

**FROM THE FIRST, ACHING CHORDS OF ITS PRELUDE, *LA TRAVIATA* DRAWS** the audience into the private world of its unforgettable heroine. Violetta, the “fallen woman” of the opera’s title, knows that the tuberculosis she suffers from will take her life. Whether amid the feverish gaiety of Parisian high society or the shadowy gloom of her deathbed, Violetta and her fate form the emotional core of Verdi’s opera. And her fate is shattering: As she spins out the last waning moments of her life, she gives herself so wholly to love that she is willing to sacrifice everything for it—even herself.

With *La Traviata*, Verdi and his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, created an intimate meditation on what was then quite radical for the operatic stage: prostitution and the urban spread of disease. Like its plot source, a novel by Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, *La Traviata* omits the sort of ending that would have been expected for such subjects—an affirmation of morality and familial responsibility. Instead, the opera’s fallen heroine displays a nobility and innate dignity worthy of the most exalted of literary and theatrical heroines. “All of Verdi is in *La Traviata*,” states the Met’s Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin. “There is an incredible intimacy about it, and yet a certain grandeur that we can see he will explore more in later years.” And as Michael Mayer, the director of this new Metropolitan Opera production adds, “Violetta has consumption from the time we meet her, and yet she’s full of life. And she’s full of love. And she wants so much to be able to give and receive love from someone.” Mayer’s production highlights the tragedy of Violetta’s short life with a luxuriously ornamented set by Christine Jones that depicts the passing of the seasons.

This guide is intended to help your students appreciate the poignancy and inventiveness of one of the most beloved operas in the repertoire. They will explore the social and historical context of the opera and discover the elements that contribute to Violetta’s tragic end. The activities on the following pages are designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of this *Live in HD* transmission. This guide will also align with key strands of the Common Core Standards.

### THE WORK *LA TRAVIATA*

Opera in three acts, sung in Italian

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francisco Maria Piave,  
based on the play *La Dame aux  
Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas  *fils*

First performed on March 6, 1853 at  
the Teatro La Fenice, Venice

### PRODUCTION

Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Conductor

Michael Mayer, Production

Christine Jones, Set Designer

Susan Hilferty, Costume Designer

Kevin Adams, Lighting Designer

Lorin Latarro, Choreographer

### STARRING

Diana Damrau

VIOLETTA VALÉRY (soprano)

Juan Diego Flórez

ALFREDO GERMONT (tenor)

Quinn Kelsey

GIORGIO GERMONT (baritone)

Production a gift of Eva-Marie and Ray Berry /  
The Paiko Foundation

Major additional funding from Mercedes T. Bass,  
Mr. and Mrs. Paul M. Montrone, and Rolex



DAMRAU



FLÓREZ



KELSEY

This guide includes five sections.

- **THE SOURCE, THE STORY, WHO'S WHO IN *LA TRAVIATA*, AND A TIMELINE**
- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:**  
Two activities designed to align with and support various Common Core Standard strands used in History/Social Studies and Music curricula
- **PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:**  
Two activities to be used during *The Met: Live in HD* transmission, highlighting specific aspects of this production
- **POST-SHOW DISCUSSION:**  
A wrap-up activity that integrates the *Live in HD* experience into the students' understanding of the performing arts and the humanities
- **STUDENT RESOURCE PAGES:**  
Classroom-ready worksheets supporting the activities in the guide

The activities in this guide will focus on several aspects of *La Traviata*:

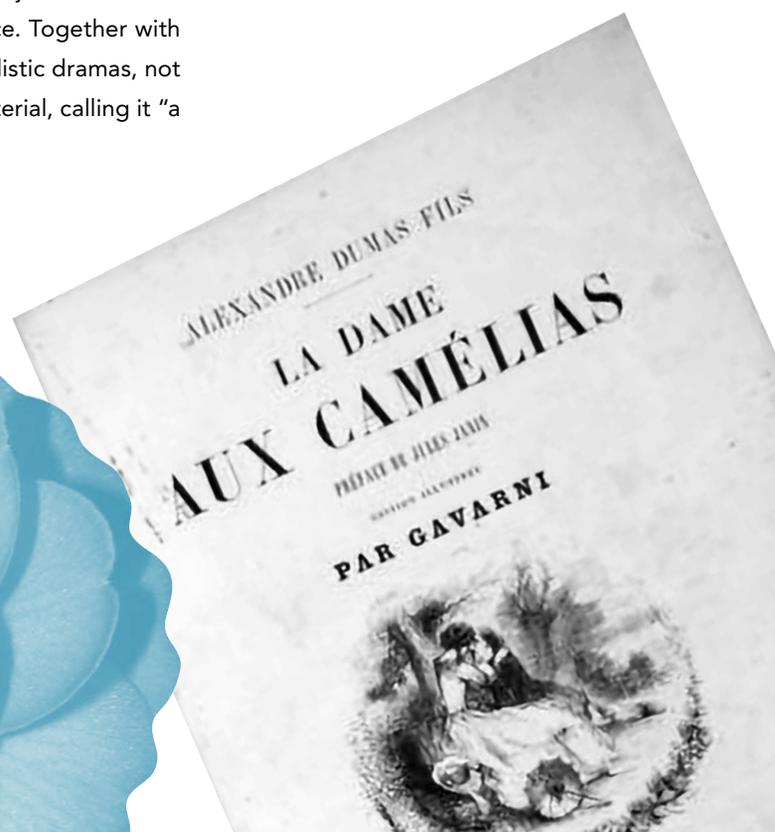
- The real-life conditions and experiences that informed Verdi's choice of plot
- The interpretation of the heroine's actions and choices
- The characteristics of Verdi's musical style
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *La Traviata*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds, and seeks to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

**SUMMARY** Violetta Valéry is a well-known courtesan in Paris whose life seems glamorous but who also suffers from a serious illness. She lives on the money given to her by her male patrons. But when she meets Alfredo Germont, a young man from a good family, they fall in love and move to the country. Alfredo's father disapproves of their relationship and comes to tell Violetta that her involvement with Alfredo will ruin his family's reputation. Out of her love for Alfredo, Violetta agrees to leave him and returns to Paris. Thinking she has betrayed him, Alfredo is heartbroken. He follows her to a party and publicly insults her. A few months later, Violetta is close to death. Alfredo, who has learned why Violetta left him, returns to her. He is shocked by her weakness as she strains to get to her feet. They vow to be together forever, but she soon collapses and breathes her last.

**THE SOURCE: LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS FILS** The story of Verdi's *La Traviata* can ultimately be traced to the life of a historical figure, the courtesan Marie Duplessis, who died from consumption in 1847. Not long before her death, Duplessis had a brief affair with Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, who then transformed this personal history into a semi-autobiographical novel, *La Dame aux Camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*), in 1848. Dumas later adapted his work as a play, and this stage version premiered at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in Paris on February 2, 1852.

Giuseppe Verdi often turned to the French theater for inspiration—his *Ernani* and *Rigoletto* were both based on plays by Victor Hugo—and within a few months of the premiere of *La Dame aux Camélias*, he had chosen it as the subject of the new opera he was contracted to write for the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. Together with his librettist Francesco Maria Piave, he created one of his most realistic dramas, not shying away from the moral and medical tensions of his source material, calling it “a subject of the times.”



## VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

### SOPRANO

the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys

### MEZZO-SOPRANO

the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto (Italian “mezzo” = middle, medium)

### CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice, also called an alto

### TENOR

the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

### BARITONE

the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

### BASS

the lowest male voice

## SYNOPSIS

**ACT I:** *At the home of Violetta Valéry in Paris* Violetta Valéry, a high-class courtesan in Paris, is giving a party following her recent recovery from a protracted illness. Her salon fills with guests, and a few of them wonder whether she is up to drinking the Champagne she offers. When Violetta is introduced to the young Alfredo Germont, she is surprised to learn that he visited her house daily during her convalescence—a kindness that even her patron, Baron Douphol, failed to show. Prompted by Violetta, Alfredo leads the assembled crowd in a drinking song. Violetta invites her guests into the ballroom but finds herself too weak to follow. Alfredo stays behind and inquires after her health, and then declares his love for her. She tries to laugh it off, but Alfredo is undeterred, and replies that if she will not talk of love, he must leave. Intrigued, Violetta hands him a camellia. She tells him to return it to her when it has withered. Alfredo, overjoyed, departs.

Alone, Violetta considers the possibility of finding the kind of true love that Alfredo spoke of. She hears him singing outside her window of the passion he feels, but she concludes that it is madness: She must forget him and continue to live, day to day, for pleasure alone.

**ACT II:** *Scene 1: A country house outside Paris, three months later* Alfredo and Violetta have been living together in the country for three months. Alfredo learns from Annina, Violetta’s maid, that Violetta has been selling her property in Paris to cover the household expenses. Upset and ashamed that his beloved has been secretly supporting him, he rushes off to the city to settle matters and to cover the expenses himself.

