this struggle in Act I of La Bohème, as the bohemians fight to keep warm, keep a roof over their heads, and keep from starving. The cold, cramped, dirty living conditions many Bohemians endured made illness a constant threat. Tuberculosis carried off many Bohemians—just as it kills the delicate Mimi in La Bohème.

4 A Serf was a peasant who was bound to work for a certain noble on a certain tract of land. In some places, like Russia, they were practically slaves who were owned by their lords and were forbidden from travelling.
Murger’s Bohemia
Author Henry Murger introduced mainstream France to Bohemian life in a series of popular newspaper and magazine "sketches." His novel, *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*, inspired many others—including Puccini, who based his opera *La Bohème* on the book. A Bohemian himself, Murger drew from his own life experiences. Café Momus was Murger’s real life hangout. In his novel, Murger’s characters practically live at the Café Momus: the café’s proprietor complains that they stay at their table for hours, painting, playing backgammon, and refusing to buy anything!

Murger’s characters were also based on real people—and they were a lot less cute and innocent than Puccini’s merry Bohemians. For instance, Puccini’s Musetta is based on Murger’s character Musette, a singer whose beautiful voice was always slightly out of tune. She has a taste for the good life, and she’ll live off a rich man as long as she can stand him, but she always returns to her true love Marcel. In one of Murger’s passages she describes herself by saying: “I lead a mad life...From time to time I have to breathe the air of high living. Every one of my affairs is a couplet, but Marcel [Marcello] is the refrain.”

Mimi, a near-angel in Puccini’s opera, is based on a number of Murger characters—among them innocent young Marie Vimal, who is corrupted by a life of crime and ends up homeless; Lucille Louvette, who died of consumption; and lovely Francine, who fell in love with her neighbor after losing her key in his dark apartment. And Rodolpho? He’s based on Murger himself, of course—the young poet still in awe of the world of beauty and misery around him.
**Meet the Characters**

**Mimi** (Mee-MEE) (soprano):
an innocent young seamstress, simple and charming.

**Musetta** (soprano):
Marcello’s old flame: a beautiful singer and incurable flirt with a big heart.

**Rodolfo** (tenor):
An idealistic young Bohemian poet.

**Marcello** (Mar-CHELL-oh) (baritone):
A young painter: Rodolfo’s best friend and roommate. He is in love with Musetta, but the two are constantly fighting.

**Schaunard** (ShAOW-nard) (baritone):
A musician.

**Colline** (bass):
A philosopher.

**Hint**: Before introducing the story to your class, take a look at the storytelling activity on page 24

You might also want to take a look at the other “First Steps” activities in this book.
The Bohemians at home

Christmas Eve in Paris, around 1830. In the tiny garret that they share with their roommates, painter Marcello and writer Rodolfo are working, joking around to keep their minds off the bitter cold. They've run out of firewood, and they can't afford to buy more. Marcello is about to burn their only chair in the fireplace when Rodolfo has a bright idea. Producing his latest manuscript, he announces that his ideas will catch fire—and his masterpiece will keep them warm. They huddle around the stove as Rodolfo’s play begins to burn. Colline, another roommate, comes home in a foul mood: the city's pawnshops are all closed for Christmas Eve, and he can't get his hands on any money. He joins his friends around the fire.

An Unexpected Feast

Suddenly two shop-boys burst in, carrying food, wine, cigars—and firewood. Their fourth roommate, Schaunard, strides into the apartment. He's had quite an adventure. He ran into a rich Englishman who was looking for a musician. Shaunard thought he wanted music lessons, but the Englishman told him: “Just keep playing until my parrot dies!” Schaunard played for three whole days, until the rich man’s maid took pity on the musician and poisoned the bird. The Bohemian roommates are so enchanted with their feast that they barely pay attention to the poor musician's story. Frustrated with his friends' lack of attention, Shaunard proposes that they save the food he’s brought for later, and celebrate Christmas Eve out on the town.

A Visit from the Landlord

But just as the Bohemians are about to leave, they are interrupted by their landlord, Benoit. He’s come to collect the rent, which is (of course) overdue. The Bohemians decide to distract the old man. Inviting him in, they butter him up with wine and flattery, encouraging him to brag about himself. When the landlord confides that he’s having an affair, the roommates, pretending to be shocked, throw him out of their apartment. Laughing at their trick, Colline, Schaunard and Marcello hurry downstairs, promising to wait for Rodolfo while he finishes an article for a newspaper.

Boy Meets Girl

Rodolfo tries to write, but he isn’t in the mood. Just then, he hears a timid knock at the door. It’s a girl! She’s beautiful, but pale; she is coughing and out of breath. Shyly, she asks if he would light her candle; hers has gone out, and she has no matches. Rodolfo invites her to sit down, gives her a little wine, and lights her candle. She’s about to leave when she realizes that she has left the key to her room somewhere in his apartment. As she stands in the dark doorway of the apartment, her candle flickers, then goes out, and so does Rodolfo’s. They search together in the dark for her lost key, and their hands brush. Rodolfo begins to tell her about his life. He explains that he is a poet, who gets
by on what little he has. He’s a millionaire at heart, he says—and he’s already fallen in love with her. Next it’s her turn to talk about herself. Slowly, shyly, she explains that her name is Mimi, and she embroiders silk flowers for a living. Although her story is simple, it’s clear that she is a gentle girl who loves life very deeply.

Outside, Rodolfo’s friends, who have been waiting for him, shout for him to hurry up. Rodolfo promises them he’ll be along later—and they should reserve two more places at the Café Momus.

**Christmas Eve on the Left Bank**

It’s Christmas Eve and Paris is alive with people. Street vendors advertise snacks and toys, men and women fill the streets, and street children run back and forth excitedly. The Bohemian friends stroll through the madness, shopping and haggling and taking it all in. They arrive at the Café. In a festive mood, Marcello orders the best meal in the house.

But the friends’ dinner is interrupted by the arrival of Musetta, Marcello’s old lover. All eyes are on the pretty girl as she strolls into the Café, followed by her aging admirer, Alcindoro. She prances, poses, complains to the waiter about her meal, and generally makes herself obnoxious to get Marcello’s attention. As the embarrassed Alcindoro squirms beside her, Musetta sings a flirtatious song about her own beauty and charm. Marcello is unable to resist. Sensing victory, Musetta pretends that there’s something wrong with her shoe and sends Alcindoro off to a shoemaker. With the old man out of the way, Marcello and Musetta are joyfully reunited, and the Bohemians charge their dinner to Alcindoro’s bill. The act ends as a marching band crosses the stage, and the crowd cheers the dashing drum major—and the charming Musetta.

**Winter in Paris**

Several months later, outside a small tavern on the edge of town. The voices of passers-by drift through the gentle snow. Among the distant sounds is Musetta’s voice, singing inside the tavern: “Wine is sweet, but young kisses are sweeter.”

Mimi arrives, searching for the tavern; she has heard that Marcello is working there. Marcello comes outside to meet her. Seeing that she’s sick and freezing, he invites her inside, explaining that he is painting a mural in the tavern, and Musetta sings for the customers. But when Mimi learns that Rodolfo is inside, she refuses to come out of the cold. Bursting into tears, Mimi admits that she doesn’t know what to do with Rodolfo. He’s constantly jealous, and they can never stop fighting. She explains that she’s tried to leave him, but they can never stay apart. Spotting Rodolfo coming, Marcello urges Mimi to return home. She pretends to hurry off—but really hides near by.

Rodolfo announces to Marcello that he has decided to leave Mimi for good. He claims that he is dying of boredom, but Marcello senses that there’s more to the story. Rodolfo finally confesses that he loves Mimi more than life itself, but she’s very sick, and he’s afraid that she will die any day. He can’t afford to give her a good, healthy life, and he feels that it is his fault that she is growing worse and worse. Eavesdropping on them from a distance, Mimi realizes just how serious her illness really is. The men hear her
coughing and sobbing, and realize that she has been listening to them. Distracted by Musetta’s distant laugh, Marcello rushes inside to see who his girlfriend is flirting with. Rodolfo is left to speak with Mimi alone.

