

Lesson: Exploring Characters and Plot in *Carmen*
Written by Olga Bezrukova for L.A. Opera

Duration: 1 lesson/ 50 minutes each

Note: This lesson plan to be done after a class field trip to *Carmen*.

Grade Levels: 9-12

Subjects: English, Literature

Standards:

California State Board of Education Language Arts Content Standards

- Grade 9/10; 1.0 Word analysis, fluency, and systematic vocabulary development: Students apply their knowledge of word origins both to determine the meaning of new words encountered in reading materials and to use those words accurately.
- Grade 9/10; 2.0 Reading Comprehension (focus on informational materials): Students read and understand grade-level-appropriate material. They analyze the organizational patterns, arguments, and positions advanced.
- Grade 9/10; 2.3 Generate relevant questions about readings that can be researched.
- Grade 9/10; 3.0 Literary response analysis: Students read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science. They conduct in-depth analyses of recurrent patterns and themes.
- Grade 9/10; 3.3 Analyze interactions between main and subordinate characters in literary text (e.g. internal and external conflicts, motivations, relationships, and influences) and how they affect the plot.
- Grade 9/10; 3.4 Determine characters traits by what they say about themselves in narration, dialogue, dramatic monologue, soliloquy.
- Grade 9/10; 3.5 Compare works that express a universal theme, and provide evidence to support the ideas.

Lesson

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Classroom Teacher Prep/Materials:

1. Lesson plan to be done after a field trip to a performance of *Carmen*.
2. Optional: Libretto (one is available on Aria-Database website at: <http://www.aria-database.com/translations/carmen.txt>)
3. Copies of Worksheet A, B, C, D

Lesson Plan Description/Procedure:

1. (Students will have read previously downloaded/distributed copies of libretto.)
2. Hand out Worksheet A and B
3. Ask the students to analyze the story and complete Worksheet A.
4. Guide the students to analyze the main characters throughout the story and complete Worksheets B and C.
5. Assign the Worksheet D as homework assignment.

Note: *It is suggested that students read a translated libretto before going to the performance.*

Goals and Objectives:

1. Introduce students to the story of “*Carmen*.” (Pre-lesson activity)
2. Discuss the story line.
3. Guide students through character analysis.
4. Guide students in character development and transformation.

Assessment:

1. Students will be exposed to the story of “*Carmen*.”
2. Students will be able to identify the storyline and the climax, **Worksheet A**.
3. Students will be able to complete a **Worksheet B: Character Development & Transformation**.
4. Students will be able to complete and discuss **Worksheet C – Creating Drama/Character Analysis**.
5. Students will be able to compare elements of the story and characters to other dramatic works they have experienced/read.
6. Students will be able to discuss the importance of character development in the plot.
7. Students will be able to write an essay discussing and critiquing the story plot and character analysis/development.

Worksheet A- Storyline

Identify the beginning, middle and end of the story. Make sure to identify the climax.

Beginning	
Middle	
End	

Identify the climax in the story/When did it happen?

Do elements (drama) of *Carmen* remind you of any other stories? Are there recurring themes in history or ideas we can relate to in our society? (For example *Carmen: Hip Hopera, Carmen Jones*)

Worksheet B: Character Development & Transformation

	CARMEN	DON JOSÉ	MICAËLA	ESCAMILLO
Beginning of opera	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:
Middle of opera	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:
End of opera	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:	Goal: _____ Obstacle: _____ Behavior: _____ Emotional State: _____ Musical ideas:

Discussion: Did the characters stay the same through out the story, or did they go through a transformation?

Worksheet C-- Creating Drama/Character Analysis

In the opera *Carmen*, we find opposing characteristics that add to the drama of the story. Compare and contrast the similarities of CARMEN vs. MICAËLA, and DON JOSÉ vs. ESCAMILLO.

Extra: Discuss additional characteristics that you can hear in the music that give us a perception of each personality. How do these characteristics add to the drama of the story?

CARMEN	vs.	MICAËLA
<i>Differences</i>	<i>Similarities</i>	<i>Differences</i>

DON JOSÉ	vs.	ESCAMILLO
<i>Differences</i>	<i>Similarities</i>	<i>Differences</i>

Question: Do the characters stay the same throughout the story or do they change?

Worksheet D: Critique
Students Name: _____

When the opera *Carmen* first premiered in 1875, it was renounced by many critics. The whole story, especially the end was a shock to an audience of 1875. Charles Gounod, a fellow composer was noted saying, “Take the Spanish airs and mine out of the score, and there remains nothing to Bizet's credit but the sauce that masks the fish.” (-- *Charles Gounod (1818-93) on the premiere of Carmen, 1875, quoted in W Dean, Bizet (1975)/quote taken from: <http://www.musicwithease.com/bizet-quotes.html>)*

Bizet was distressed due to the failure of this opera. In fact, many believe that this frustration caused his premature death only three months after the premier.

1) It was an opinion of some first time *Carmen* viewers that the end is not suited for this opera. In an essay format, write your opinion on whether the end of the opera *Carmen* should be different. If it is your opinion that the ending should be changed, explain:

- a. Why?
- b. What elements of character development made you feel that the ending should be different?
- c. Write an example on how the opera should end.

If you feel that the end of the story is an ideal ending, explain:

- a. Why?
- b. What elements of character development contributed to the ending?
- c. Discuss how the character development added to the drama of the story.

2) Extra Credit: In an essay format, modernize the character of CARMEN/ DON JOSÉ. If CARMEN/ DON JOSÉ lived in our society, who would they be? Where would they live? What would they be doing?