While he is gone, Violetta receives an unexpected visit from Giorgio Germont, Alfredo’s father. Disapproving of her lifestyle and her relationship with his son, Germont demands that Violetta leave Alfredo in order to protect their family name and enable his daughter, Alfredo’s sister, to marry well. Violetta is shocked and dismayed, but out of love for Alfredo, eventually agrees to the sacrifice.

Just as Violetta is writing a farewell note to Alfredo, he returns. She effusively affirms her love for him, then rushes out. A messenger appears with her note. The moment Alfredo opens it, his father arrives to console him. But all the memories of home and family can’t prevent the furious Alfredo from seeking revenge for Violetta’s apparent betrayal. Germont tries to comfort his son, but Alfredo is inconsolable. When he finds an invitation for a ball that Violetta had received from her friend Flora, he departs, swearing vengeance.

A model of Christine Jones's set for Act I



*Scene 2: A party at Flora's home in Paris* At Flora's ball, news has spread of Violetta and Alfredo's separation. Dancers entertain the guests. Meanwhile, Violetta and her previous lover, Baron Douphol, have arrived. Alfredo and the baron battle at the gaming table, and Alfredo wins a fortune. When everybody has withdrawn, Alfredo confronts Violetta, who claims to be truly in love with the baron. In a rage, Alfredo calls the guests as witnesses and publicly denounces Violetta, throwing his winnings at her as payment for their time together. Giorgio Germont, who has witnessed the scene, rebukes his son for his behavior. The baron challenges his rival to a duel.

**ACT III:** *Violetta's apartment in Paris* Months later, Violetta is at death's door. Dr. Grenvil appears and tells Violetta's maid that her mistress has only a few hours to live. Violetta rereads a letter from Alfredo's father in which he recounts that he has told his son the truth about Violetta's sacrifice, and Alfredo is on his way to see her and ask her forgiveness. Violetta is certain that it is too late and she will die before he arrives.

The sounds of a carnival are heard. Alfredo arrives and begs Violetta's forgiveness. Forgetting Violetta's hopeless situation, they reaffirm their love and dream of leaving Paris for a new life. Germont arrives, remorseful about his earlier treatment of Violetta.

A model of Christine Jones's set for Act III



He asks for her mercy and declares that she is like a daughter to him. Violetta gives Alfredo her portrait and asks him to pass it along to his future wife, whomever she may be. Having made her peace with the world, she suddenly feels her strength returning, but then falls, dead.

## WHO'S WHO IN LA TRAVIATA

| CHARACTER     |  | PRONUNCIATION  | VOICE TYPE    | THE LOWDOWN   |
|---------------|--|----------------|---------------|---|
| Violetta      | A courtesan in 19th-century Paris                        | vee-oh-LET-tah | soprano       | Even before the curtain rises, Violetta knows she will fall victim to a fatal illness.            |
| Alfredo       | A young man of good family but small financial resources | al-FRAY-doe    | tenor         | Alfredo has fallen in love with Violetta from afar, unknown to her, well before the opera begins. |
| Germont       | Alfredo's father   | djare-MON      | baritone      | Germont's parental and social anxieties cause him to reject Violetta's involvement with his son.  |
| Baron Douphol | A protector of Violetta's                                | doo-FOLE       | baritone      | Violetta was involved with the baron before meeting Alfredo.                                      |
| Flora         | Violetta's friend, another "kept woman"                  | FLOH-rah       | mezzo-soprano | Flora hosts lavish parties at her Paris home.   |
| Dr. Grenvil   | Violetta's physician                                     | grahn-VEEL     | bass          | Grenvil cares for Violetta in her final illness.  |

*18th–19th centuries*

Tuberculosis, an infectious disease of the lungs (known historically as consumption or phthisis), becomes endemic across the world, at its height causing a quarter of all deaths in Europe. There is evidence of the disease as early as the Neolithic Age, and it was common in ancient Egypt, China, and Greece.

**1813** Giuseppe Verdi is born in Le Roncole, a small village in northern Italy.

**1820s** The explosive growth of European urban centers at the close of the Industrial Revolution results in cramped, unsanitary living conditions and an environment primed for the rapid spread of tuberculosis and other diseases.

**1836** Verdi's first opera to be completed and produced, *Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio*, opens at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan.

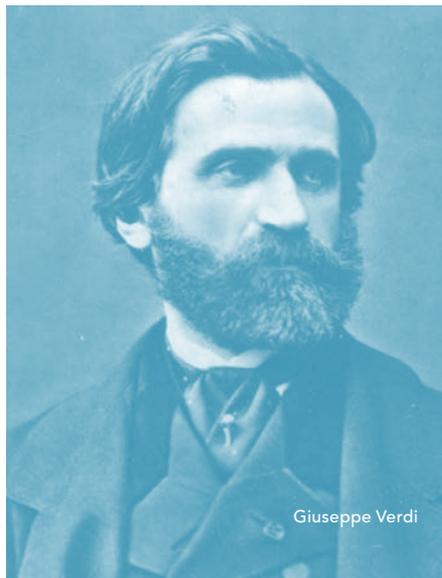
**1842** *Nabucco* premieres at La Scala, its success establishing Verdi as Italy's foremost composer. He enters a period of remarkable productivity, writing 14 operas over the following ten years.

**1843** Verdi is contracted to work on a new opera for the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, with the unknown poet Francesco Maria Piave as librettist. Their collaboration results in *Ernani*, the first of ten operas they would eventually work on together, including *La Traviata*.

**1847** The beautiful Parisian courtesan Marie Duplessis dies of tuberculosis at age 23.



A portrait of Marie Duplessis



Giuseppe Verdi

1847 Verdi and Giuseppina Strepponi, an Italian soprano, begin a romantic relationship. They remain devoted to each other for the rest of their lives and eventually marry in 1857.

1848 French author Alexander Dumas  *fils*  publishes his novel *La Dame aux Camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*), based on his real-life relationship with Marie Duplessis.

1852 Dumas's stage adaptation of *La Dame aux Camélias* premieres at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in Paris on February 2.

In April, Verdi is commissioned by the Teatro La Fenice to write an opera for early the following year, but by October he still has not decided on a subject. He eventually settles on Dumas's story, and composition proceeds in record time.

1853 The premiere of *La Traviata* on March 6 turns into one of the most notorious fiascos in operatic history. The audience's negative reaction likely is due to poor casting more than any artistic fault on the part of Verdi or Piave. After the premiere, Verdi writes to a friend, "*La Traviata* last night a failure. Was the fault mine or the singers'? Time will tell."

1854 Verdi makes a few changes to the score, most notably to the Act II duet between Violetta and Germont. With a new cast, *La Traviata* is an unequivocal success when performed at Venice's Teatro San Benedetto on May 6.

1882 After slow advances in the study of tuberculosis over the past century, the Prussian doctor Robert Koch identifies the bacillus *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* as the cause of the disease.

1901 Verdi suffers a stroke on January 21 and dies on January 27. His funeral procession in Milan draws tens of thousands of mourners.



*History/Social Studies***IN PREPARATION**

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *Traviata Time Capsule*. You will also need construction paper, colored pens/pencils, boxes for dioramas (shoe boxes, small cardboard boxes, etc.), and any other craft items teachers may wish to provide (scissors, glitter, sequins, fabric, popsicle sticks, home décor and/or fashion magazines, etc.).

**CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS**

Social Studies, World History, Art and Art History, Architecture, Interior Design, Social History, Economics

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- To deepen students' understanding of *La Traviata's* story and themes
- To develop students' media literacy through close reading and visual analysis
- To interpret facts about the past based on an analysis of cultural artifacts
- To foster students' creative responses to *La Traviata* and other contemporary works of art

***Traviata* Time Capsule: Fashion, Opulence, and Parisian Courtesans**

Designing an opera set is rather like building a bridge between two different time periods. First, the designer must figure out how to recreate the interiors, objects, and clothes of a production's historical setting; then he or she must figure out how these visual elements will help modern viewers understand the opera's story. Fortunately, there are numerous resources designers can use to ascertain what life in another era looked like. This exercise will focus on two such resources: literature and paintings.