**Lovers’ Farewell**

Mimi tells Rodolfo that she’s leaving him for good this time. Rodolfo can barely believe it. Together they remember their relationship and think about how hard it will be to part, especially in the winter, when life is so hard. Lost in memories, they melt into eachother’s arms. They decide that they’ll have to wait until the spring to break up.

**Back home in the garret**

Several months later, in spring. Marcello and Rodolfo are back in their garret again, trying to work. Musetta has left Rodolfo for a rich man. Mimi and Rodolfo have also broken up, and she has been spotted riding around town in a fancy carriage. The poet and the painter both try to keep working, pretending they aren’t thinking about their private heartaches. But soon each man is lost in his own memories.

The men are roused from their reverie by Schaunard and Colline, who have brought a little food for dinner: a herring and some bread. Pretending they are nobility, the Bohemians treat the food like a great feast, waltz with eachother, and even get into a duel with stove tongs and fire pokers for swords.

**Mimi Returns**

But their horseplay is interrupted when Musetta rushes in. She’s brought Mimi, who is now so weak that she can barely stand. As Rodolfo helps Mimi to lie down and rest, Musetta explains that she found the girl wandering the streets. Mimi said that she knew she was dying, and that she wanted to spend her last moments with Rodolfo. Hoping that Mimi may still be saved, Musetta gives Marcello her earrings to sell: perhaps they will bring enough money for some medicine and a doctor. When Mimi complains about her cold hands, Musetta takes one further step, deciding to buy her the muff she’s always dreamed of. Even Colline decides to help by selling his precious old overcoat. Leaving the apartment, he persuades Schaunard to give the lovers some time alone. Left alone together for the last time, Mimi and Rodolfo declare their love for eachother.

The others return. Mimi is delighted with her new muff, and happy to be back among friends. Musetta tearfully prays for her friend while Mimi drifts off to sleep. Rodolfo gets up to consult with Marcello: he hopes that Mimi might still recover. But the others, looking at the girl, realize that she is already dead. Rodolfo is the last one to learn the truth. He rushes over to the bed, calling Mimi’s name, as the curtain falls.

**ACT IV**
Activities Connected to the Plot and Characters

Take a look at pages 24-29 for activities related to the plot and characters of the opera. In particular:

- Motivation / Role Play Activity by Jonathan Dzik
- Storytelling
- Modern Adaptation
- Essential Props
- What If?
- Themes
- Who Am I?
- Character Exploration
- How Should They Sound?
- Standing in the Character’s Shoes
The Music of La Bohème

Famous Themes
The music of La Bohème is famous for its big, soaring melodies, which perfectly express the beauty and pain of young love. Throughout the opera, Puccini uses a number of themes to refer to specific characters or feelings. There’s a special musical theme for the four Bohemian roommates (the four notes that open the opera): this theme reappears whenever the fun and frolic of their life together takes center stage. Mimi’s theme (the gentle, rising scale that introduces her first aria, Mi chiamano Mimi) reoccurs when she is on stage, or when Rodolfo is thinking about her. Rodolfo has a theme, of course. His relationship with Mimì is reflected in the “love theme” that we hear at the climax of Rodolfo’s beautiful aria Che gelida manina, which echoes throughout the opera. And Musetta’s waltz evokes her flirtatious, youthful spirit any time we hear it. Puccini weaves these themes together throughout the opera to help us to understand the characters’ deep emotions.

Descriptive Music
Puccini is also a master of using sounds to illustrate action onstage. For instance, listen to the following moments:

- In Act I, when Rodolfo tears up the manuscript paper to throw in the fire. We can hear the fire blaze as the manuscript is thrown in (Track 2, 1:22), then hear the fire die down to ashes. (Track 2, 2:03)

- In Mimi’s aria Mi chiamano Mimi, when Mimì sings about springtime (“che parlano d’amor, di primavere”: “those things that have a gentle magic about them, that remind me of love and springtime”) a flute makes little bird songs. (Track 6, 1:07)

- When Schaunard buys a toy horn from the junk man on Christmas Eve, you can hear the slightly out-of-tune sound it makes.

- When Mimì dies at the end of Act IV, all sound stops for a few moments: the solemn event passes in silence. (Track 23, 0:15)

Famous Soundtracks
You might have heard some of the music from La Bohème if you’ve seen Moonstruck or Room with a View. La Bohème also inspired the popular Broadway musical Rent, which borrows some of Puccini’s music.

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5 Track 1
6 Track 6
7 Track 5, 2:44
8 Track 9
Activities Connected to the Music of La Bohème

Take a look at pages 28-31 for activities related to the music of the opera.
In particular:

- What the Music Tells Us
- Popcorn!
- Instant volume!
- Me the conductor
- Music and the Development of Character
- Rewrite the Aria

Also, Take a look at the Music Activities section on pages 33-50.
As guests in the Metropolitan Opera house, we are lucky enough to watch as the art of hundreds of singers, musicians, dancers, actors, designers and stagehands comes to life onstage. During your trip it is important to understand and respect all the immensely hard work that goes into the production you are watching.

**Opera Singers**

*What?  No microphones?!!*

The Met auditorium is 72 ft tall, 100 ft wide and 230 ft wide. The auditorium alone is like a seven-story building that covers one quarter of a city block. Opera singers make themselves heard through the whole house, over a full orchestra – *without amplification*. There are no microphones hidden in the set! Instead, opera singers use their training and the acoustics of the building to project their voices. In order to do this, opera singers train for longer than doctors. This is partly because they are trying to isolate and train their vocal cords: a mechanism about the size of your little finger nail. This is made doubly hard by the fact that unlike other musicians, singers can’t see their instrument, so all of their learning has to be by sensation.

**Amazing feats of memory**

Opera singers have to memorize several hours of music for each opera. Operas are usually performed in the language in which they were written, which means that opera singers must perform in – and understand – Italian, German, French, Russian; even Czech!

**Phew!**

Opera singers do all of these things while they are onstage under hot lights, performing blocking that can be awkward or difficult. Opera singers have to be able to sing lying down, running, jumping, dancing and performing all kinds of other tricky moves. Period costumes like hoop skirts, cloaks and corsets can also be hot and uncomfortable.

**Who Sings What?**

Here is a very rough guide to the different voice types, starting with the highest (soprano), going right down to the very deepest (bass).

**Soprano:** Sopranos have the highest voices. They usually play the heroines of an opera. This means they have lots of show-off arias to sing, and get to fall in love and / or die more often than other female voice types.
**Mezzo-soprano**, or *mezzo*: This is the middle female voice, and has a darker, warmer sound than the soprano. Mezzos spend a lot of their time playing mothers and villainesses, although sometimes they get to play seductive heroines. Mezzos also play young men on occasion – these are called trouser roles, for obvious reasons.

**Contralto, or alto**: The lowest female voice. Contralto is a rare voice type. Altos usually portray older females or character parts like witches and old gypsies.

**Counter tenor**: Also known as alto, this is the highest male voice, and another vocal rarity. Counter tenors sing with about the same range as a contralto. Counter tenor roles are most common in baroque opera, but some more modern composers write parts for counter tenors too.

**Tenor**: If there are no counter tenors on stage, then the highest male voice in opera is tenor. Tenors are usually the heroes who get the girl or die horribly in the attempt.

**Baritone**: The middle male voice. In comic opera, the baritone is often the ringleader of whatever naughtiness is going on, but in tragic opera, he’s more likely to play the villain.

**Bass**: The lowest male voice. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera, and basses usually play Kings, fathers, and grandfathers. In comic opera basses often portray old characters that are foolish or laughable.

