

**Lesson Plan: REALISM IN ART**  
*Written by Olga Bezrukova for L.A. Opera*

**Duration:** 50 min

**Grade Levels:** Secondary

**Subjects:** Arts, Literature, Music

**Standards:**

*California State Board of Education Language Arts Content*

Grades 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.

Grades 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.

**Music**

Grade 9-12; 4.3 Explain how people in a particular culture use and respond to specific musical works from that culture.

**Theatre**

Grades 9-12; 3.1 Identify and compare how film, theatre, television, and electronic media productions influence our values and behaviors.

Grades 9-12; 3.2 Describe the ways in which playwrights reflect and influence their culture in such works as *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Antigone*, and *Mahabharata*.

Grades 9-12; 3.3 Identify key figures, works, and trends in world theatrical history from various cultures and time periods.

**Process:**

**Class 1**

Preparatory:

- 1) Copies of Worksheet A and B.
- 2) As homework, the students will research the art movement, **REALISM**, before class and bring an article (can be a print out from a website or a personal item) to class as an example of **REALISM**.
- 3) Suggested websites:  
Realism: <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=240>  
Verismo (or Realism) in opera:  
[http://www.baltimoreopera.com/education/studyguide/tosca\\_03.asp](http://www.baltimoreopera.com/education/studyguide/tosca_03.asp)

Process:

- 1) As a class, discuss the meaning of **REALISM** and fill out **Worksheet A**.
- 2) Have students demonstrate and share examples of the articles they brought to class.
- 3) As a class, look at a painting from the time period. For example:

Alphonse Legros  
*Le Repas des Pauvres*  
1877

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=8558>

- 4) Explain to class that **REALISM** extends to many different aspects of art, such as literature and music.
- 5) As a class, read the synopsis of the opera *La Rondine* provided by LA Opera:  
<http://www.laopera.com/productions/0708/larondine/synopsis.htm>
- 6) As a class, fill out **Worksheet B**.
- 7) Discuss the similarities and differences between the elements of the painting and the opera.

Goals:

- 1) To allow students to research a topic.
- 2) To introduce students to the **REALISM** movement.
- 3) To analyze how this movement was present in different art forms.
- 4) To engage students in a class discussion about the elements of **REALISM**.
- 5) To see the parallels within the arts.

Assessment:

- 1) Students will be able to research the topics.
- 2) Students will be able to engage in the class discussion.
- 3) Students will be able to give examples.
- 4) Students will be able to do **Worksheet A & Worksheet B** as a class.
- 5) Students will be able to write an essay on how ideas of **REALISM** can be seen in our society (for example: film and television).

# La Rondine

Giacomo Puccini

<http://www.laopera.com/productions/0708/larondine/synopsis.htm>

## Act I

Magda entertains several friends in her elegant Paris house. When the poet Prunier mentions that romantic love is the latest fashion, Magda's maid Lisette scoffs at the idea. Romantic love, however, is the subject of Prunier's newest, nearly complete lyric. He sits down at the piano to try out the first verse, in which his heroine, Doretta, turns down a king's fortune to await the love of her life. Magda then offers her own ending, in which Doretta awakens to love with a young student. She closes with the thought that love is more important than wealth.

Magda reflects upon her own life before she met Rambaldo, who pays for her comfortable existence. In particular, she remembers an evening at Bullier's cafe where she spent a few romantic hours drinking and dancing with a young man she never saw again. Prunier entertains the ladies by pretending to read Magda's palm; he predicts that she will soon migrate, like a swallow, beyond the sea to a land of dreams.

Ruggero, the son of an old friend of Rambaldo, arrives with a letter of introduction. It is his first day in Paris, and the other guests suggest the nightclub Bullier's for his entertainment. The guests all take their leave, and Lisette prepares for her night off.

Lisette, in fancy clothes "borrowed" from Magda's wardrobe, steals away with her secret lover, Prunier. Soon afterward, Magda, remembering that long-ago night at Bullier's, goes out too, now dressed as in the simple clothes of a *grisette*.

## Act II

Later that evening, Ruggero enjoys the bustling crowd at Bullier's. Magda enters and is soon surrounded by admiring young men. She allows them to think that she is there to meet Ruggero, and sits down at his table. Not recognizing Magda, Ruggero asks her to dance. She tells him her name is Paulette. Prunier and Lisette come in, arguing about the poet's attempts to sophisticate her. Magda quickly signals to Prunier not to reveal who she really is. The four drink a toast to life and love. Their bliss comes to an abrupt end when Rambaldo enters. He asks Magda to come home with him, but she refuses; she has found love with Ruggero.

## Act III

Magda is now living with Ruggero (who still knows nothing of her past) in a villa on the Cote d'Azur. He tells her that he has written home to ask his family's permission to marry her. Prunier and Lisette come in, arguing about his disastrous attempt to foster her career as a singer. Prunier tells Magda about the debacle and Magda agrees to take the humiliated girl back into service. When Magda is alone, Rambaldo arrives. He tells Magda that he is prepared to wait for her to return to him in Paris. He also gives her a well-filled purse, for he knows that she and Ruggero are in debt. Ruggero rushes back with an anonymous letter that reveals Magda as Rambaldo's mistress. Magda tries in vain to explain that she has tried, through her love for him, to put an end to her former way of life, but Ruggero denounces Magda and runs out. Nothing is left for Magda. After having known real love, she cannot live without it.