In this activity, your students will delve into the historical setting of Verdi's *La Traviata* and its source novel, *La Dame aux Camélias*. As they study the opulent, upper-class world of 18th- and 19th-century Paris, students will think about the importance of luxury in Violetta's life and consider how her shifting fortunes reflect her development as a character. Students will:

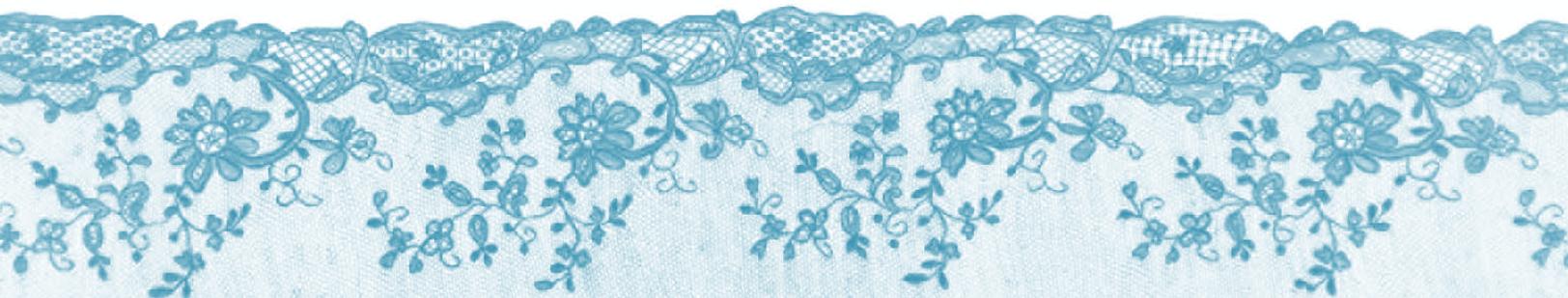
- review *La Traviata's* plot and discuss how Violetta's choices shape the opera's story
- analyze several literary excerpts and historical paintings and consider what these selections may tell us about Violetta's surroundings
- design a historically appropriate apartment for Violetta
- build an architectural model of their design (i.e., a diorama), which they will then present to the class

**STEPS**

In this activity, students will analyze short literary excerpts and paintings as though they are time capsules—sealed containers in which objects are preserved for study at a later point in time. As they use these selections to learn more about *La Traviata's* story and setting, students will practice close reading skills, develop techniques for analyzing paintings and other images, and design and execute a creative project based on Verdi's masterpiece.

**STEP 1:** Begin by reviewing *La Traviata's* plot with your students. Distribute copies of the synopsis and ask your students to read it silently or take turns reading it aloud. Your students may also enjoy acting out short scenes from the opera.

Now, test students' comprehension of the plot by drawing their attention to the importance of money in Violetta's life. Start an open discussion by asking them the following questions:



- What must Violetta give up to be with Alfredo? Do you think this is a difficult decision for her?
- Do you think Violetta’s life in the country (in Act II) is as luxurious as her life in Paris?
- Why does Alfredo think Violetta has left him? Is this true?
- Finally, ask your students to reflect more broadly on what money means for Violetta. Why does she have to choose between luxury and love?

**STEP 2:** Explain to your students that Dumas’s novel and Verdi’s opera tell the same story yet are set in two different time periods. *La Dame aux Camélias* takes place in the 19th century, and is actually based on the life of a woman whom Dumas knew and loved. By contrast, Verdi’s opera is set in Paris around the year 1700. Throughout the rest of this activity, students will be asked to compare descriptions and depictions of these two historical settings.

Distribute the reproducible handout entitled *Traviata Time Capsule: Literature*. Briefly introduce the excerpts to your students. Excerpts 1 and 2 were both written by Alexandre Dumas père, the father of the author of *La Dame aux Camélias*; each describes a palace or fancy apartment in the decades immediately before or after 1700. In other words, they describe the kind of luxurious settings that Verdi’s Violetta would have inhabited. Summaries are provided below.

#### LITERARY EXCERPT 1

##### At Louis XIV’s Louvre (Alexandre Dumas père, *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*)

ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, one of numerous historical novels by Dumas, is part of a series that begins with *The Three Musketeers* and includes *The Man in the Iron Mask*. It takes place during the reign of Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715). This excerpt describes what a young princess sees when she arrives at the Louvre, the Parisian palace of the French kings.

#### LITERARY EXCERPT 2

##### Intrigue at the Court of Louis XVI (Alexandre Dumas père, *The Queen’s Necklace*)

ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: *The Queen’s Necklace* is a story of intrigue and romance set at the court of Louis XVI (r. 1774–1792), the final French king before the French Revolution toppled the monarchy. It is loosely based on a real event, the so-called “Affair of the Necklace,” when Queen Marie Antoinette was accused of stealing a valuable diamond necklace. In this excerpt, a disgraced noblewoman named Jeanne inspects a luxurious apartment that she has recently been given.

#### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND LA TRAVIATA

This activity directly supports the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.7

Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.





Have your students read these two excerpts carefully; it may be helpful for them to take turns reading the excerpts aloud. Next, have them underline or circle every object which makes the scene seem fancy or luxurious. Finally, students should make a list of all the items they underlined, either using the space provided on the handout or orally. You may choose to notate their examples on the board.

**STEP 3:** Now have your students turn to the next section of the reproducible handouts. Excerpts 3 through 5 are drawn from *La Dame aux Camélias* itself, and thus describe the 19th-century spaces inhabited by Marguerite Gautier, the character on whom Verdi's *Violetta* is based.

Have your students read these excerpts, repeating the processes they followed in Step 2 above.

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*A Consuming Illness* Violetta's illness, embodied musically by the ethereal, mournful opening notes of *La Traviata*, is "consumption," the same sickness from which the character in Dumas's original story suffers and a frequent scourge of operatic heroines.

Today we know this disease as pulmonary tuberculosis, a bacterial infection of the lungs. Tuberculosis is highly infectious, but it is relatively rare in the developed world of the 21st century, and highly curable thanks to antibiotics. Tuberculosis patients lose a good deal of weight, as if the disease were "consuming" their bodies, which historically led to the term "consumption."

In the 19th century, consumption occurred frequently among the urban poor and was almost invariably fatal. It became a recurrent theme in art and culture of the period and was the cause of death for artists and writers from across history, including John Keats, all three Brontë sisters, Frédéric Chopin, Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekhov, and many others. Literary and theatrical characters were also frequently felled by the illness, including Fantine in Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, Mimì in Puccini's opera *La Bohème*, and Little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

The artistic legacy of consumptive heroines continues today. In the 1996 musical *Rent*, which is based on *La Bohème*, Mimi suffers from AIDS. In the Baz Luhrmann movie *Moulin Rouge!*, a 2001 take on the *Traviata* story set in the world of Parisian cabaret, the performer and "kept woman" Satine succumbs to consumption.

### LITERARY EXCERPT 3

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#### *Marguerite's Apartment (Alexandre Dumas fils, La Dame aux Camélias)*

ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: Marguerite has died, and her belongings must be auctioned off to pay her enormous debts. The auctioneers host an open house in her apartment so that potential buyers can see what is for sale, and the curious narrator stops by.

### LITERARY EXCERPT 4

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#### *Marguerite in Paris (Alexandre Dumas fils, La Dame aux Camélias)*

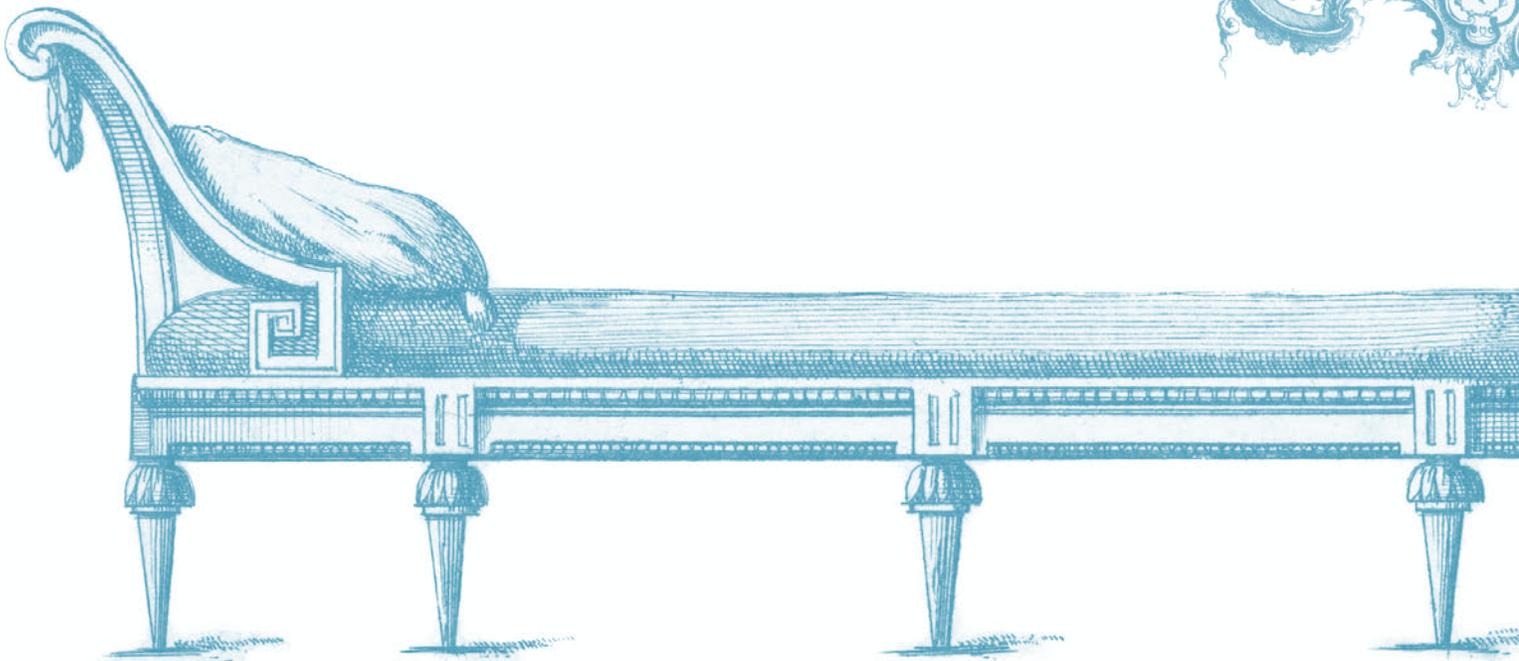
ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: The narrator recalls Marguerite's appearance, the settings where she was most commonly seen, and the objects she always had with her.