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**The Conductor**

The conductor is in charge of keeping the orchestra and all the singers together. He or she decides on the speed (tempo) for the music and decides which parts of the music to emphasize and bring out. It’s also the conductor’s job to achieve the right balance of sound, making sure that the singer can be heard above the orchestra. The conductor keeps time throughout the opera and has the last word on all questions of musical interpretation.

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**The Orchestra**

The orchestra plays the music of the opera in the pit. As a general rule of thumb, orchestras are divided into the following sections:

- **Strings**: including violins, violas, cellos, double bass
- **Woodwind**: including oboe, clarinet, flute and bassoon
- **Brass**: including trumpets, trombones, flutes, piccolos, french horns
- **Percussion**: including bass drum, kettle drum, timpani, and xylophone

Often opera orchestras include special effects specific to the opera being performed. Sometimes you can see unusual instruments in the pit. Some that have been used at the Met in recent years are airplane propellers, type writers, and guillotines!
The Chorus

Most operas have a chorus. The chorus at the Met has to learn large chunks of music for each opera. Sometimes they perform in several different operas a week! In each opera, chorus members have to remember just as much as the soloists – it’s just that they sing together rather than on their own.

The Audience

Last, but my no means least, are the audience. Hundreds of artists work every day just to produce spectacular, beautiful, exciting opera for their audiences. You can show that you appreciate their hard work (whether you like the opera or not!) with your applause – and with your politeness during the performance. Being quiet during the opera is not only polite to the performers – it’s a gift to your fellow audience members, and it means you won’t miss any of the action.

Hurray! Bravo!

Opera is all about extremes and this extends to the audience too. Although you should be as quiet as a mouse during all the action, there are points at which you can clap and yell ‘bravo’ at the top of your voice. Here are some guidelines:

- Definitely clap when the conductor comes out to his podium (but not while the orchestra is tuning up!)
- Clap when the curtain comes down and when performers take a bow
- You can also applaud if the conductor stops the orchestra for applause after an aria – but it’s always rude to applaud over the orchestra!
- If you really love a particular singer’s performance, by all means yell at them. You yell ‘bravo’ to a man, or ‘brava’ to a woman. This lets singers know that you especially loved their performance.

Absolutely NO whispering during the performance!

There is no whispering or talking allowed inside the opera house. This means not to discuss the opera, not when the orchestra gets loud; not even to ask to borrow binoculars.

Part of the reason that we, the audience, can hear opera singers so clearly without microphones is that the Met Opera House has incredible acoustics. This means that when sound comes from the stage, it bounces around the house and reaches your ears without getting lost in dead space. In other words, the house itself is a huge echoing tunnel that amplifies sound. In the same way as you can hear everything that the orchestra and singers perform, they can hear every whisper, candy wrapper, and cough in the audience very, very clearly. It is a fact
that if you stand on stage at the Met, you can hear anyone at the back of the audience whisper!

**Acoustics at the Met: Did you know...**
- There are no hard corners in the Met opera house. Hard corners eat up sound, whereas the curved surfaces at the Met reflect sound back to the audience, so that none is lost in transit.
- Even the chandeliers at the Met are designed to bounce sound back towards the audience!
- All of the wood veneer in the Met auditorium comes from a single African rosewood tree. This means that all of the wood resonates at exactly the same frequency, amplifying sound. It’s as if the auditorium itself is a huge musical instrument!

### Quick Checklist for Enjoying Opera

**Before the show:**
- Read the story
- Work out how long the opera is
- Turn your cell phone off – along with anything else that might beep
- Have some food

**During the show:**
- No snacks, food, gum, or drinks allowed inside the auditorium
- No eating, chewing gum or drinking during the performance
- No cell phones, beeping watches, radios, cassette recorders or cameras
- No feet on seats of railings
- No clapping out of turn

**At the end of the show:**
- Clap as much as you like and yell bravo at your favorite singer!

### Activities Connected to this Section

Take a look at the Activities section for activities related understanding opera production. In particular:
- Brainstorm!
- Company Warm Up
- The Peter Brook Opera Game
- Cast Your Own Opera
- Me the Conductor
- How Should They Sound?
What Other Students Think of Opera

‘I just wanted to watch them perform again!’

‘This was my first opera and I really liked it. I hope I can see one again. I really enjoyed the performance so much’

‘It was very exciting’

‘I will have to learn to sing and act’

‘The theatre was amazing. I liked it so much I would go again if I had the chance’

‘You should listen to the opera’s music because it will help you understand the scenes easier’

‘Overall the dancers were fluid, and the moves they did were creative. I believe that their dancing almost depicted the scene. It was really fun to watch them’

‘I think it’s neat that the Met is built so that sound bounces off of the walls’
Introducing Your Students to 
*La Bohème*

**Approaching Opera**
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- K-W-L Chart
- Company warm up
- Ring the changes
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**After you see the opera...**
- The commitment game
- Opera review
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**Getting to Know the Characters better**
- Who am I?
- Character exploration
- How should they sound?
- Standing in the characters’ shoes
Approaching Opera in General

Brainstorm!

Time required: at least 10 minutes

Resources required: 5 or 6 large sheets of paper and fat felt tip pens

Purpose: To explode opera myths!

If opera is a new experience, brainstorming can be a nice way in. Split your class into 5 or 6 groups, with a large sheet of paper per group. In their groups, have them write all the words they can think of associated with the word ‘opera’ for 5 minutes – or longer as per the needs of the group – (eg. Screamy singing, Viking helmets, fat ladies, shattering glass etc). When the time’s up, have them walk around the room looking at what other groups have written.

Extensions of this Activity

• Discuss why the Camerata wanted to make a play that was entirely sung. If you sing in daily life, when? While you’re washing up? In the bath? When you’re happy?
• Discuss how opera singers’ voices are not amplified and how singers must project (see ‘Opera production – who’s who at the opera’ on pages 13-15)
• Discuss typical roles of different voice parts i.e. Soprano is often the heroine, bass is often evil; see pages 13-14 and play examples of different voices
• You could also brainstorm with your students about what an orchestra is.

KWL Chart

Resources required: large sheet of paper and felt tip pen

Purpose: To determine what students want to know about opera, and use this as an organization tool for future lessons.

Based on an activity used by Judy Bouton, Vroom School

Divide your large sheet of paper into three columns

• Label column one ‘K’, ‘what I know’
• Label column two ‘W’, ‘what I want to find out’
• Label column three ‘L’, ‘what I have learned’

Use this as a tool to brainstorm on what the class’ knowledge of the opera is and what they want to discover from further study.
**Company Warm Up**

**Time required:** 10-15 minutes  
**Resources required:** none  
**Purpose:** To increase energy levels and engage your students.

Students new to opera can be shy or doubtful about it. One way to get students energized and enthusiastic is to lead them in a brief group warm up. Explain that the group warmup is similar to what an opera’s cast / chorus will do before they come on stage, so your class can become an opera company for the lesson!

- If you have space, get the class to stand in a circle, otherwise just find a space in the room, but make sure all the class have a clear line of vision to you.
- Start with a copying exercise. Teacher initiates movements and class copy these, being as quick on the uptake as possible. Make these movements as bold and physical as possible, for example:
  - Drumming hands on thighs  
  - Shaking hands out above head  
  - Standing on one leg, shaking the other  
  - Crouching low and drumming fingers on floor  
  - Star jumps
- Following the teacher, see if it’s possible to clap as a group all at the same time with no stragglers.
- Then try this with no ‘leader’
- See if the group can maintain its unison movements without any leader - i.e. see what type of movements happen when everyone is following each other.

**Ring the Changes**

**Time required:** 10 minutes  
**Resources required:** none  
**Purpose:** To understand how our voices can convey our emotions and discover the differences and similarities between speaking and singing

Pick volunteers from your class to say the sentence:

‘I don’t want to be at school today’

or in fact any sentence you choose. Play with different ways of saying this sentence. Have the students notice what it is that changes with each variation; Pitch? Volume?

How does it change if you pretend:

- you are happy?
- you’re telling someone a guilty secret?
• you’re upset?
• you’re jealous?
• Etc. Be bold!

