

Carmen

Georges Bizet

Music: The Characters

Students will

- Read the *Carmen Synopsis*.
- Read the information sheet **The Characters** included with the lesson.
- Listen to audio selections from *Carmen* online.
- Discuss and answer questions on the appropriate portion(s) of the **Activity Worksheet**.

Getting Ready

- Print copies of the information sheet **The Characters** and the **Activity Worksheet** for each student.
- Decide which section(s) of the worksheet you wish your group to complete.
- Print a copy for the teacher of the Sample Answers for the **Activity Worksheet**.
- Prepare internet access to the online listening selections.
- Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your group.

Introduction

Have your students read the **Synopsis**. Give each student a copy of the information sheet **The Characters** or display it on the screen. Read through the information, discussing each character and listening to the online selections as you go.

Guided/Independent Practice

Depending on your grade level, the ability of your students, and time constraints, you may choose to have students work as a whole class, in small groups, with a partner, or individually. Read the directions on the **Activity Worksheet**. Have students complete the portion(s) of the **Activity Worksheet** you have chosen with opportunity for questions. If students are working with a partner or in small groups, give them time to discuss their answers before writing them down. Have students share their answers individually or by groups and tell why they gave their answers.

Evaluation

Have students discuss and evaluate the answers of others. The teacher may want to guide the discussion with the sample answers provided. After individual or small group responses have been shared and/or turned in, the class can then formulate comprehensive answers with the teacher asking leading questions to guide the discussion.

For Further Study

The teacher may want to have students further research *Carmen*. Students may also want to do additional research on Georges Bizet, his life and other works, or other related topics online or in their school library. Their findings can be shared with the class at the beginning of a later lesson.

TEKS: Music

[6th Grade] 117.208.C.4 Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B). (C).

[7th Grade] 117.209.C.4 Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B). (C).

[8th Grade] 117.210.C.4 Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B). (C).

[Music, Level I] 117.310.C.5 Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A). (C). (D). (E).

[Music, Level II] 117.311.C.5 Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A). (B). (C). (E).

[Music, Level III] 117.312.C.5 Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A). (B). (C). (E).

[Music, Level IV] 117.313.C.5 Historical cultural relevance. The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A). (B). (C). (E).

Correlates: Language Arts, Drama, Music

Gardner's Intelligences: Verbal-Linguistic, Musical, Interpersonal

Bloom's Taxonomy: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Evaluation, Synthesis

Sources:

Carmen Libretto

Warrack, John and West, Ewan, The Oxford Dictionary of Opera, Oxford University Press, 1992.

Online Resources:

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

www.aria-database.com

Carmen Synopsis

The opera is set in and near Seville, Spain around 1820.

Members of the military are serving as police in Seville. Several soldiers are standing around the guard house in the square. Micaëla, a simple, devoted country girl, arrives looking for Don José. He is a corporal in the army and her fiancé. Another soldier tells her that Don José will return soon. She leaves the square.

Many of the soldiers and other men are gathering to see the girls who work in the cigarette factory emerge for a break. When Carmen appears in the group, she is clearly the center of attention. Carmen is a gypsy girl, who sings of fleeting, changing love. She flirts with Don José, the only soldier nearby who is not staring and flirting with her. Once she has Don José's attention, she uses all her charm to keep it. She throws a red flower from the bodice of her dress at him before returning to work.

Micaëla finds Don José to deliver both a letter and a kiss from his mother. Seeing Micaëla makes Don José think of his mother and wonder how he could have been distracted by a woman like Carmen. Micaëla leaves him alone to read the letter. His mother has advised him to marry Micaëla. Don José agrees to do so.

Before Micaëla returns, there is a commotion in the cigarette factory. Carmen has argued with another girl inside the factory and attacked her with a knife. She refuses to answer any questions. Carmen is arrested, and Don José is left alone to guard her. Carmen continues to influence Don José and tells him that he will let her escape because he loves her. She convinces him that he will be her love, and that he must let her go. She tells him of an inn where she will wait for him to join her. When he is to lead Carmen to jail, Don José allows her to escape. Don José is thrown in jail for helping her.

ACT TWO

Two months later, Carmen and her friends are at an inn socializing with officers of the military. She passes the time while waiting for Don José, as she promised him. Escamillo, a famous bullfighter, arrives to an adoring crowd at the inn. He notices Carmen, and immediately has his own intentions of winning her love. Carmen tries to ignore him, even though she is attracted to him.

As the inn closes, Carmen tells her friends that she cannot join their latest plans for smuggling, as she is in love. When Don José appears, her friends urge her to get him to join in their plans. Don José explains that he has been in jail for the past two months. When he hears the bugle call of the military, Carmen ridicules him for being so obedient. She accuses him of not really caring about her. He denies being indifferent, showing Carmen the dried flower that she threw at him. It is now dried, but kept by Don José as a precious memento.

