

LA TRAVIATA

Lesson Plan: REALISM IN ART AND MUSIC

Written by Olga C.G. Bezrukova for L.A. Opera

Duration: Two lessons, 50 min each (not counting the fieldtrip or DVD viewing)

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 (Proficient)

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.

Theatre (Advanced)

Grades 9-12; 3.2 Analyze the impact of traditional and nontraditional theatre, film, television, and electronic media on society.

Suggested: This lesson plan can be further expanded with a fieldtrip to *La Traviata* or a DVD viewing.

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 of **REALISM** in opera versus paintings.
- 6) To see how movements in art reflect in our society and culture.

Process:

Class 1

Preparatory:

- 1) Copies of **Worksheet A** and **B**.
- 2) Copies of synopsis from *La Traviata* (copies are available from:

<http://www.laopera.com/production/0809/traviata/synopsis.aspx>)

Optional: copy of libretto (available: http://www.opera-guide.ch/opern_komponisten.php?uilang=en&first-letter=V

Specific link to English libretto: <http://www.opera-guide.ch/libretto.php?id=396&uilang=en&lang=en>)

- 3) 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**.
- 4) Suggested websites for students to check/read before class:
Realism: <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=240>
Verismo (or Realism) in opera:
http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/hum_303/naturalism.html
<http://operaamerica.org/Content/Audiences/Programs/Cornerstones/pagliacci/pagverismo.htm>
<http://www.operainfo.org/broadcast/operaBackground.cgi?id=3&language=1>

Procedure:

- 1) Have students demonstrate and share examples of the articles they brought to class to demonstrate **REALISM**. Have the students explain what element(s) of the article makes it a good example of “**REALISM**.”
- 2) As a class, discuss the meaning of **REALISM** and fill out **Worksheet A**.
- 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 art forms, including literature and music.
- 5) As a class, fill out **Worksheet B, section 1**.
- 6) As a class, teacher will guide a discussion: “Can art be real?”
- 7) As homework, students will write an essay: Do you think some of the ideas and elements of **REALISM** can be found in present day art? What about television and film?

*Suggested: Fieldtrip to a Verdi opera (ex. *La Traviata*), or a class viewing of a DVD between the two classes.

Class 2

Procedure

- 1) The teacher will divide the class into groups and give them synopsis from *La Traviata*. In groups, students will read the synopsis of *La Traviata* provided by LA Opera: <http://www.laopera.com/production/0809/traviata/synopsis.aspx>
- 2) With teacher’s guidance, the students will discuss the similarities and differences between the elements of the painting and the opera. Each group will decide whether the synopsis they are reading is a representation of a **REALISM/verismo**, or not.
- 3) In groups, students will present to the rest of the class. Each group will present their argument and introduce the elements in story that prove their point. Each group will argue their point whether they believe that the story is a good representation of **REALISM/verismo** and compare the story to **REALISM** in art and the discussion in class. For extra credit, students may create a poster with the elements, photos, printouts

and other items that will explain REALISM/verismo in art and music.

Assessment:

- 1) Students will be able to research the topics presented.
- 2) Students will be able to engage in the class discussion.
- 3) Students will be able to give examples, demonstrating their understanding of the given topic.
- 4) Students will be able to do **Worksheet A & Worksheet B Section 1** as a class.
- 5) Students will be able to discuss the topic in groups and decide whether given synopsis of a story is a good representation of the **REALISM**.
- 6) Students will be able to do **Worksheet B** as a class.
- 7) Students will be able to discuss the topic in groups and fill out **Worksheet B Section 2**.
- 8) Students will be able to write an essay on how ideas of **REALISM** can be seen in our society.

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
- *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, working, swimming

Elements that are important to this movement:

This movement grew out of:

- Reaction against ROMANTICISM (Romantic music dealt with love, heroism, mother nature. It had darker subjects such as death. Romanticism was also influenced by the nationalism and urbanization.)
- 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. Opera that uses a verismo text, where characters are drawn from the ordinary social classes.

Examples of REALISM brought to class:

This will vary depending on what students brought!!!

Name 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?* And *Tom Sawyer*

Opera- Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Ruggero's *Ruggiero*, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Giacomo Puccini's *Il Trittico*, *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...

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?

This is an open ended question meant to engage students in class discussion. Discuss how some of the previous works you have studied in class, which 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?” **ANSWERS WILL VARY. Have a class discussion.**

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:

Name 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.