Discuss how big a leap there is from what the students are doing with their voices now, and singing.

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**The Peter Brook Opera Game**

**Time required:** 15+ minutes  
**Resources required:** none  
**Purpose:** To discover what it feels like to be an opera singer

English director, Peter Brook, famous for his theatre and opera productions worldwide, developed this game to help actors and young singers understand the many tasks opera singers must perform at once.

- Pick four students: an ‘opera singer’ and three assistants (A, B and C)
- The opera singer and A should face each other. A will make a series of simple movements, which the opera singer should mimic as closely as possible, being A’s mirror
- B is responsible for asking the opera singer simple mathematical equations. The opera singer must answer these, while still mirroring A
- C is responsible for asking the opera singer a series of personal questions (what’s your favorite place, favorite color, etc). The opera singer must answer questions from B and C, whilst being A’s mirror

This game gives students a taste of what it’s like for opera singers to follow blocking (physical movement), sing music (math) and make artistic and emotional decisions (personal questions) all at the same time.

**Things to watch out for:**

- B and C have a tendency to become very polite, alternating questions. Have them try different ways of asking the questions. They should repeat them if they are not receiving answers!
- The opera singer will find it easier to follow A if looking directly into A’s eyes, allowing the movements to be in their peripheral vision.
- A’s movements should be smooth and slow – the aim is to allow the opera singer to follow, not to make them mess up!
Cast Your Own Opera

**Resources required:** Handout provided and Definitions of voice types on page 13

**Purpose:** To make the opera more immediate; To understand and apply music vocabulary

*Based on an activity by Jim Tornatore, Howell Road Elementary School*

A handout is provided for this exercise. Have a look at the definitions of voice types on pages 13-14. Bearing these definitions in mind, take an established television show, like *Friends, The Simpsons, or Seinfeld*, and cast it as an opera – what kind of voice types would you choose for each part, and why? Alternatively, you could use a folk tale or fairy tale.
Approaching the Story

Motivation / Role Play Activity by Jonathan Dzik

Resources required: ‘Meet the characters’ on page 6 and ‘The story of La Bohème’ on page 7-9

Purpose: To help students identify with the characters and their dilemmas

1) Bring in an empty sugar bowl. Ask a girl to come forward. Tell her that she has just moved in to the neighborhood and has run out of sugar. She needs it to bake a cake. The stores are closed. She has to borrow sugar from a neighbor. Ask a guy to come forward. Tell him that he is going to get a visit from a new neighbor who wants to borrow something. He should try to engage her in conversation; invite her in; ask her to stay awhile and not just give her the sugar and have her leave right away. This scenario should play out in a number of dialogues. Then have two students read the equivalent scene from the libretto of the meeting of Rodolfo and Mimi in Act I. You will need two candles and their holders, a key and a paper cup as props. Use this as a jumping off point to go into the rest of the opera via the story and music.

2) Present the following scenario: A girl, with her escort whom she doesn’t particularly want to be with, is dining in an outdoor café. At the next table is her former boyfriend with a few of his friends. She would like to get his attention and get rid of her escort. Set up some chairs: 2 together facing each other, and a few more off to one side. Place various students in these chairs as diners. Place the two key people, the girl and the guy, with their backs to each other. Have the girl and the guy improvise a dialogue in which she tries to get him to notice her. (This is equivalent to the scene in Act II where Musetta tries to rekindle her relationship with Marcello.)

3) Present the following scenario: A guy has broken up with his girlfriend because she has a serious illness which he cannot handle. His best friend confronts him as he makes up a fictitious story that he broke up with her because he found her flirting with other guys. The best friend sees through him and tries to get him to admit the truth. Have the two guys engage in an improvised dialogue with, unknown to them, the girl listening in the background. At the appropriate moment, the girl should reveal she is there and confront her former boyfriend. (This is equivalent to Act III with Rodolofo, Marcello and Mimi.)
Storytelling

Resources required: ‘Meet the characters’ on page 6 and ‘The story of La Bohème on page 7-9

Purpose: To help students identify with the characters and their dilemmas; To become familiar with story construction.

If you usually read the synopsis aloud to your class, this is a good exercise to do BEFORE that.

- Introduce the main characters and their desires using the character guide on page 6
- Have the students to whom you have assigned characters sit or stand in relation to their character’s relationships; have the students themselves guess what relationships exist between the characters based on what they know already.
- Ask the class what they think will happen when these characters meet. How will what one character wants affect the fate of another? (This could be a discussion, or you could ask them to write down what they think the story will be.)
- Use the students’ ideas to introduce the full synopsis.
- Stop at crucial turning points and ask the students what they think happens next. See if any students can guess what will happen to the characters.
- Some teachers choose to not give away the end of the opera; they feel that it keeps the students engaged when they actually watch the opera.

Modern Adaptation

Resources required: ‘The Story of La Bohème’ on pages 7-9

Purpose: To help students identify with the characters and their dilemmas by responding creatively to the opera; To develop creative writing skills

Have students write a modern adaptation of the story of the opera, taking the bare bones of the plot and circumstances of the characters as their starting point.

Extensions of this Activity:
- This could lead to writing a modern play version of one act of the opera, either individually or in small groups.
- Or, you might want to have students research another modern version of La Bohème: the Broadway musical Rent.
### The World of the Opera

**Resources required:** Take a look in the Resources Section for research ideas

**Purpose:** To develop research skills and make connections to another historical era

Have students imagine they live in the time and place of the opera’s setting. How would they 1) travel, 2) contact a friend, 3) find out about daily events, 4) entertain themselves, 5) eat, sleep, and keep warm? etc. This could be the basis for a classroom discussion or a research project.

### Essential Props

**Resources required:** None

**Purpose:** For students to display their understanding of the plot and make choices about what is essential in this opera

After reviewing the story of the opera, have students write a list of and draw three essential props that no production of *La Bohème* could be without, making sure that they explain their choices.

### Spot-The-Prop

**Resources required:** The handout included at the back of this book.

**Purpose:** For students to display their understanding of the plot

After reviewing the story of the opera, have the students strengthen and confirm their memory of the plot by connecting important situations with a vital prop. Use the handout included at the back of this book.
What If?

**Resources required:** None  
**Purpose:** To help students identify with the characters and their dilemmas by responding creatively to the opera; To develop creative writing skills

Have your students rewrite the story of *La Bohème* considering the following “what if”s. What would happen if:

- Alcindoro fought a duel with Marcello at the Café Momus  
- Rodolfo decided to get a good job in order to take better care of Mimì  
- Musetta stole Rodolfo from Mimì  
- Make up your own plot twist!

**Extension of this Activity:**
- If there was a happy ending to *La Bohème*, what would it be? Would we believe it? Would this opera be as effective with a happy ending?

Themes

**Resources required:** None  
**Purpose:** To make connections between students’ own experience and the themes of the opera; To develop essay writing skills

Discuss the themes of the opera and have students write stories based on their own lives connected to these themes. Have they ever had an instant connection with someone? Fought with someone that they loved for the wrong reasons? Have they ever lost someone that they loved very much? How did it feel?
Getting to know the characters better

Who Am I?

**Time required:** 15+ minutes
**Resources required:** none
**Purpose:** To help students identify with the characters and their dilemmas by responding creatively to the opera

After reviewing the story of the opera, have students select a character from the opera, or assign one to them individually. Use the cast list to ensure that lesser characters are also represented.

Everyone should find a space in the room and close their eyes. Ask students questions, which they are to answer silently in their head, not out loud:

- Are you happy?
- How old are you?
- Are you in love?
- When was the last time you cried?
- What’s your favorite food?
- What do you want more than anything else?
- What is standing in your way?
- What are you going to do to get it?

Have students walk around the room, expressing their character by their posture and movements, gestures, facial expressions.

Have students improvise scenes in character. Scenes need not end as they do in the actual opera, and could involve characters meeting who do not meet in the actual plot.