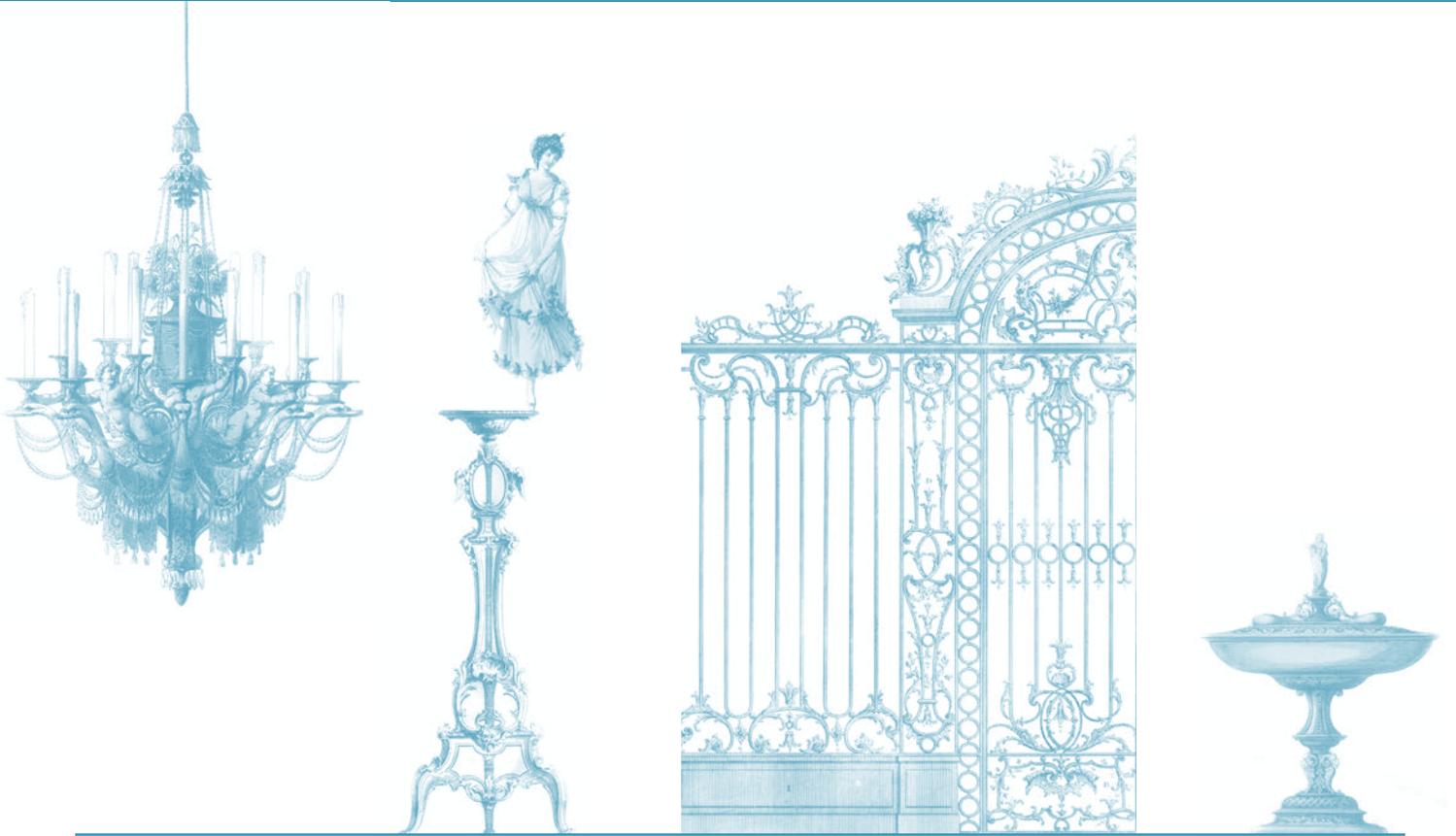
### LITERARY EXCERPT 5

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#### *Marguerite's Costly Lifestyle (Alexandre Dumas fils, La Dame aux Camélias)*

ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: Marguerite's lover, Armand, has promised not to judge her career choice; nevertheless, he is jealous of the other men she entertains. Here, Marguerite's friend Prudence reminds him that Marguerite needs her wealthy customers if she wants to maintain her lavish lifestyle.





**STEP 4:** Ask your students to compare the lists they compiled in Steps 2 and 3, and then begin an open class discussion:

- Which objects appear on both lists?
- Which objects appear on only one list?
- How do these objects contribute to our understanding of the character portrayed?
- Are any of these objects still considered luxurious today?
- For objects that are not frequently encountered today, what might be some modern-day equivalents? (For instance: instead of private carriages, people drive luxury cars to demonstrate wealth and status.)

**STEP 5:** Now, we will turn to a visual analysis of historical items. Distribute the final sheets of the reproducible handouts for this exercise, *Traviata Time Capsule: Images*. These paintings (and one pastel drawing) will help your students refine the lists of luxury items they created in Steps 2 and 3. **Images 1 and 2** are from the 18th century, and thus correspond to Literary Excerpts 1 and 2; **Images 3–5** are from the 19th century and correspond to Literary Examples 3–5. (Note, however, that Image 1 does not illustrate Literary Excerpt 1 specifically; rather, Images 1 and 2 both illustrate scenes that are contemporaneous with the scenes described in Excerpts 1 and 2.)

Beginning with Images 1 and 2, first ask your students for general impressions of these visual representations. Next, ask if they see in these works any of the objects that appeared in Literary Excerpts 1 and 2. Finally, ask them to observe any other objects in the images that represent luxury or wealth. Have them add these items to their lists.

Repeat the same process with Images 3, 4, and 5.

## IMAGES THAT CORRESPOND TO LITERARY EXAMPLES 1 AND 2

### IMAGE 1

#### Jean-Baptiste André Gautier d'Agoty, *Marie Antoinette* (1777)

ABOUT THIS WORK: Marie Antoinette was the wife of Louis XVI and the last queen of France before the French Revolution. In 1793, she and Louis were beheaded during the Reign of Terror.

### IMAGE 2

#### Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, *Madame de Pompadour* (ca. 1748)

ABOUT THIS WORK: Madame de Pompadour was a mistress of Louis XV. Although she was never married to the king, she enjoyed great power at the court and was an important patron of artists and intellectuals in mid-18th-century France. Unlike the other images in this exercise, all of which are paintings, this image was drawn with pastels.

### IMAGE 1



CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES (COURTESY RÉUNION DES MUSÉES NATIONAUX)

### IMAGE 2



MUSÉE DU LOUVRE (COURTESY RÉUNION DES MUSÉES NATIONAUX)

### IMAGE 3



PRIVATE COLLECTION

### IMAGES THAT CORRESPOND TO LITERARY EXCERPTS 3, 4, AND 5

#### IMAGE 3

*Jean Charles Olivier, A Portrait of Marie Duplessis (1840)*

ABOUT THIS WORK: Marie Duplessis was the inspiration for Alexandre Dumas *filis*'s Marguerite, the Lady of the Camellias. Notice the white camellias—her signature flower—in the large vase on the table behind her.

#### IMAGE 4

*Unknown Artist, An Interior with a Curtained Bed Alcove (ca. 1853)*

ABOUT THIS WORK: This watercolor depicts a bedroom much like the one Marguerite would have had in Paris. It is important to notice that the bedroom does not just have a bed; rather, like Marguerite's dressing room, it has many pieces of furniture and art—including a desk and table with bottles, toiletries, and trinkets; numerous paintings; delicate fabric on the walls; and a thick rug.