Carmen continues to try to convince Don José to leave the army and stay with her and her friends. One of the local officers arrives to see Carmen himself, and finds Don José. The officer orders Don José back to the barracks, but Don José refuses. He is now a deserter, and must flee while Carmen and her gypsy friends playfully distract the officer, singing of their free existence.

Synopsis Continued

ACT THREE

In the mountains, Don José and Carmen are with the band of smugglers. Don José looks to the valley where his mother lives, and regrets betraying his family and his mother's expectations. Carmen sees Don José's regret and tells him he might as well leave. She accuses him of not truly loving her. Carmen's indifference makes his temper flare, and Carmen realizes that he could be dangerous. Carmen reads tarot cards with her friends, repeatedly turning up the death card for herself and for Don José. Don José takes up guard duty for the evening, and the women leave him.

Micaëla wanders in, having found the smuggler's hideout. She is looking for Don José, hoping to win him back and bring him home. As she is calling out to Don José, he spots an intruder and fires a warning shot. The intruder turns out to be Escamillo, looking for Carmen. Micaëla hides as the two men face off, both realizing that they are competing for Carmen. Don José challenges Escamillo to a duel. They fight, but Carmen intervenes in time to prevent Don José from hurting Escamillo. The smugglers allow Escamillo to leave, and he invites them all to his next bullfight.

Micaëla is found in her hiding place, and Don José assures the band that she is not a spy. Micaëla pleads with Don José to come to see his mother, who is sick and possibly dying. At first he refuses to leave. Carmen tells him to go. He vows to return.

ACT FOUR

In a square outside the bullring, the crowd waits to see the parade of bullfighters. The procession includes Escamillo. He is hailed as the hero of the day. He sees Carmen and pulls her aside. The two sing of their love for each other. Escamillo continues into the bullring. Carmen's friends warn her that they have seen Don José nearby. Now wanted for desertion, he is hunting for Carmen while staying out of sight of the authorities. Carmen insists that she is not afraid of him and will talk to him if he shows up.

Don José arrives and tries one last time to plead with Carmen to be his love. He has sacrificed everything for her. Carmen, however, tells him that there is nothing left between them. She is distracted by the cheers from the bullring for Escamillo. When she hears the crowd declare Escamillo's victory, she tries to enter the bullring. Don José blocks her way. Carmen shouts that he should either let her go or kill her. She throws away a ring he once gave her. In a jealous rage, Don José stabs Carmen then falls to his knees beside her body. As the cheering crowd leaves the bullring, they are met with the horrific sight of Don José crying over Carmen.

The Characters

Carmen (*soprano or mezzo-soprano*): A nomadic woman. She does not hold to the conventions of society. Carmen lives her life from moment to moment. She seems to enjoy making men fall in love with her, but is not faithful to any one man. When Don José is the only man in the square not to notice her, her pride makes her flirt with him and do her best to make him fall in love with her. When he later shows any sign of weakness or wavering, she casts him aside, saying that he does not truly love her. She quickly moves on to another man, not worried about what Don José is likely to do. Her tragic end is foretold in the cards, but she seems to rush toward the bitter end on her own terms rather than try to avoid the outcome. Watch and listen as Carmen sings “*L’amour est un oiseau rebelle,*” also known as “*The Habanera.*” She sings of love as being fleeting and untamable. A force that nothing can hold – much like herself.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2snTkaD64U>

Don José (*tenor*): A corporal of the Dragoons, the military officers in charge of Seville. Don José is from a small town near Seville. He is a handsome, honest man, from a good family. His mother is counting on him to marry Micaëla and lead a respectable life. When he meets Carmen, however, José finds excitement and passion. He makes several life-changing choices to be with Carmen and please her. Carmen, however, only sees his hesitation at each momentous decision, and casts him aside. Don José’s infatuation for Carmen turns to jealousy and murderous rage, resulting in the tragic ending to the story. Watch and listen to “*La fleur quetu m’avais jetée,*” as Don José shows Carmen the dried flower that she gave him the day they met and tells her of his undying love for her. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0tUnqvRanM>

Escamillo (*baritone*): A Toreador, or bull fighter. Escamillo enjoys the status of a great hero in Spain. Crowds of people gather around him wherever he goes, and they celebrate his great victories in the bullring. Escamillo also wants Carmen from the first time he sees her. He doesn’t know that Don José is also in love with her until later. Carmen seems to want him, as she finds herself attracted to his great success and fame. Escamillo seems confident that Don José is now a part of her past, and that she will be faithful to him. Watch and listen to “*Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre,*” also known as “*The Toreador Song,*” as Escamillo and the chorus sing of fighting in the bullring while love is waiting for him. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tIemwS024I