## Answers- Worksheet A

### REALISM IN ART:

#### Definition:

-Term “**REALISM**” was coined by the Fr. novelist Champfleury in the 1840s

-Subjects include scenes of:

- \*Peasant and working class life
- \*Cafes and popular entertainments
- \*Poverty, brutality, passion, lower classes
- \*Portrayals of the way things and people appear every day
- \*Photographic representations of subjects
- \*Images of the middle and lower classes (very shocking to the upper class!)
- \*Everyday situations are portrayed, for ex. people eating

#### Elements that are important to this movement:

This movement grew out of:

- Reaction against ROMANTICISM (Romanticism was also influenced by the nationalism and urbanization. Romantic music dealt with love, heroism, mother nature. It had darker subjects such as death.)
- Technological advances (photography, train/travel)
- Scientific advances and theories (Darwin)
- Realism in art is impossible, but the appearance of REALISM or “verisimilitude” is an important idea.

#### How was REALISM apparent in different art forms of the period?

**Art-** Everyday life depicted with a variety of subjects that included lower classes and at times a photographic perception of the scene.

**Literature-** Included subject matter and scenes which could be observed in every day life

**Drama-** The actors as well as staging depict real life as well as suggest scenes that are more believable.

**Opera-** The ideas of real characters dealing with everyday problems are explored. The music of *La Rondine* foreshadows the style of musicals.

#### Examples of REALISM brought to class:

This will vary depending on what students brought!!!

#### Some of the important artists, writers, musicians who made contributions to this movement:

**Art-** Gustave Courbet, Honoré Daumier (painting and sculpture) and Jean-François Millet

**Literature-** The actual term was coined by the Fr. novelist Champfleury in the 1840s; Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Émile Zola's *Germinal*, and Proust's *Du côté de Chez Swann*

**Drama-** David Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* and *The Girl of the Golden West*; Mark Twain's *Is He Dead?*

**Opera-** Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Ruggero's *Ruggiero*, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Giacomo Puccini's *La Rondine* and *La Bohème*, Bizet's *Carmen*

#### How do you think this movement continues to influence our society?

This is an open ended question meant for classroom discussion. Ideas to discuss: realism in television and film, realism in commercials, radio, pod casts, “reality TV shows,”etc...

**Did REALISM affect our culture? Do you think that some of the works previously studied in class had any influences of REALISM?**

This is an open ended question meant to engage students in class discussion. Discuss how some of the previous works might have been influenced by realism.

**Ideas for Discussion:**

How did technologic innovations influence this movement?

How did scientific ideas influence this movement?

There is no question that **REALISM** is artful. What elements make something “real?”

Question for discussion: Considering that art is an interpretation by an artist, can art be “real?”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teachers Guide- Worksheet A**

**REALISM IN ART:**

**Definition:**

**Elements that are important to this movement:**

**How was REALISM apparent in different art forms of the period? (art, literature, opera, drama)**

**Examples of realism:**

**Some of the important artists, writers, musicians who made contributions to this movement:**

**How do you think this movement continues to influence our society? Do you think that some of the works previously studied in class were influenced by REALISM?**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Answers- Worksheet B- Elements of REALISM

After learning what REALISM means, list some of the elements that reflect REALISM in art. In the MUSIC- Verismo column, include the elements that transferred from the REALISM movement into this style of opera.

ART	MUSIC- Verismo
Depending on the painting chosen, the answers will vary...	-different social classes represented: <i>bourgeoisie, students, painters, elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen, grisettes, flower girls and dancing girls, waiters.</i>
Generally the painting will have representations of landscapes or settings of people depicted in real life situations	-The story has an accurate depiction of life in France at the turn of the century -In this story a well kept woman, a demimonde, chooses to abandon her fancy life and move to the country side to find love and happiness
The subjects will mostly be lower classes or middle classes, something that probably was shocking to the higher class	- All characters are definitely everyday individuals with problems regular people have. They are not demigods or gods. -The protagonist is a woman who chooses to a different life from the one what she is used to, in order to find happiness
The paintings are usually very detailed, some of them almost of photographic quality	-The characters are not perfect, they are regular people. For example, Magda hides her past and falls in love with Ruggero, a middle class man.
Paintings of people at work	-Idea that love is more important than wealth
Some paintings have a rugged quality	
Subjects do not tend to sit and pose, they are usually painted in action	
Subjects will wear the clothes of the period	

Essay: Do you think some of the ideas and elements of REALISM can be found in present day art? What about television and film?

Write an essay explaining the ideas of REALISM and give some of the examples on how some of the ideas of this movement are present in our society in visual art, film, television, literature, etc...

**\*Extra Credit: Many people argue that Puccini was a composer writing in the romantic style, not verismo style. Some believe that his works are sentimental, often having a romanticized, rather than a real notion, of poor people. In an essay format, give your opinion and support it with the information discussed in class as well as your own research.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Worksheet B- Elements of REALISM

After learning what REALISM means, list some of the elements that in your opinion reflect the movement in ART. In the MUSIC- Verismo column, include the elements that transferred from the REALISM movement into this style of opera.

ART	MUSIC- Verismo

Essay: Do you think some of the ideas and elements of **REALISM** can be found in present day art? What about television and film?

Write an essay explaining the ideas of **REALISM** and give some of the examples on how some of the ideas of this movement are present in our society in visual art, film, television, literature, etc...

**\*Extra Credit: Many people argue that Puccini was a composer writing in the romantic style, not verismo style. Some believe that his works are sentimental, often having a romanticized, rather than a real notion, of poor people. In an essay format, give your opinion and support it with the information discussed in class as well as your own research.**