#### IMAGE 4



COOPER-HEWITT, NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

#### IMAGE 5



COURTESY PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

## IMAGE 5

### Mary Cassatt, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* (1879)

**ABOUT THIS WORK:** Cassatt was an American painter. Like the painting from Image 4, Cassatt's portrait depicts an environment similar to one found in Dumas's novel. In this case, it shows a theater box (also known as a "loge") such as the one where Marguerite can often be seen.

**STEP 6:** Your students will now put their studies of literature and art into practice. Divide the class into several small groups. Each of these groups will design and build a model for Violetta's apartment. Half of the student groups will design an apartment from the 18th century; the other half will design an apartment from the 19th century. Each group may choose whether they are designing Violetta's first Parisian apartment (from Act I), her country house (from Act II), or the final Parisian apartment where she dies (from Act III). Allow students time to discuss the items they would like to include in their designs. They may refer back to the readings, images, and lists they made for inspiration.

**STEP 7:** Distribute the cardboard boxes and craft materials, and have each group build a diorama that brings their apartment design to life. Depending on class size, it may be useful to set up different craft stations—one with glitter, one with fabric, one with magazines, etc. You may also wish to have your students work on the components of their dioramas at home and assemble the dioramas in class another day.

**STEP 8:** Finally, have each group present its diorama to the class. Students should point out the various objects in their diorama and explain why they chose them. Finally, ask them to explain how their apartment reflects and helps us understand Violetta's life.

**FOLLOW-UP:** The story of *La Dame aux Camélias* / *La Traviata* has been adopted and adapted by numerous artists over the years; for instance, the 2001 film *Moulin Rouge* sets the story in Paris at the turn of the 20th century. To bring this activity to a close, invite your students to imagine some other settings for *La Traviata*. How would the story have to change? What would the stage look like? How would these settings portray luxury?

The following locations may help get the conversation going:

- The United States in the 21st century (you might even specify: Las Vegas, New York, Hollywood, etc.)
- The Wild West
- Ancient Egypt
- Mars

**FUN FACT** The opera's title, *La Traviata*, is drawn from the feminine adjective form of the verb *traviare*—to lead astray. A *traviata* in everyday English might be called a "fallen woman."

tra-vi-'a-re

## Double Aria Jeopardy

### Music

#### IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *Double Aria Jeopardy*, as well as the synopsis and the audio selections from *La Traviata* available online or on the accompanying CD. If available, you can use your school's quiz bowl buzzers. You will also need prizes of some sort for the winning group.

#### CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

General Music, Band, Orchestra, Chorus, Humanities, Fine Arts

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To introduce and/or reinforce knowledge of musical terminology
- To identify new musical forms and styles by listening to selections from *La Traviata*
- To develop aural memory and recognition through an interactive game

In *La Traviata*, Verdi makes use of a musical-dramatic form common in 19th-century Italian opera known as the double aria. Composers employed these two-part solos to depict a character moving through a wide range of emotions within a single scene, while also providing the singer with an opportunity for virtuosic vocal display. The following activity is designed to provide students with an introduction to the music of some of Verdi's double arias, while also becoming familiar with the themes and musical style of *La Traviata*. In this activity, students will:

- explore the different aspects of Verdi's style in *La Traviata*
- learn new musical terminology to describe what they hear
- recognize the distinct sections of the Italian double aria and their musical attributes

#### STEPS

Students will explore the musical characteristics of the Italian double aria in *La Traviata* by listening to musical excerpts from the opera, both in audio examples of the *Ten Essential Musical Terms* and in independent excerpts. Their understanding of the form as well as other musical attributes will then be tested in a listening cognition exercise, *Double Aria Jeopardy*.

**STEP 1:** It will be necessary for students to have a basic understanding of the plot of *La Traviata*. You may like to distribute copies of the synopsis ahead of time and assign it as homework reading. Alternatively, you may prefer to wait until your class period to review the summary, which provides an abridged version of the plot. In any case, students should understand the overarching story and be able to identify the major characters.



**STEP 2:** Distribute copies of the *Ten Essential Musical Terms* as well as the Voice Type sidebar and review them as a class. Using your voice, musical instruments available, and /or the audio tracks outlined below, demonstrate each term, as well as the supplemental tracks that provide examples of voice types. A guide to the audio examples is below.

| TRACK | MUSICAL TERM/EXAMPLE |
|-------|----------------------|
| 1     | brass                |
| 2     | cabaletta            |
| 3     | cadenza              |
| 4     | cavatina             |
| 5     | recitative           |
| 6     | strings              |
| 7     | woodwinds            |
| 8     | soprano              |
| 9     | mezzo-soprano        |
| 10    | tenor                |
| 11    | baritone             |
| 12    | bass                 |

**STEP 3:** Now, we will explore Verdi’s use of the double aria form more closely. Explain to students that a double aria consists of two self-contained sections, connected by a short intermediate segment often in the form of a recitative and sometimes involving other characters.

The initial aria section usually is written in the form of a cavatina (cah-vah-TEEN-ah), a comparatively simple piece in slow to moderate tempo, in which the character reflects on his or her situation—thoughtfully, somberly, even sadly.

In the middle section, something will change the mood: News might arrive, another character might express himself, do something, or prevent something from being done. This sets up the second aria section, called a cabaletta (cah-bah-LET-tah). It is faster, more energetic, and has a strong rhythmic drive. The character’s feelings have changed: He or she may be joyful or angry, or may have come to a decision.

You may play **Tracks 2 and 4** from the *Ten Essential Musical Terms* again, or, alternatively, Violetta’s full double aria “Ah, fors’è lui ... Sempre libera.” The text is provided in the reproducible handouts, and the music can be found on **Track 13**. Be sure to call students’ attention to the differences in musical style between the two sections. Note: The cavatina begins at the text “Ah, fors’è lui che l’anima”; the middle recitative section begins at “Follie! Follie!”; and the cabaletta begins at “Sempre libera.”

**STEP 3:** In order to give students an additional roadmap to the music of *La Traviata*, it will also be helpful to work through the opera’s main musical themes. The *Double Aria*

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND LA TRAVIATA

This activity directly supports the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Jeopardy questions in the game to come will also draw from this work. The themes are described on the following page, along with score excerpts and audio track numbers.

### TRACK 14: VIOLETTA'S SACRIFICE THEME

A lush and tuneful melody in the major mode, spun out in this excerpt by the strings, against a waltz-like accompaniment.



### TRACK 15: DEATH THEME

A slow, sad-sounding, expressive melody in the minor-mode, played in a high range by the violins. It includes chromatic harmonies.



### TRACK 16: DRINKING THEME

A boisterous and brisk melody in the major mode played against a strong "oom-pah-pah" accompaniment, which gives the excerpt a celebratory and dance-like feeling.



## TRACK 17: LOVE THEME

A major-mode, triple-time outpouring of passionate emotion, marked “con espansione” (“expansively”) in the score. It recurs throughout the opera, signaling Alfredo’s love.



**STEP 5:** Now distribute copies of the *Double Aria Jeopardy* handout at the back of this guide and divide students into groups of equal size, with ideally no more than five groups. The *Jeopardy* chart is organized in the same way as in the game show: There is a series of categories (Characters & Voice Types; Musical Characteristics; Instruments; and Theme Identification), organized in order of increasing difficulty.

You should set up your classroom so that there are chairs at the front of the room—the number of chairs should match the number of groups. (If your school has quiz bowl buzzers, you can set them up on a long table in front of the chairs.) Prior to each round, the groups should nominate one student from their ranks to go to the front of the room and choose a seat.

Unlike in the game show, you should identify which group will select the first question (e.g., “Musical Characteristics for \$300,” etc.). Rather than having the winner of each round continue by selecting the next question, you should cycle through each group, so that everyone has a chance to choose a question.

Remind students that they should frame their answers in the form of a question, then provide the first prompt. (A completed chart is provided on the following page.) If you are not using buzzers, make sure you are watching the students carefully so that you can see who raises his or her hand to answer first. That student has the first opportunity to provide an answer; if they are incorrect, you can cycle through the other group representatives until one provides the correct answer. For the next question, a new round of students should come to the front to play. Keep a running tally of the score on the blackboard.

The game of *Double Aria Jeopardy* can continue until all of the questions have been answered or the class period ends. The team with the highest score wins!