Character Exploration

**Purpose:** To develop critical thinking skills through character analysis; To develop creative writing skills

For discussion in the classroom:

After reviewing the plot, divide the class into as many groups as there are characters, nominating one person per group to record the groups’ ideas. Using the cast list, assign each group a character from the opera. Ask each group to make a list of words to describe their character’s appearance, age, occupation, nationality, personality etc. Are they happy with their life? Are they hopeful? Jaded? What do they really want? Read the lists aloud and discuss them. Ask the students to justify their ideas.
For a written assignment:
Have students write a diary excerpt for their character from either:
• Rodolfo or Mimi’s life before the start of the opera
• During the time between Act II and Act III
• After the end of the opera

How Should They Sound?

Resources required: Take a look at the ‘Who sings what’ section on pages 13-14
Purpose: To respond imaginatively to the opera’s story; To make connections to musical structure and vocabulary

Now that the students are familiar with the characters of La Bohème, have them imagine how each character should sound. What instruments or tempi might the students use to portray this character? How similar to Puccini’s choices are the students’ decisions?

Standing in the Characters’ Shoes

Resources required: none
Purpose: To help students identify with the characters and their dilemmas by responding creatively to the opera; To develop creative writing skills

The following are ideas for further exploration of the story from the characters’ perspective:

• Have the students choose a character. Have them tell (or write!) the story of the opera from their chosen character’s point of view, using personal pronouns. (for example: “My candle burnt out one night, and I went to borrow a light from my neighbor...”)
**Approaching the Music**

*In addition to these activities, see also ‘Company warm up’ on page 20*

**What the Music Tells Us**

**Resources required:** Blackboard / whiteboard, recording of the opera

**Purpose:** To help students identify with the characters and their dilemmas by responding creatively to the opera; To develop critical listening skills and respond creatively to music

*Based on an activity by Mike Minard, A MacArthur Barr Middle School*

- Before introducing the story of characters of the opera to your students, pose this question on the board:

  "If this piece of music were a person, what would the person be like?"

- Then play excerpts from:
  - ‘Che gelida manina’ (Track 5)
  - ‘Mi chiamano Mimi’ (Track 6)
  - Musetta’s waltz ‘Quand me’n vo’ (Track 9)

  for the class. While your students are listening to each excerpt, they should write every adjective that comes to mind that describes the music, and personifies the sound. The words are then offered by the class and written on the board.

- Use the students’ descriptions to introduce the characters: Rodolfo (Track 5), Mimi (Track 6) and Musetta (Track 9). Discuss what the music tells us about each character:
  - How is Mimi’s music different from Musetta’s? Are their vocal lines the same, or different? What about the rhythm of their music? Melody? Ornamentation?
  - What do these musical differences tell us about the differences between the two characters?

**Extensions of this Activity:**

- Play the excerpts for your students again. What do they think is going on in the music? Why?

- Use the students’ guesses to introduce the story of *La Bohème*. Then, listen to the music a final time, following along with the translations provided in the back of this book.
**Popcorn!**

**Time required:** 5+ minutes  
**Purpose:** This is an excellent warm-up game to do before approaching the music and a fun way to energize the group.

This can either take place in a circle, or everyone can find themselves a space, and squat down. When everyone is still and quiet, the teacher explains the following: Everyone is a piece of corn, the floor is a big pan, and we’re going to make popcorn. We slowly start heating the pan; as the pan gets hotter, corn starts to twitch and then to 'pop'. A player can 'pop' by jumping up, clapping hands above their head, and saying 'pop'.

**Things to watch out for:** Make sure the 'popping' starts gradually, 'popping' is a group thing, and in the end, 'popping' should stop.  
**Variation:** Forget to take the pan off the fireplace, and have the popcorn start burning...

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**Instant Volume!**

**Time required:** 5 minutes  
**Resources required:** none  
**Purpose:** If you are going to approach singing, this is an excellent exercise to increase the volume and confidence of the group.

- Gather group in close near the center of the room so that they are in a tight bunch around you and ask someone for a word (any word, but nonsense words are particularly good – eg ‘wibble wobble’)
- First all whisper the word, then take a tiny step back
- Speak word in a normal voice and take another step back
- Shout the word and step back again (taking care of each other’s toes!)
- Sing the word to any notes you like, the bolder and more outrageous, the better.

**Variation 1:** Try the same exercise with character names, exaggerating pronunciation as much as possible.  
**Variation 2:** Try the same exercise but adding different emotional states, eg. pretending that the word / name is the most exciting news in the world, or that it is terrifying; the stakes should get higher with each step back.
Me the Conductor

Time required: 10 minutes
Resources required: none
Purpose: To understand what it feels like to be a conductor leading the group / a singer following a conductor

Start by leading this exercise yourself. Once the rules are understood, students can volunteer to take turns leading it.
- Have the students say the word ‘SING’, being sure to elongate the ‘NG’ at the end; ‘SINGGGGGGGGGGG’
- Take the ‘s’ off; ‘INGGGGGGGGGGG’
- Take the ‘i’ off; ‘NGGGGGGGGGGG’
- Using this ‘ng’ sound, explore sliding up and down through range; keep the sound thin and small and make sure the kids don’t blurt / splurge air when they are higher in their range
- Have kids echo the movement of their voices with their hands, drawing the shape of the sounds they are making in the air
- Now lead them yourself; you are the conductor and they are the chorus. The arc of your movement will relate to the pitch of their sound. In addition, explain that when your hand is open, the sound should be loud and open into an ‘ah’ vowel, when your fingers are close together the sound should remain soft on ‘ng’
- Once everyone is clear on the rules, have students volunteer to ‘conduct’ the group. The more expansive their gestures, the more responsive the group will be. Have each student decide on a signal to bring the sound to a stop as together as possible.
- Ask the ‘chorus’ who were being conducted for feedback about what worked and what didn’t.

Rewrite the Aria

Resources: CD and translations provided
Purpose: To familiarize your students with the music; To help students identify with the characters and their dilemmas by responding creatively to the opera; To develop creative writing skills

Listen to Che gelida manina (or another aria of your choosing) with your students. Provide them with a copy of the translation of the aria and read it together (a translation for Che gelida manina is provided in the Resources Section). Have your students rewrite the text of the aria in their own words.
**For discussion in the classroom:**
At the start of the opera, Mimì and Rodolfo meet each other and fall in love. By the end of the opera, they have quarrelled, broken up and gotten back together many times. When Mimì dies, she admits that she has always loved Rodolfo. We can hear their love develop and grow in the music Puccini has written for them. The excerpts in which this journey is clearest are:

- ‘Che gelida manina’ (What a cold little hand), Track 5
- ‘Mi chiamano Mimi’ (They call me Mimi), Track 6
- ‘Addio, sebza rancor!’ (Goodbye, no hard feelings!) Track 17
- ‘Sono andanti?’ (Are they gone? I only pretended to sleep) Track 21

• Before playing these extracts to your class, hand out four pieces of paper to each student and have them label them 1 through to 4.

• After hearing the first extract, they are to take the paper labeled ‘1’ and fold it, rip it, crumple it, color it, draw on it, or a combination of these things to express what they think the music sounds like or is trying to communicate. They should do this for each of the tracks.

• Afterwards, ask the students to describe what they were responding to in the music. Could they translate these responses into another medium, for instance
  - What shape would your body take for each piece of music?
  - What word(s) would correspond to each piece?
  - Can your students guess what is happening dramatically?

**For a written assignment:**
Once the above activity has been completed, have your students write a paper articulating their responses to the music and how it chronicles the development of Mimì and Rodolfo’s relationship. Their four pieces of paper will help them to remember the impact of each passage of music. Have them consider the following:

- The relationship between the voice and the orchestra
- The volume, tempo and rhythm of the music

 Afterwards, take a look at the translation of these sections and discuss whether they feel Puccini portrayed the story and its emotions effectively.
Musetta’s Waltz, *Quand me’n vo’*, is one of opera’s great seduction songs. In it Musetta brags about her many charms, hoping to remind Marcello how much he truly loves her. The aria is not so different from many contemporary hip-hop and R&B songs in which a woman sings or rhymes about her own charms.