Section 1- ART	Section 2 MUSIC- Verismo
Depending on the painting chosen, the answers will vary...	-Opera that uses a verismo text, where characters are drawn from the ordinary social classes.
Generally the painting will have representations of landscapes or settings of people depicted in real life situations	-different social classes represented: <i>bourgeoisie, students, painters, elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen, nuns, girls and dancing girls, waiters.</i>
The subjects will mostly be lower classes or middle classes, something that probably was shocking to the higher class	-The story has an accurate description of life during the period depicted.
The paintings are usually very detailed, some of them almost of photographic quality	-Everyday low social class people are depicted in bright colors.
Paintings of people at work	-The shape of the story is based on changing demands of the unfolding text.
Some paintings have a rugged quality	-The story line may explore love, lust, hatred, murder.
Subjects do not tend to sit and pose, they are usually painted in action	- All characters are everyday individuals with problems regular people have. They are not demigods or gods.
Subjects will wear the clothes of the period	-The protagonist often questions if love is more important than wealth as well as wonders what is the purpose in life.
	-The characters are not perfect, they have flaws.
	- The purpose of one's life may be questioned.
	-Betrayal, murder, lust, and hatred are portrayed vividly.

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

In groups, do a class presentation on the opera synopsis your group got. In your presentation, give your definition and opinion on REALISM/verismo, as well as support it with the information discussed in class and your own research. For extra credit, create a poster with visual examples.

Assignment: 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: Research ROMANTICISM and in your essay contrast it to REALISM.

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. After in-class discussion, In the MUSIC- Verismo column, include the elements that transferred from the REALISM movement into this style of opera.

Section 1-ART	Section 2- Music/Verismo

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

In groups, do a class presentation on the opera synopsis your group got. In your presentation, give your definition and opinion on REALISM/verismo, as well as support it with the information discussed in class and your own research. For extra credit, create a poster with visual examples.

Assignment: 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: Research ROMANTICISM and in your essay contrast it to REALISM.

La Traviata

Synopsis Page

Downloaded from LA Opera Website:

<http://www.laopera.com/production/0809/traviata/synopsis.aspx>

Act I Violetta's house in Paris, August 1847 Violetta throws a party attended by her "protector," Baron Douphol and her friends, including Flora, a fellow courtesan. Gastone introduces Violetta to Alfredo Germont, a young man who admits that he is one of her greatest admirers. Violetta welcomes Alfredo to her gathering. Gastone invites Alfredo to offer a drinking song, and Alfredo sings the praises of wine and the love it inspires. Violetta joins him, urging everyone to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of love and life. As the guests move into the ballroom, Violetta has a sudden attack of faintness, an unwelcome reminder of her declining health. Alfredo urges her to abandon her exhausting way of life, and tells her that he has loved her since he first saw her. Violetta tactfully suggests that she is not the kind of woman he should fall deeply in love with; nonetheless, she invites Alfredo to visit her again. When her guests have left, Violetta muses over his declarations of love. Disturbed to discover that her own emotions have been deeply stirred, she resolves to forget Alfredo and devote herself to the shallow pleasures of the courtesan's world.

Act II A country house near Paris, November 1847 Alfredo has been living for three months with Violetta in her country house. He is ashamed to discover that she has been secretly selling her possessions to meet their expenses.

Alone, Violetta receives a letter from Flora, inviting her to a party in Paris. An unexpected visitor arrives: Giorgio Germont, Alfredo's father. Germont asks her for a great sacrifice; his daughter's marriage prospects have been threatened by Alfredo's scandalous association with Violetta. Germont convinces her that leaving Alfredo would be the most generous, selfless thing she could do for him. Violetta knows that because she is mortally ill, any future happiness is unlikely with Alfredo. She writes two letters: the first is an acceptance of Flora's invitation; the second is addressed to Alfredo.

When Alfredo returns, Violetta attempts to hide her great agitation. Desperately assuring him of her love, she goes off in a carriage to Paris. Alone, Alfredo reads Violetta's letter, which informs him that she is returning to Baron Douphol. Germont returns to console his son. Alfredo sees Flora's invitation and, unaware of Violetta's sacrifice, vows to avenge himself for her apparent faithlessness at Flora's party.

That evening, Flora's guests are entertained by masqueraders dressed as gypsies and matadors. Alfredo arrives, alone; Violetta enters shortly afterward with Baron Douphol. Alfredo goes to the card table, where he is soon joined by the Baron, but Alfredo's good luck at gambling is unmatched. When the guests sit down to supper, Violetta privately begs Alfredo to leave. Furious, he insults her in front of everyone, throwing his winnings at her as "payment" for their time together. The elder Germont

comes in, joining the assembled crowd in expressing their outrage.

Act III Violetta's room, February 1848 Violetta is near death, alone and impoverished. Germont has written to tell her that Alfredo, who had fled abroad after wounding Baron Douphol in a duel, has been told of Violetta's sacrifice and is on his way back to Paris. When he returns, the lovers are reunited with tender words. Giorgio Germont also arrives, filled with remorse, but there is nothing to be done. Violetta feels a sudden rush of exhilaration as her pain disappears, and she dies.