**FUN FACT:** While the story of the *Lady of the Camellias* remains essentially the same across its many versions, the heroine’s name has changed over the years—from the historical Marie Duplessis (who was born Alphonsine Plessis) to Marguerite Gautier in Dumas’s novel and play, to Violetta Valéry in *La Traviata*, to Camille in some of the film versions.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Double Aria Jeopardy **ANSWER KEY**

| <p><b>CHARACTERS &amp;<br/>VOICE TYPES</b></p>  | <p><b>MUSICAL<br/>CHARACTERISTICS</b></p>  | <p><b>INSTRUMENTS</b></p>   | <p><b>THEME<br/>IDENTIFICATION</b></p>  |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Who is the character being described?</p>  | <p>What is a prominent musical attribute of the example, with an emphasis on style or structure?</p> | <p>What is the most prominent instrument or instrument family you hear?</p>                         | <p>Which musical theme do you hear?</p>   |
| <p><b>\$100</b><br/>PROMPT: The major soprano character in the opera.<br/>ANSWER: <i>Who is Violetta?</i></p>                 | <p><b>\$100</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 18<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is recitative?</i></p>                | <p><b>\$100</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 19<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is the violin?</i></p>               | <p><b>\$100</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 20<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is the Love Theme?</i></p>     |
| <p><b>\$200</b><br/>PROMPT: The name of the tenor and main love interest of the opera.<br/>ANSWER: <i>Who is Alfredo?</i></p> | <p><b>\$200</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 21<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is a cadenza?</i></p>                 | <p><b>\$200</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 22<br/>ANSWER: <i>What are the woodwinds and brass?</i></p> | <p><b>\$200</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 23<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is the Drinking Theme?</i></p> |
| <p><b>\$300</b><br/>PROMPT: The character who persuades Violetta to leave Alfredo.<br/>ANSWER: <i>Who is Germont?</i></p>     | <p><b>\$300</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 24<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is a cavatina?</i></p>                | <p><b>\$300</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 25<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is the cello?</i></p>                | <p><b>\$300</b><br/>BONUS / DAILY DOUBLE #2<br/><i>(see below)</i></p>                        |
| <p><b>\$400</b><br/>PROMPT: Violetta returns to this character in Act II.<br/>ANSWER: <i>Who is Baron Douphol?</i></p>        | <p><b>\$400</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 27<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is a cabaletta?</i></p>               | <p><b>\$400</b><br/>BONUS / DAILY DOUBLE #1<br/><i>(see below)</i></p>                              | <p><b>\$400</b><br/>PROMPT: Audio Track 28<br/>ANSWER: <i>What is the Death Theme?</i></p>    |

**DAILY DOUBLE:**

- PROMPT: All of the common brass instruments in a symphony orchestra ANSWER: *What is trumpet, French horn, trombone, and tuba*
- PROMPT: Audio Track 26 ANSWER: *What is Violetta's Sacrifice Theme?*

# Ten Essential Musical Terms

The following list of terms provides basic vocabulary to help your students engage more deeply with the music of *La Traviata*.

**Aria** A self-contained piece for solo voice, typically with orchestral accompaniment. Arias form a major part of larger works such as operas or oratorios.

**Brass** An instrument family that includes trumpet, trombone, French horn, and tuba, among others. These instruments are usually made from brass, and sound is created by the player blowing through a mouthpiece with buzzing lips. The opposite end of the instrument has an enlarged opening called a bell. With a timbre that can range from bright to mellow, brass instruments are the loudest members of a standard symphony orchestra.

**Cabaletta** The second and final section of a double aria in 19th-century Italian opera. In contrast to the first section, the cabaletta is usually fast, rhythmically driving, and may include florid ornamentation.

**Cadenza** A musical passage performed by one or more soloists as a virtuosic display of elaborate embellishment before the end of a phrase or section. Cadenzas sometimes are not written out by the composer but left to the improvisational skills of the performer. During a cadenza, the orchestra remains silent in order to focus all the attention on the soloist and give him or her the flexibility to improvise freely.

**Cavatina** A term that throughout operatic history has been used to describe different types of arias. In modern usage, it often refers to the first section of a double aria in Italian operas of the 19th century. Also called a "Cantabile," this section is frequently characterized by a slow to moderate tempo, a simple melodic style, and a text that can be reflective, somber, or sad. In double arias, the cavatina is followed by a brief section of recitative and the cabaletta.

**Double aria** An extended solo in 19th-century Italian opera, featuring two self-contained sections, connected by a short intermediate segment often in the form of a recitative and involving other characters.

**Recitative** A term with far-reaching significance across the history of opera, recitative refers to a type of vocal utterance that can be characterized as song-speech. It is derived from the Italian verb that translates as "to recite" and is meant to capture the gestures of the spoken word. Recitative is understood in contrast to the more tuneful and reflective mode of arias and ensemble pieces, in which texts are often repeated. The middle part of an Italian double aria (between the cavatina and the cabaletta) employs a recitative-like style; this section is called a "tempo di mezzo."

**Strings** The string family includes instruments that produce sound by drawing a bow across a string, most notably violins, violas, cellos, and double basses. (In a wider sense, guitars, lutes, harps, and other plucked instruments are also part of the string family.) In the modern symphony orchestra, strings are grouped into four or more sections, which may include ten or more players per part.

**Theme** Musical themes are melodies or melodic fragments that can act as building blocks for a composition. A theme is often recognizable as a distinct tune and may reappear, in its original form or in an altered version, throughout the piece. Especially in opera, a specific theme may be associated with a particular character, object, or emotion.

**Woodwinds** A group of instruments, including flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon (as well as versions of these instruments with different ranges, such as the piccolo and contrabassoon), that are sounded by blowing air across an opening or against a reed, through a conical chamber. Although modern flutes are made of metal, in their earlier form they were made of wood, like the other instruments in the family.

## Supporting the Student Experience during *The Met: Live in HD* Transmission

### IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the Performance Activity reproducible handouts found in the back of this guide.

### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *LA TRAVIATA*

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3

Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities help students analyze different aspects of the experience and engage critically with what they see and hear. They will consider the creative choices that have been made for the particular production they are watching and examine different aspects of the performance.

Each Performance Activity incorporates a reproducible sheet. Students should bring this activity sheet to the *Live in HD* transmission and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activities direct attention to details of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The first activity sheet, *Seasons of Love*, directs students' attention to the shifting color palettes and set decorations of director Michael Mayer's production. While the entire opera takes place in one lavishly decorated set, the decorations and overlays change with the shifting of scenes, mimicking the changing of the seasons. Using this activity sheet, students will be prompted to note aspects of the design that connote the passing of time and nature's shifting palette.

The second, basic activity sheet is called *My Highs & Lows*. It is meant to be collected, opera by opera, over the course of the season. This sheet serves to guide students toward a consistent set of objective observations, as well as to help them articulate their own opinions. It is designed to enrich the students' understanding of the art form as a whole. The ratings system encourages students to express their critique: Use these ratings to spark discussions that require careful, critical thinking.

The Performance Activity reproducible handouts can be found in the back of this guide. On the next page, you'll find an activity created specifically for follow-up after the *Live in HD* transmission.

## Violetta Valéry: A Tragic Heroine

Start the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did students like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? The discussion offers an opportunity to apply the notes on students' *My Highs and Lows* sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production—in short, to see themselves as *La Traviata* experts.

As students now understand, *La Traviata* tells the story of Violetta Valéry, a fictional character who makes her living as a courtesan—an escort to wealthy and powerful men. This “fallen woman”—as a rough translation of the opera's title might read—is based on a real person, Marie Duplessis,



Susan Hilferty's sketch for the costume Violetta wears to Flora's party in Act II

### IN PREPARATION

This activity requires no preparation other than attendance at the *Live in HD* transmission of *La Traviata*.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To discuss the students' overall experience watching *La Traviata*
- To consider the societal forces at play in the lives of the main characters
- To assess Violetta's tragic end and interpret its meaning

### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND LA TRAVIATA

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

## *In the Lap of Luxury:* The Living Costs of a Courtesan in Paris

In Dumas's novel *La Dame aux Camélias*, Marguerite's lavish lifestyle is said to cost "more than a hundred thousand francs a year." This was an enormous amount of money for the time. To put it into perspective:



In mid-19th-century Paris, female laborers earned about 2 francs (frs.) for a full day's work. Marguerite's trademark camellias cost 3 frs. each.

One of Marguerite's hats would have cost around 1,800 frs., six times the annual salary of a school teacher.

A private box at the Théâtre-Italien (where Marguerite first meets her lover Armand) was rented for 5,475 frs. for a six-month period—more than a cabinet minister in the French government earned in the same amount of time.

An "Indian" (i.e., cashmere) shawl of the kind Marguerite regularly wears could have cost as much as 25,000 frs., only slightly less than the annual salary of a French senator.



(Figures adapted from "A Note on Money," in Alexandre Dumas *filis's* *La Dame aux Camélias*, translated and with an introduction by David Coward, Oxford World's Classics [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986], 203–4.)

who rose from humble beginnings in northern France to become one of the most sophisticated and celebrated courtesans of early-19th-century Paris. Duplessis was the favored partner of writers, composers, and even noblemen, and, like Verdi's protagonist, suffered from consumption and met a tragic early death.

Encourage students to imagine how Violetta might have become such a famous courtesan. You might prompt them with the following questions.