Compare Musetta’s waltz with a comparable contemporary song (perhaps one chosen by your students). Alternatively, have your students write a modern-day Musetta’s Waltz, with contemporary lyrics and music.
The Commitment Game

**Time required:** 5+ minutes  
**Resources required:** none, but if you are doing this in the classroom, you will need to clear desks and chairs to one side  
**Purpose:** Prevents apathy and gets students thinking critically

**HINT – This would be a good exercise to do before writing a review**

Assign one wall of the room ‘YES’, and one wall ‘NO’. Gather the students into the middle of the room and ask them questions; they have to run to the yes or no side depending on their answer and be able to back up their choices with solid reasoning. Questions could be black and white or more ambiguous, i.e:

- Did you enjoy going to the opera?
- Does Rodolfo ever love again?
- Did you enjoy the music?
- Was the singing as you expected?

Opera Review

**Resources required:** None, though you might like to obtain the *New York Times*’ review of the opera (the *Times* review of an opera always appears two days after its opera’s season premiere.)  
**Purpose:** To help students think critically about their experience.

What did students like? What did they dislike? Did the opera meet their expectations? Who was their favorite singer? Who was their least favorite singer? Compare students’ reviews with the New York Times review.
**Write a Letter**

Resources required: None

Purpose: To develop critical thinking skills; To develop letter writing skills

Students can write letters to their favorite performers and mail them to the Education Department at the Met office. We will be happy to forward the letters to the performers themselves. Feel free to illustrate them!

**Draw your Favorite Moment**

Resources required: Handout provided on page 40

Purpose: To respond creatively to the opera

Using the handout provided on page 40, illustrate your favorite moment in *La Bohème* and describe the scene you have drawn.
Create your own 'in-house' study guide for *La Bohème* as a class. Each student will write one article on an aspect of the story, characters, composer or background. Decide as a class what you will need to cover to provide a balanced insight into the opera. When students have completed their articles, collect them in a book and publish it, distributing copies to the whole class. (Based on an activity by Anthony Marshall of Baldwin Senior High School.)

Act out scenes from *La Bohème*, using modern dialogue and (if possible) modern melodies composed by members of the class.

Learn and perform excerpts from *La Bohème* in class.

Design and/or build sets or costumes for a scene or scenes from the opera.

Prepare a mural relating to the events of the opera.

Create original dances using music from the opera.

Create short stories about the lives of Rodolfo, Mimi, Musetta, and Marcello.

Write melodies to be used as motifs identifying each character of the opera.

Create characteristic walks and/or facial expressions for each character and present them to the class.
Further Research Ideas

The following list is a suggestion of topics for further study/research. Research into one or more of these areas could form the basis of a project.

Bohemians in Paris:
- Bohemian lifestyle in 1830
- Parisian Bourgeois lifestyle in 1830
- Henry Murger
- Victor Hugo (especially *Les Misérables*)
- Tuberculosis
- The French Revolution
- The geography of Paris
- Romanticism
- Famous painters and writers of the time period
- Music in 19th century Paris
- Café culture
- Bohemians in 19th century Paris vs. hippies in 1960’s America

Italy during Puccini’s day:
- Everyday life
- Politics
- Government
- Music
- Realism and Verismo

Going Further
- What was going on in the New York City region (or your region) in 1830? How was life different from life in Paris?
- Research what was going on around the world in 1830, the year of the opera’s setting.
- Research what was going on around the world in 1896-1898, the years of the opera’s composition.
- Research other versions of *La Bohème*, like Broadway’s *Rent*. 
Handouts

Handouts are required for some exercises. These are provided here:

- Cast your own opera
- Draw your favorite opera moment
- Join the numbers to letters
- Join object to the situation
Cast your own opera

You are composing the operatic version of an established television show, (for example *Friends* or *Seinfeld*) or alternatively you can use a folk / fairy tale. Decide what kind of operatic voice each character should have. Fill in the chart and use if for reference. You don’t have to use all the voice types in your opera necessarily.

Woman’s high voice: _______________________________________________________
Woman’s medium voice: ___________________________________________________
Woman’s low voice: _______________________________________________________
Man’s high (falsetto) voice: _______________________________________________
Man’s high voice: _______________________________________________________
Man’s medium voice: _____________________________________________________
Man’s low voice: _______________________________________________________

Title (of show / story): ___________________________________________________
Composer (your name): _________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character's name</th>
<th>Voice type</th>
<th>Briefly explain your choice</th>
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<tbody>
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Opéra title: ______________________ Composer: ______________________
Illustrate your favorite part of the opera and describe the scene in the space below.

List the main characters in your scene and their voice type:  *example: Pinkerton - tenor*

What's happening in your picture?

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________
Draw a line from each number on the left side to the **correct** letter on the right side.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Letter</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>She dies at the end of the opera</td>
<td>a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Song when characters reflect on their feelings</td>
<td>b.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Group who invented opera</td>
<td>c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Musetta’s boyfriend</td>
<td>d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The composer of <em>La Bohème</em></td>
<td>e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The highest female voice</td>
<td>f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>This male voice type usually plays the hero</td>
<td>g.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The day of the year that the opera begins</td>
<td>h.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Musician</td>
<td>i.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The city where the story takes place</td>
<td>j.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rodolfo’s profession</td>
<td>k.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mimi loses this in Rodolfo’s apartment</td>
<td>l.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sung conversation</td>
<td>m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Bohemians’ holiday hangout</td>
<td>n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The person who leads the orchestra</td>
<td>o.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Young, poor artist</td>
<td>p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Puccini stole these to make extra money</td>
<td>q.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>This voice type usually plays mothers and villainesses</td>
<td>r.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>This character sells his overcoat at the end of the opera.</td>
<td>s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on an activity by Joel Jay Brooks, P.S 261K
Connect the object (prop) to the situation it appears in in *La Bohème*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROP</th>
<th>SITUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>candle</td>
<td>Colline sells his possessions to buy Mimì medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earrings</td>
<td>Rodolfo and Marcello try to keep warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muff</td>
<td>Musetta wins back Marcello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toys</td>
<td>Rodolfo meets Mimì</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manuscript</td>
<td>Doesn’t actually appear in <em>La Bohème</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>key</td>
<td>Mimì receives a present before she dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overcoat</td>
<td>Vendors sell all types of treats in front of the Café Momus on Christmas Eve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman’s shoe</td>
<td>Musetta sells her possessions to buy Mimì medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elephant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resources

• Sheet Music
  *Mi chiamano Mimi*
  *O soave fanciulla*
  *Parpignol*
  *Quando m’en vo’*
  *O Mimi, tu più non torni*
  *Sono andati*

• Libretto Translations
  *Che gelida manina*
  *Mi chiamano Mimi*
  *Quand m’en vo’*
  *Addio, senza rancor*
  *Sono andanti? Fingevo di dormire*

• Europe and America in 1830, Europe and America in 1896

• Cutaway Picture of The Met

• Metropolitan Opera Facts

• Musical Terms and Definitions
Che gelida manina (Rodolfo’s aria)

**Rodolfo:**
Che gelida manina,
Se la lasci riscaldar.
Cercar che giova?
Al buio non si trova.
Ma per fortuna
è una notte di luna,
E qui la luna
L’abbiamo vicina.

Aspetti, signorina,
Le dirò con due parole
Chi son, e che faccio,
Come vivo.
Vuole?

Chi son? chi son? Sono un poeta.
Che cosa faccio? Scrivo.
E come vivo? Vivo.
In povertà mia lieta
Scialo da gran signore,
Rime ed inni d’amore.
Per sogni e per chimere
E per castelli in aria
L’anima ho milionaria.