Micaëla (*soprano*): A village maiden. Micaëla is a young woman of good virtue. She is honest and truly seems to love Don José. She does not give up on him even after he spends two months in jail and deserts from the military. She makes one last ditch attempt to get him to come home to their village, but he is completely focused on Carmen. In many ways, Micaëla is the complete opposite of Carmen. Her attempts to save Don José from himself are not enough to sway him. Watch and listen as Micaëla sings “*Je dis que rien ne me epuvante,*” as she is searching for Don José in the mountains to bring him home to his ailing mother and his life in their village. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynMdCyNUvZM>

Name _____ Date _____

***Carmen* Music Lesson: The Characters
Activity Worksheet**

Part I:

1. Do you think that Don José should have let Carmen influence him into letting her escape? Why or why not?

2. Do you think that Don José and Micaëla could have been happy together? Why or why not?

3. Which of the characters is more like the people in your life? Why?

4. Which of the characters do you consider to be the real villain of the story? Why?

Name _____ Date _____

***Carmen* Music Lesson I: The Characters
Activity Worksheet**

Part II

5. Do you think that Micaëla could have done more to try to get Don José to return to his former life? Why or why not?

6. If you were one of the characters in the opera, could you have done something to help prevent Don José from throwing his life and career away? What would you have done?

7. Do you think that the tragic ending of this story could have been avoided? Why or why not?

8. If you were to be one of the lawyers at Don José's trial, would you choose to be the prosecutor or his defense attorney? Why ?

Name _____ Date _____

Carmen
***Carmen* Music Lesson I: The Characters**
Activity Worksheet

Part III

9. What do you think is the important lesson to be learned from this story and how the characters acted?

Many operas are treated as **concept operas**, with stories that can take place in any time or location. This opera is set in Spain around 1820 and includes characters who are gypsies.

10. Would a different time or place in which the story is portrayed change the story in any real way? Why or why not?

11. If you were to create a production of this opera, what location and time period would you like to use?

***Carmen* Music Lesson I: The Characters
Activity Worksheet**

Part I

1. Do you think that Don José should have let Carmen influence him into letting her escape? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Example: "No, Don José should not have done anything to mess up his life for
Carmen or anyone else."

2. Do you think that Don José and Micaëla could have been happy together? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Example: "No, they wouldn't have been happy long term. Don José would have
been distracted by another more exciting woman eventually."

3. Which of the characters is more like the people in your life? Why?

Answers will vary. Example: "Carmen reminds me of my aunt. She has one boyfriend after another, and
never treats them very well."

4. Which of the characters do you consider to be real villain of the story? Why?

Answers will vary. Example: "Don José was weak and easily led astray, but Carmen was the real
villain. She used him for her own purposes, and then refused to believe he loved her even after he threw
away his life for her."

Part II *Carmen*

5. Do you think that Micaëla could have done more to try to get Don José to return to his former life? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Example: "I don't think so. Don José was so intent on Carmen that he wouldn't
have listened to anything Micaëla said."

6. If you were one of the characters in the opera, could you have done something to help prevent Don José from throwing his life and career away? What would you have done?

Answers will vary. Example: "I might have tried to keep Don José from getting near Carmen, either by
myself or by alerting the authorities."

7. Do you think that the tragic ending of this story could have been avoided? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Example: "I think that if Carmen hadn't openly told Don José to let her go or kill her,
then thrown the ring away, she might have avoided enraging him to the point he lost control."

8. If you were to be one of the lawyers at Don José's trial, would you choose to be the prosecutor or his defense attorney? Why?

Answers will vary. Example: "I would choose to be Don José's defense attorney. I would want to make
sure he didn't get the death penalty. I would want to get him a deal to plead guilty to manslaughter,
since it was a crime of passion."

Part III *Carmen*

9. What do you think is the important lesson to be learned from this story and how the characters acted?

Answers will vary. Example: "I think the lesson of the story is to be true to ourselves no matter what anyone else tries to get us to do. People who want to manipulate others are never going to make us happy."

A concept opera is one that can take place in any time or location. This opera is set in Spain and includes characters who are gypsies. The time is around 1820.

10. Would a different time or place in which the story is portrayed change the story in any real way? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Example: "The characters would be the same people wherever they lived or in whatever time period they lived. Selfishness and manipulation exist in all time periods and societies."

11. If you were to create a production of this opera, what location and time period would you like to use?

Answers will vary. Example: "I would set it in modern times. It could be set anywhere in the world, but I might set it on a college campus with students."