- What could Violetta's backstory be? What kind of family might she have come from?
- What types of employment might have been available to her?
- Does Violetta seem to have anyone else looking out for her well-being? Does she have anyone to rely on besides herself?

Have students remember that in a crucial scene in the opera, Alfredo's father, Germont, confronts Violetta and asks her to leave Alfredo for the good of his family. Remind students that Violetta has been selling her property to support her life together with Alfredo; by doing this, she no longer has to accept money from other men. Ask students to consider:

- What would it have meant for Violetta to leave the man she deeply loves and return to her former life?
- What are the other ramifications of her decision to leave Alfredo? Is Violetta truly independent?
- What else would Violetta be giving up besides love?

In conclusion, ask students to reflect on the opera's plot and characters. What do they view as the true tragedy of the opera? Is it the mere fact of Violetta's death? Is it her sacrifice? Or something else? There is no correct answer to this question; it merely aims to encourage students to consider the full range of events and societal forces that lead to Violetta's tragic end.

Excerpts taken from the  
Metropolitan Opera broadcast of  
December 27, 2014

**VIOLETTA**

Marina Rebeka

**ALFREDO**

Stephen Costello

**GERMONT**

Quinn Kelsey

Conducted by  
Marco Armiliato

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra  
and Chorus

- 1 Ex. brass
- 2 Ex. cabaletta
- 3 Ex. cadenza
- 4 Ex. cavatina
- 5 Ex. recitative
- 6 Ex. strings
- 7 Ex. woodwinds
- 8 Ex. soprano
- 9 Ex. mezzo-soprano
- 10 Ex. tenor
- 11 Ex. baritone
- 12 Ex. bass
- 13 Violetta's double aria "Ah, fors'è lui ... Sempre libera"
- 14 Violetta's Sacrifice Theme
- 15 Death Theme
- 16 Drinking Theme
- 17 Love Theme
- 18 Musical Characteristics for \$100—recitative
- 19 Instruments for \$100—violin
- 20 Theme Identification for \$100—Love Theme
- 21 Musical Characteristics for \$200—cadenza
- 22 Instruments for \$200—woodwinds and brass
- 23 Theme Identification for \$200—Drinking Theme
- 24 Musical Characteristics for \$300—cavatina
- 25 Instruments for \$300—cello
- 26 Theme Identification for \$300/Daily Double—Violetta's Sacrifice Theme
- 27 Musical Characteristics for \$400—cabaletta
- 28 Theme Identification for \$400—Death Theme



LA TRAVIATA

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Traviata Time Capsule: Literature (CONT'D)

LITERARY EXCERPT 2:

Luxurious Items:

Intrigue at the Court of Louis XVI (Alexandre Dumas père, *The Queen's Necklace*)

ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: *The Queen's Necklace* is a story of intrigue and romance set at the court of Louis XVI (r. 1774–1792), the final French king before the French Revolution toppled the monarchy. It is loosely based on a real event, the so-called "Affair of the Necklace," when Queen Marie Antoinette was accused of stealing a valuable diamond necklace. In this excerpt, a disgraced noblewoman named Jeanne inspects a luxurious apartment that she has recently been given.

The ground floor of the apartment, which was well insulated and carefully paneled in wood, included the bathroom, a study, the dining room, three salons, and two reception rooms. The furniture of these large chambers was not as fancy or charming as those in other stately homes, but it exuded the quiet luxury of Old Money. The furniture was not new, and Jeanne would actually have liked the house less had it been furnished expressly for her.

All of these rich antiques, disdained by fashionable women—the marvelous furniture of sculpted ebony; the crystal light fixtures with sparkling pink candles set on their gilded arms; the gothic clocks, masterworks of engraving and enamel; the screens embroidered with Chinese figures; the enormous Japanese vases, filled to bursting with exotic flowers; the painted panels over the doors—all this made Jeanne tremendously happy.

On a mantelpiece, two gilded shells supported branches of coral, from which hung, like fruit on a tree, pieces of the most fashionable jewelry of the day. A little farther away, on a gilded table with a white marble top, stood a large elephant sculpted out of green stone, from whose ears hung large sapphire earrings and on whose back stood a tower of perfumes.

Gilded and illustrated books sat on rosewood shelves, the corners of which were decorated with gold designs.

A complete set of furniture, upholstered with the finest French tapestries, filled a small salon decorated in gray and gold; the walls of this salon were covered with canvases by the greatest painters of the day. The study was filled with portraits of the highest artistic merit and fine terracotta sculptures.

It was not a trendy house, filled with the latest fads and fashions. Rather, it was the result of generation after generation of fathers passing their artistic and decorative treasures down to their children.

—from Chapter 24, "Sapho"

LA TRAVIATA

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Traviata Time Capsule: Literature (CONT'D)

LITERARY EXCERPT 3:

Marguerite’s Apartment (Alexandre Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*)

ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: Marguerite has died, and her belongings must be auctioned off to pay her enormous debts. The auctioneers host an open house in her apartment so that potential buyers can see what is for sale, and the curious narrator stops by.

The furniture was superb. There were pieces made of rosewood, and pieces with delicate brass inlay. There were exquisite vases from Europe and China, porcelain figurines from Germany, satins, velvet, and lace—nothing was missing.

I wandered through the apartment, following the curious noblewomen who had arrived before me. They went into a bedroom with Persian fabric on the walls, and I was just about to follow them, when they hurried out again smiling with embarrassment. Of course, this made me want to see the room even more. It was a dressing room, exquisitely decorated down to the smallest details, where the dead woman’s taste for luxury and elegance seemed to have found its most perfect expression.

On a large table (easily three by six feet in size) which stood beside a wall, there was a magnificent collection of toilettries and other beauty items. Not a single one of these items was made from any metal other than gold or silver. It was clear that this was not a collection in which all the items had been purchased at the same time; rather, multiple individuals had contributed to it, and the various items all bore different initials or coats of arms.

—from Chapter 1

*Luxurious Items:*

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LA TRAVIATA

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Traviata Time Capsule: Literature (CONT'D)

LITERARY EXCERPT 4:

Marguerite in Paris (Alexandre Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*)

ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: The narrator recalls Marguerite’s appearance, the settings where she was most commonly seen, and the objects she always had with her.

Marguerite was tall and perhaps too thin, yet she knew how to conceal her unusual slenderness by the careful arrangement of her clothes. Her Indian cashmere shawl, the corners of which reached all the way down to the ground, gave way on either side to the large skirts of a silk dress, and her thick muff, into which she buried her hands and which she pressed against her chest, helped conceal her small stature so that even the pickiest observer could find no fault in her figure. ...

Marguerite never missed an opening night at the theater, and she spent each evening at the theater or at a ball. Every time a new play was premiered, she was there to see it, and she was never without three things that she always placed on the ledge of her ground-floor box: her opera glasses, a little bag of bonbons, and a bouquet of camellias.

—from Chapter 2

*Luxurious Items:*

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LA TRAVIATA

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Traviata Time Capsule: Literature (CONT'D)

LITERARY EXCERPT 5:

Marguerite’s Costly Lifestyle (Alexandre Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*)

ABOUT THIS EXCERPT: Marguerite’s lover, Armand, has promised not to judge her career choice; nevertheless, he is jealous of the other men she entertains. Here, Marguerite’s friend Prudence reminds him that Marguerite needs her wealthy customers if she wants to maintain her lavish lifestyle.

“You’re being unreasonable,” Prudence admonished. “You must understand that Marguerite can’t kick the Count out when he comes to visit her. As for Mr. G—, he has been her customer for a long time, and he always gives her plenty of money. He still does. Marguerite spends more than one hundred thousand francs per year, you know; she has plenty of debts. The Duke sends her whatever she asks for, but she doesn’t dare ask him for everything she needs. She can’t afford to break up with the Count, who gives her at least twelve thousand francs per year. Marguerite likes you, my dear, but your affair with her—for both her sake and yours—can’t be serious. Do you really think that with the seven or eight thousand francs you make every year you can support this girl? Your salary wouldn’t even cover the cost of her carriage. Accept Marguerite as she is, a warm-hearted, spirited, beautiful girl. Be her lover for a month or two, give her bouquets, candies, and evenings in her box at the theater. But don’t be jealous. It’s ridiculous. You know perfectly well what you’ve gotten yourself into: Marguerite isn’t some innocent young thing. She likes you, you love her; don’t worry about the rest. Don’t play these silly jealous games: You have the most beautiful girlfriend in Paris! She has a gorgeous apartment she lets you visit, she is covered with diamonds, and she doesn’t cost you anything!”

—from Chapter 13

*Luxurious Items:*

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Traviata Time Capsule: Images



Image 1

Jean-Baptiste André Gautier d'Agoty, Marie Antoinette

ABOUT THIS WORK: Marie Antoinette was the wife of Louis XVI and the last queen of France before the French Revolution. In 1793, she and Louis were beheaded during the Reign of Terror.