Talor dal mio forziere
Ruban tutti i gioielli
Due ladri: gli occhi belli.
Ed i miei sogni usati...
E i bei sogni miei
Tosto si dileguar!
Ma il furto non m’accora,
Poichè v’ha preso stanza
La speranza!
Or che mi conoscete
Parlate voi, deh! parlate.
Chi siete?
Vi piaccia dir?

Mi chiamano Mimi

**Mimi:**
Sì.
Mi chiamano Mimi
Ma il mio nome è Lucia
La storia mia
È breve. A tela o a seta
Ricamo in casa e fuori.
Son tranquilla e lieta
Ed è mio svago far gigli e rose.
Mi piaccion quelle cose
Che han si dolce malia,
Che parlando d’amor, di primavere,
Che parlando di sogni e di chimere,
Quelle cose che han nome poesia...
Lei m’intende?

Mi chiamano Mimì

**Mimi:**
Yes...
I’m always called Mimi
but my name is Lucia.
My story
is simple. I work at home, or somewhere else,
I embroider silk and satin.
I’m content with my life
to amuse myself, I make lilies and roses.
I love every one of those things
that have a sweet magic
that talk to me of love, of springtime
that talk to me of hopes and visions,
those things they call poetry...
Do you know what I mean?
Rodolpho:
Si.

Mimi:
Mi chiamo Mimì, il perché non so.
Sola, mi fo il pranzo da me stessa.
Non vado sempre a messa.
Ma prego assai il Signor.
Vivo sola, soletta.
 Là in una bianca cameretta:
Quando sui tetti e in cielo,
Ma quando vien lo sgelo
Il primo sole è mio!
Il primo bacio dell’aprile è mio!
Germoglia in un vaso una rosa.
Foglia a foglia la spio!
Così gentil il profumo d’un fior!
Ma i fior ch’io faccio, ahimè!
Non hanno odore!
Altro di me non le saprei narrare:
Sono la sua vicina.
Che la vien fuori d’ora a importunare.

Rodolpho:
Yes.

Mimi:
I’m always called Mimi, why, I don’t know.
I live by myself, and I usually eat alone.
I don’t always go to church, but I always pray.
I live alone, all alone, there, in a little white room.
It looks out over rooftops and sky.
But when the cold is finally over, the first rays sunshine are mine...
the first kiss of April is mine, the first sun is mine!
I watch a rose blossom in my vase and I breath in its sweet scent.
One petal at a time!
But the flowers I make myself... they have no scent of their own.
There’s not much else I can tell you: I’m you neighbor, and I’m so sorry.
I disturbed you at this late hour.

Quando m’en vo

Musetta:
Quando me’n vo,
Quando me’n vo soletta per la via,
La gente sosta e mira...
E la bellezza mia tutta ricerca in me,
Ricerca in me da capo a piè...

Marcello (agli amici):
Legatemi alla seggiola!

Alcindoro (sulle spine):
Quella gente che dirà?

Musetta:
...Ed assaporo allor la bramosia
Sottile che dagli occhi traspira
E dai palesi vezzi intendere sa
Alle occulte beltà...
(aizzandosi)
Così l’effluvio del desio
Tutta m’aggira;
Felice mi fa,
Felice mi fa!

Alcindoro:
Quel canto scurrile...
...Mi muove la bile, mi muove la bile!

Musetta:
When I walk out.
By myself on the avenue,
Everyone stops and stares...
And they take in how beautiful I am,
from my head to my toes.

Marcello (to his friends):
You’d better tie me to the chair!

Alcindoro (beside himself):
What will people say?

Musetta:
...And then I savor the hidden desire
That’s gleaming in their eyes,
As they all try to guess what’s concealed
Beneath my more obvious charms...
(rising to her feet)
And when this sudden rush of passion
Takes me by surprise
It makes me happy,
makes me so happy!

Alcindoro:
This nasty little song...
...is making me furious!
Musetta:
E tu che...sai...

Mimi (a Rodolpho):
Io vedo ben...

Musetta:
...Che memori e ti...
Struggi....

Mimi:
...Che quella poveretta....

Musetta:
...De me tanto...Rifuggi?

Mimi:
Tutta invaghita ell'è...

Musetta:
So ben:...Le angoscie tue non le vuoi...

Mimi:
...Tutta invaghita di Marcel...

Musetta:
...Dir,

Mimì:
...Tutta invaghita...

Musetta:
...Non le voi dir....

Mimi:
...Ell'è!

Musetta:
So ben, ma ti senti morir!

Addio, senza rancor

Mimi:
I'm going back all by myself
To my lonely little nest
And my artificial flowers,
Back to the place I left
When I heard your words of love!
Good-bye, then, no hard feelings...
But I need your help right now...
Please gather up the few things
I've left behind. In the trunk
There's the gold bracelet of mine,
And there's my prayer-book, too.
Wrap everything up in an apron,
And I'll send someone to come for them...
Don't forget, there's my pink bonnet
that's lying under the pillow...
If you want to...you can keep it,
As a memento of our love!
Addio, addio senza rancor...

**Rodolfo:**
Dunque è proprio finita!
Te ne vai, la mia piccina.
Addio, sogni d’amor!

**Mimi:**
Addio, dolce svegliare alla mattina!

**Rodolfo:**
Addio....sognante vita

**Mimi:**
Addio, rabbuffi e gelosie...

**Rodolfo:**
...Che un tuo sorriso acqueta!...

**Mimi:**
Addio, sospete,...

**Rodolfo:**
...Baci...

**Mimi:**
...Pungenti amarezze...

**Rodolfo:**
...Ch’io da vero poeta rimavo con carezze!

**Mimi:**
Soli...

**Mimi e Rodolfo:**
D’inverno è cosa da morire!

**Mimi:**
Soli!

**Mimi e Rodolfo:**
Mentre a primavera
C’è compagno il sol!

**Mimi**
C’è compagno il sol!

**Sono andanti? Fingevo di dormire**

**Mimi:**
Sono andati?
Fingevo di dormire
Perchè volli con te sola restare...
Ho tante cose che ti voglio dire...
O una sola, ma grande come il mare,
Come il mare profonda ed infinita...
Sei il mio amor e tutta la ma vita!

**Mimi:**
Have they all left?
I only pretended to be asleep
Because I wanted to be alone with you...
I have so many things to tell you...
Or just one, but big as the ocean,
As deep and infinite as the sea...
You are my love and my whole life!
Rodolfo:
Ah! Mimi, mia bella Mimi!

Mimi:
Son bella ancora?

Rodolfo:
Bella come un’aurora...

Mimi:
Hai sbagliato il raffronto.
Volevi dir:
Bella come un tramonto.
“Mi chiamano Mimi...
Il perché...non so...”

Rodolfo:
Ah! Mimi, my beautiful Mimi!

Mimi:
Am I still beautiful?

Rodolfo:
Beautiful as the dawn...

Mimi:
You used the wrong comparison.
You should have said
Beautiful as the sunset.
“I’m always called Mimi...
But I don’t know why....”
Europe and America in 1830

History/Politics
France captures Algeria
Revolution in Paris
Simón Bolívar, Latin-American soldier-statesman, dies
Daniel Webster negates States’ Rights doctrine

Literature
Lamartine: “Harmonies poétiques et religieuses”
Tennyson: “Poems, Chiefly Lyrical”
Emily Dickinson, American poet, born (died 1886)

Religion/Philosophy
Jeremy Bentham: “Constitutional Code for All Nations”
The Religious society of Mormons, or Later-Day Saints, founded
Pope Pius VIII dies

Visual Arts
Delacroix: “Liberty Guiding the People” at the Louvre
Camille Pissarro, French Impressionist painter, born (died 1903)

Science/Technology
Scottish botanist Robert Brown discovers the cell nucleus in plants
Liverpool-Manchester railroad formally opened
French tailor Barthélemy Thimonier devises a machine that sews

Daily Life
Fashion: Women’s skirts shorter, sleeves become enormous, hats decorated with flowers and ribbons are in style
Bevla Lockwood, American lawyer, is the first woman to practice before the Supreme Court and to be nominated for the presidency

Europe and America in 1896

History/Politics
Utah becomes part of the United States
New evidence for the innocence of Alfred Dreyfus suppressed in France
William McKinley elected 25th President of the United States

Literature
Chekhov: “The Seagull”
Paul Verlaine dies

Philosophy/Learning
Five annual Nobel Prizes established for the fields of physics, physiology, medicine, chemistry, literature and peace

Music
Puccini: “La Bohème” premieres in Turin
Giordano: “Andrea Chénier” premieres in Milan

Science/Technology
William Ramsay discovers helium
Niagara Falls hydroelectric plant opens

Daily Life
First modern Olympics held in Athens
First Alpine ski school established at Lilienfeld, Austria
Klondike gold rush begins, Bonanza Creek, Canada

Grun, Bernard; The Timetables of History: A Horizontal Linkage of People and Events: Simon and Schuster (New York: 1982), 3920394, 450-451
Wallace K. Harrison, architect
Cyril Harris, acoustical consultant

This opera house is the 2nd home of the Metropolitan Opera. The 1st was located at Broadway and 39th St.

The Met’s new home at Lincoln Center cost $49 million to build and construction took 4 years.

The Met is the 2nd-deepest building in Manhattan. It consists of 10 floors: stage level, six floors above and three below, cushioned with anti-vibration pads for sound-proofing.

The opera season generally runs from September to April, during which time the opera company puts on 7 performances a week (two on Saturdays) from a repertoire of 21-25 different operas.

The auditorium can seat 3,800 people on five tiers, and there is standing room space for 253 people on various levels.

There are no 90°-angles anywhere in the auditorium, which keeps the sound from getting lost. The boxes have irregular, shell-patterned decorations for the same reason: it prevents the sound from being “swallowed” and distributes it evenly throughout the auditorium.

A single African rosewood tree was used to panel the walls. The tree, brought from London, was almost 100 ft. long and about 6 feet in diameter.

The ceiling rises 72 feet above the orchestra floor and is covered with over 1 million 2-½-inch-square sheets of nearly transparent 23-carat gold leaf. Not only does the gold add to the glamour of the interior, but it is supposed to eliminate the need for maintenance and repainting.

If you look up once you leave the auditorium and are in the outer lobbies, you’ll see that the ceiling has a greenish color. These ceilings are covered with a Dutch alloy which contains copper, and copper turns green when it tarnishes.

There are two house curtains in the auditorium:
• a guillotine curtain made of gold velour which rises and descends vertically
• a Wagner curtain, conceived by Richard Wagner whose design was first used in 1886 in Bayreuth, Germany. It is a motorized tableau drape with adjustable speed.
The current curtain, woven of 1,150 yards of gold-patterned Scalamandre silk, was installed at the Met in 1990 and is the biggest Wagner curtain in the world.

The chandeliers are a gift from the Austrian government. The 1 central chandelier is 17ft. in diameter and is surrounded by 8 starbursts of varying sizes. The 12 satellite clusters can be raised to avoid blocking the stage. Altogether, the chandeliers contain over 3,000 light bulbs.

Does your seat feel a little tighter than last time? Not all the chairs at the Met are the same size; they vary in width from 19 to 23 inches. The result is staggered seating to provide the best possible sight lines.

The conductor's podium is motorized so that it can be adjusted to any height. It is also equipped with cue lights that indicate when the curtain is ready to rise and a telephone line to the stage manager's post and the prompter's box.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adagio</td>
<td>Indication that the music is to be performed at a slow, relaxed pace. A movement for a piece of music with this marking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allegro</td>
<td>Indicates a fairly fast tempo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aria</td>
<td>A song for solo voice in an opera, with a clear, formal structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arioso</td>
<td>An operatic passage for solo voice, melodic but with no clearly defined form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baritone</td>
<td>Man’s voice, with a range between that of bass and tenor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bel canto</td>
<td>Refers to the style cultivated in the 18th and 19th centuries in Italian opera. This demanded precise intonation, clarity of tone and enunciation, and a virtuoso mastery of the most florid passages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cabaletta</td>
<td>The final short, fast section of a type of aria in 19th-century Italian opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cadenza</td>
<td>A passage in which the solo instrument or voice performs without the orchestra, usually of an improvisatory nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chorus</td>
<td>A body of singers who sing and act as a group, either in unison or in harmony; any musical number written for such a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coloratura</td>
<td>An elaborate and highly ornamented part for soprano voice, usually written for the upper notes of the voice. The term is also applied to those singers who specialize in the demanding technique required for such parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conductor</td>
<td>The director of a musical performance for any sizable body of performers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contralto</td>
<td>Low-pitched woman’s voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crescendo</td>
<td>Means “growing”, used as a musical direction to indicate that the music is to get gradually louder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ensemble</td>
<td>From the French word for “together”, this term is used when discussing the degree of effective teamwork among a body of performers; in opera, a set piece for a group of soloists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finale</td>
<td>The final number of an act, when sung by an ensemble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fortissimo (ff)</td>
<td>Very loud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forte (f)</td>
<td>Italian for “strong” or “loud”. An indication to perform at a loud volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harmony</td>
<td>A simultaneous sounding of notes that usually serves to support a melody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermezzo</td>
<td>A piece of music played between the acts of an opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermission</td>
<td>A break between the acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legato</td>
<td>A direction for smooth performance without detached notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leitmotif</td>
<td>Melodic element used by Richard Wagner in his operas to musically represent characters, events, ideas, or emotions in the plot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>libretto</td>
<td>The text of an opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maestro</td>
<td>Literally ‘master’; used as a courtesy title for the conductor, whether a man or woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>melody</td>
<td>A succession of musical tones (i.e., notes not sounded at the same time); the horizontal quality of music, often prominent and singable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>Female voice with a range between that of soprano and contralto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opera buffa</td>
<td>An Italian form in which the spoken word is also used, usually on a comedy theme. The French term “opera bouffe” describes a similar type, although it may have an explicitly satirical intent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opera seria</td>
<td>Italian for “serious opera”. Used to signify Italian opera on a heroic or dramatic theme during the 18th and early 19th centuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operetra</td>
<td>A light opera, whether full-length or not, often using spoken dialogue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The plots are romantic and improbable, even farcical, and the music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tuneful and undemanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overture</td>
<td>A piece of music preceding an opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pentatonic</td>
<td>Typical of Japanese, Chinese, and other Far Eastern music, the scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pentatonic scale divides the octave into five tones and may be played on the piano by striking only the black keys.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
pianissimo (pp)  Very softly.
piano (p)  Meaning "flat", or "low". Softly, or quietly.
pitch  The location of a musical sound in the tonal scale; the quality that makes "A" different from "D".
prima donna  The leading woman singer in an operatic cast or company.
prelude  A piece of music that precedes another.
recitative  A style of sung declamation used in opera. It may be either accompanied or unaccompanied except for punctuating chords from the harpsichord.
reprise  A direct repetition of an earlier section in a piece of music, or the repeat of a song.
score  The written or printed book containing all the parts of a piece of music.
serenade  A song by a lover at the window of his mistress.
solo  A part for unaccompanied instrument or for an instrument or voice with the dominant role in a work.
soprano  The high female voice; the high, often highest, member of a family of instruments.
tempo  The pace of a piece of music; how fast or how slow it is played.
tenor  A high male voice.
theme  The main idea of a piece of music; analogous to the topic of a written paper, subject to exploration and changes.
trill  Musical ornament consisting of the rapid alternation between the note and the note above it.
trio  A sustained musical passage for three voices.
verismo  A type of "realism" in Italian opera during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which the plot was on a contemporary, often violent, theme.
volume  A description of how loud or soft a sound is.