Image 2

Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, Madame de Pompadour

ABOUT THIS WORK: Madame de Pompadour was a mistress of Louis XV. Although she was never married to the king, she enjoyed great power at the court and was an important patron of artists and intellectuals in mid-18th-century France. Unlike the other images in this exercise, all of which are paintings, this image was drawn with pastels.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

*Traviata* Time Capsule: Images (CONT'D)



Image 3

Jean Charles Olivier, *A Portrait of Marie Duplessis*

ABOUT THIS WORK: Marie Duplessis was the inspiration for Alexandre Dumas *fil's* Marguerite, the Lady of the Camellias. Notice the white camellias—her signature flower—in the large vase on the table behind her.



Image 4

Unknown Artist, *An Interior with a Curtained Bed Alcove* (ca. 1853)

ABOUT THIS WORK: This watercolor depicts a bedroom much like the one Marguerite would have had in Paris. It is important to notice that the bedroom does not just have a bed; rather, like Marguerite's dressing room, it has many pieces of furniture and art—including a desk and table with bottles, toiletries, and trinkets; numerous paintings; delicate fabric on the walls; and a thick rug.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

*Traviata* Time Capsule: Images (CONT'D)



Image 5

Mary Cassatt, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*

**ABOUT THIS WORK:** Cassatt was an American painter. Like the painting from Image 4, Cassatt's portrait depicts an environment similar to one found in Dumas's novel. In this one, it shows a theater box (also known as a "loge") such as the one where Marguerite can often be seen.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Double Aria Jeopardy

### TRACK 13

VIOLETTA: È strano!... è strano!... in core  
scolpiti ho quegli accenti!...  
Saria per me sventura un serio amore?...  
Che risolvi, o turbata anima mia?...  
Null'uomo ancora t'accendeva... oh gioia  
ch'io non conobbi, esser amata amando!...  
E sdegnarla poss'io  
per l'aride follie del viver mio?

Ah, fors'è lui che l'anima  
solinga ne' tumulti  
godea sovente pingere  
de' suoi colori occulti!...  
Lui che modesto e vigilante  
all'egre soglie ascese,  
e nuova febbre accese,  
destandomi all'amor.

A quell'amor ch'è palpito  
dell'universo intero,  
misterioso altero,  
croce e delizia al cor.

*[the following stanza is typically cut in performance]*

[A me fanciulla, un candido  
e trepido desire  
questi effigiò dolcissimo  
signor dell'avvenire,  
quando ne' cieli il raggio  
di sua beltà vedea,  
e tutta me pascea  
di quel divino error.

Sentia che amore è palpito  
dell'universo intero,  
misterioso altero,  
croce e delizia al cor!] *(absorbed in thought)*

*(recovering herself)*

Follie!... follie!... delirio vano è questo!...  
Povera donna, sola,  
abbandonata in questo  
popoloso deserto  
che appellano Parigi,  
che spero or più?... che far degg'io?... Gioire.  
Di voluttà ne' vortici perire.  
Gioir, gioir!

It is strange!... it is strange!... I have  
those words engraved upon my heart!...  
Would true love be a misfortune for me?...  
What do you resolve, oh my troubled soul?...  
No man has yet enflamed you... oh joy  
that I have not known, being loved and in love!...  
And can I scorn it  
for the arid follies of my life?

Ah, perhaps it is he whom my soul  
lonely in its tumults  
often enjoyed painting  
with its secret colors!...  
He who modest and vigilant  
visited my sickroom,  
and ignited a new fever,  
awakening me to love.

To that love that is the heartbeat  
of the entire universe,  
mysterious noble,  
cross and delight of the heart.

[As a girl, a pure  
and anxious desire  
depicted him, a most gentle  
lord of my future,  
when in the heavens I saw  
the ray of his beauty,  
and nourished my whole self  
with that divine fancy.

I felt that love is the heartbeat  
of the entire universe,  
mysterious noble,  
cross and delight of the heart!]

Follies!... follies!... this is vain delirium!...  
Poor woman, alone,  
abandoned in this  
crowded desert  
they call Paris,  
what more do I hope?... what should I do?... Revel.  
Die of pleasure in the whirlwinds.  
Revel, revel!

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Double Aria Jeopardy (CONT'D)

Sempre libera degg'io  
folleggiar di gioia in gioia,  
vo' che scorra il viver mio  
pei sentieri del piacer.  
Nasca il giorno, il giorno muoia,  
sempre lieta ne' ritrovi  
a dilette sempre nuovi  
dee volare il mio pensier.

**ALFREDO:** (*under the balcony*)

Amore, amor è palpito  
dell'universo intero,  
misterioso altero,  
croce e delizia al cor.

**VIOLETTA:** Oh! Amore!  
Follie! follie! follie!... gioir, giorir!  
Sempre libera degg'io, etc.

I must always be free  
to frolic from joy to joy,  
I want my life to run  
along the paths of pleasure.  
Be it dawn, be it dusk,  
always happy in meeting places  
my thought must fly  
to ever new delights.

Love, love is the heartbeat  
of the entire universe,  
mysterious noble,  
cross and delight of the heart.

Oh! Love!  
Follies! follies! follies!... revel, revel!  
I must always be free, etc.

LA TRAVIATA

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Double Aria Jeopardy (CONT'D)

| <b>CHARACTERS &amp;<br/>VOICE TYPES</b> | <b>MUSICAL<br/>CHARACTERISTICS</b>  | <b>INSTRUMENTS</b>   | <b>THEME<br/>IDENTIFICATION</b>  |
|---|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Who is the character being described?   | What is a prominent musical attribute of the example, with an emphasis on style or structure? | What is the most prominent instrument or instrument family you hear? | Which musical theme do you hear? |
| <b>\$100</b>                            | <b>\$100</b>  | <b>\$100</b>   | <b>\$100</b>                     |
| <b>\$200</b>                            | <b>\$200</b>  | <b>\$200</b>   | <b>\$200</b>                     |
| <b>\$300</b>                            | <b>\$300</b>  | <b>\$300</b>   | <b>\$300</b>                     |
| <b>\$400</b>                            | <b>\$400</b>  | <b>\$400</b>   | <b>\$400</b>                     |

## At the Met: *Seasons of Love*

The central set in this production of *La Traviata* is an open, beautiful room, with large windows and a domed ceiling. As the opera progresses, the lighting, set decorations, and other items change to indicate the passage of time and the shifting of seasons. Use this sheet to make notes on what you see and how these design elements communicate Violetta's waning life.

### Act I: Violetta's apartment in Paris

Colors featured in this scene:

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Set decorations:

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Quality of the lighting:

---

What season is portrayed here?

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### Act II: A country house outside Paris

Colors featured in this scene:

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Set decorations:

---

Quality of the lighting:

---

What season is portrayed here?

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### Act II: At Flora's home in Paris

Colors featured in this scene:

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Set decorations:

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Quality of the lighting:

---

What season is portrayed here?

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### Act III: Violetta's apartment in Paris

Colors featured in this scene:

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Set decorations:

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Quality of the lighting:

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What season is portrayed here?

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# La Traviata: My Highs & Lows

THE MET: LIVE IN HD

DECEMBER 15, 2018

CONDUCTED BY YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN

REVIEWED BY \_\_\_\_\_

| THE STARS                    | STAR POWER | MY COMMENTS |
|------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| DIANA DAMRAU AS VIOLETTA     | ☆☆☆☆☆      |             |
| JUAN DIEGO FLÓREZ AS ALFREDO | ☆☆☆☆☆      |             |
| QUINN KELSEY AS GERMONT      | ☆☆☆☆☆      |             |

| THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE  | ACTION    | MUSIC     | SET DESIGN/STAGING |
|---|-----------|-----------|--------------------|
| THE OPENING: VIOLETTA AT HOME<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:              | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5          |
| ALFREDO'S DRINKING SONG<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:                    | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5          |
| ALFREDO AND VIOLETTA ALONE AT THE PARTY<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:    | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5          |
| VIOLETTA, ALONE, REFLECTS ON HER LIFE<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:      | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5          |
| ALFREDO FINDS OUT WHY ANNINA WENT TO PARIS<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5          |
| GERMONT VISITS VIOLETTA<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:                    | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5          |
| VIOLETTA'S DECISION<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:                        | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5          |
| THE PARTY AT FLORA'S<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:                       | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5          |

|  |           |           |           |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| ALFREDO GAMBLES<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:                 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| ALFREDO CONFRONTS VIOLETTA<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:      | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| THE DOCTOR'S VISIT<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:              | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| VIOLETTA READS GERMONT'S LETTER<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| ALFREDO ARRIVES<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:                 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| VIOLETTA'S LAST MOMENTS<br>MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:         | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |