

LA TRAVIATA

GIUSEPPE VERDI

Social Studies: The Life and Times of Giuseppe Verdi

Students Will

- Read for information
- Complete timelines
- Choose an event to study in-depth
- Present their findings to the class

Copies for Each Student

- “The Composer”
- Social Studies Activity Worksheet

Copies for the Teacher

- “The Composer”
- Social Studies Activity Worksheet
- **SAMPLE** Social Studies Activity Worksheet Parts I & II

Getting Ready

Arrange for time in the library and/or prepare internet access for research, guided practice, or group work if needed. Gather pens, pencils, and additional writing paper as needed for your group.

Introduction

Depending on your grade level and the ability of your students, you may choose to conduct this lesson or portions of this lesson as a whole class, small group, or partner activity. Remind students to ask for clarification of any unknown words or concepts. Tell students that they will be reading about the composer of *La Traviata*, Giuseppe Verdi, and studying an abbreviated a timeline of his life.

Guided/Independent Practice

Part I

Instruct your students to read, “The Composer.” Then, provide your students with the “Social Studies Activity Worksheet.” Read the directions and explain to students that by studying events that happened during the composer’s lifetime, one can gain a broader picture and more understanding of the times in which he lived. Allow students time to complete the worksheet. Student answers will vary based on the events they choose to complete the timeline.

Part II

Instruct students to choose one event within the timeline to study further. Have them present their findings about that event to the class.

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Evaluation

1. Did the students read “The Composer”?
2. Did the students complete the activity worksheet?
3. Did the students research an event and present their findings to the class?

TEKS

Grades 6 & 7

(21) Social studies skills. B. C.

Grade 8

(30) Social studies skills. B. C.

Grades 9-12

§113.38. Special Topics in Social Studies

(2) Social studies skills. B.

§113.41. United States History Studies Since 1877

(29) Social studies skills. B.

§113.42. World History Studies

(29) Social studies skills. F.

Correlates

Literature, History, Math, Music, Visual Arts, Science

Gardner’s Intelligences

Verbal-Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical

Bloom’s Taxonomy

Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation

Bibliography

"Anesthesia, Discovery of." Dictionary of American History. . *Encyclopedia.com*. (August 22, 2017).

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/anesthesia-discovery>

Goulding, Phil G. Ticket to the Opera. New York: Fawcett Books, The Ballantine Publishing Group. 1996.

Soukhanov, Anne H. Gen. Ed. Encarta World Dictionary. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999.

Online Resources

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1813>

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1836>

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1842>

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1843>

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1853>

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1856>

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1893>

<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1901>

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>

La Traviata

The Composer

Giuseppe Verdi was born in a village, Le Roncole, in Italy on October 10, 1813. At the time, the village was part of the first French Empire. His parents, Carlo Giuseppe Verdi and Luigia Uttini, kept a small inn and grocery store. When Giuseppe was an infant, Russian Cossack troops raided the village killing men, women and children. His mother hid from troops with Giuseppe in a church belfry for twenty-four hours.

The Verdi family moved to the town of Busseto when Giuseppe was still a child. Here he took his first lessons in composition. When Don Pietro Seletti, a Latin teacher and amateur violinist, learned that Giuseppe was interested in music he said, “What do you want to study music for? You have a gift for Latin, and it will be much better for you to become a priest. What do you expect from your music? Do you fancy that someday you may become organist of Busseto? . . . Stuff and nonsense. . . That can never be.”

For a while, it seemed that Seletti was right. When Giuseppe Verdi was nineteen, he applied to the Milan Conservatory, but was not admitted because they believed he was “lacking in musical talent.” Verdi continued his studies by taking private lessons and attending operatic performances and concerts. He also attended gatherings called “salons” hosted by Clara Maffei. These *Salotto Maffei* attracted artists, composers, scholars, and writers to discuss art, literature, and the current news.

Verdi returned to Busseto and became the town music master. A local merchant and music lover, Antonio Barezzi, hosted Verdi’s first public performance in his home. Barezzi so loved Verdi’s music that he employed Verdi to teach his daughter, Margherita. Margherita and Verdi fell in love and were married on May 4, 1836. They had two children: a daughter, born March 26, 1837 and a son, born on July 11, 1838.

Oberto, Verdi’s first opera, opened in Milan at La Scala on November 17, 1839. His daughter had passed away the year before on August 12, 1838, and his son died only a month before on October 22, 1839. Shortly after his son’s death, his wife became ill and died on June 18, 1840. It is no surprise that the comic opera Verdi had been hired to compose after *Oberto* was not a success. Verdi vowed to give up opera. However, only a few months had passed before Verdi was given the libretto for a proposed opera about Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. This libretto caught his interest, and Verdi composed the music. Verdi was twenty-nine years old when that opera, *Nabucco*, opened at La Scala in 1842 with great success.

Over the next ten years, Verdi composed fourteen operas with great success. During this time he met the soprano, Giuseppina Strepponi, and fell in love. Many people thought it scandalous when they lived together without being married. The couple would later wed on August 29, 1859. Verdi continued to compose operas that the public loved. He was not only a musical genius; he had other qualities that secured his operas’ successes. Verdi was fascinated and acutely aware of the character of human beings and their emotions. He knew how to translate those emotions into music and chose to work with great librettists. He did not try to revolutionize music or create a new style of opera, but used music to communicate the real-life struggles of men and women. His operas portrayed those human conditions connected with hate, love, and death.

Verdi bought an estate two miles from Busseto in 1848 where, initially, his parents lived. After Verdi’s mother died in 1851, Verdi and Giuseppina made the estate their home at the Villa Verdi at Sant’Agata in Villanova sull’Arda. They lived there for fifty years until his death. During those years, Verdi composed many operas. In 1853, *La traviata* opened in Milan. Verdi had written it in less than two months as he was also working on *Il trovatore* at the same time. *La traviata*, based on Alexandre Dumas’s play, *The Lady of the Camellias*, is one of the most popular of all of Verdi’s operas.

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The Composer cont.

Verdi was asked to write a section of a requiem in memory of the composer, Rossini. Because of business complications, this requiem was never performed during Verdi's lifetime. Later, Verdi re-worked his portion of the Rossini Requiem for his own *Requiem Mass*, composed in honor of the famous novelist and poet Alessandro Manzoni who died in 1873. This *Requiem Mass* was first performed on May 22, 1874 at the cathedral in Milan.

From 1871 to 1893, Verdi composed his final three operas. *Aida*, Verdi's most popular opera, premiered in Cairo in 1871. Sixteen years later, he composed *Otello* and it sold out weeks before the first performance. During the performance, there were repeated calls from the audience for Verdi to take the stage. After the opera, huge crowds in the streets waited for him to appear. As a sign of their respect for him, members of the crowd unhitched the horses from his carriage and pulled it through the streets to his destination. Verdi wrote his last opera and only mature comedy, *Falstaff*, when he was seventy-nine years old.

Verdi and the German composer, Richard Wagner, were born in the same year. They were each respected composers with regards to their own work, but they never met. Although they did not care for each other's work, Verdi's words upon hearing of Wagner's death in 1883 were, "Sad, sad, sad! . . . a name that will leave a most powerful impression on the history of art."

Verdi's wife, Giuseppina, died in 1897. She was buried at Casa di Riposo per Musicisti, a rest home for retired musicians that she and Verdi had planned and established. During the following years, Verdi worked on revising earlier works and composing new works. His *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*, four sacred works, was first performed on April 7, 1898 at the Grand Opera in Paris.

While staying in Milan, Giuseppe Verdi suffered a stroke on January 1, 1901. His health continued to deteriorate and he died on January 27. Famous conductor, Arturo Toscanini, conducted the many orchestras and choirs composed of musicians from all across Italy at Verdi's funeral in Milan. It remains the largest public assembly of any event in the history of Italy. Verdi was initially buried in Milan's Cimitero Monumentale, but a month later his body was moved to the Casa di Riposo per Musicisti where his wife was buried.

Verdi once said, "Of all composers, past and present, I am the least learned." He hastened to add, however, "I mean that in all seriousness, and by learning I do not mean knowledge of music." His knowledge and commitment to communicating human nature and emotion through music is proved by his twenty-eight operas, many of which are a staple of the standard repertoire today.

La Traviata

Social Studies Activity Worksheet

Directions: Research historic events that occurred during Verdi's lifetime online or in the library. Write an entry into the Verdi timeline next to the years in **bold** below. Place a check mark beside an event you would like to continue researching to present to your class.

Part I

Giuseppe Verdi Timeline

1813 – October 11 – Giuseppe Verdi is born in the village of Le Roncole in Italy.

1813 - _____

1822 – Verdi lives and studies music in Milan, Italy.

1836 – May 4 - Verdi marries Margherita Barezzi.

1836 - _____

1837 – March 26 – A daughter, Virginia Maria Luigia, is born.

1838 – July 11 – A son, Icilio Romano, is born. August 28 – The Verdis' daughter dies.

1839 – October 22 – The Verdis' son dies.

1839 – November 17 – *Oberto*, Verdi's first opera opens at La Scala in Milan.

1840 – June 18 – Verdi's wife, Margherita, becomes ill and dies.

1840 – September 5 – Verdi's second opera, *Un giorno di regno*, opens and flops. Verdi despairs.

1842 – March 9 – *Nabucco*, Verdi's third opera, opens and Verdi is a success at twenty-nine.

1842 - _____

1853 – March 6 – *La traviata*, Verdi's 19th opera, opens in Milan.

1853 - _____

1893 – February 9 - *Falstaff*, Verdi's 28th and final opera opens.

1893 - _____

1901 – January 27 – Verdi dies in Milan. The funeral is the largest public assembly in Italian history.

1901 - _____

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EVENTS USED FOR TIMELINE

1813 March 19 - Dr. David Livingstone, Scottish missionary is born. He will become an antislavery advocate, a scientist, and an explorer spending 30 years in Africa.

1836 March 2 – The Texas Declaration of Independence is signed creating the Republic of Texas.

1842 Anesthesia is used for the first time.

1853 March 30 - Vincent Willem van Gogh is born. Van Gogh will complete 800 oil paintings and 700 drawings. Sadly, he sells very few works. He becomes a famous Post-Impressionist artist after his death.

1893 New Zealand becomes the first country to enact women's suffrage.

1901 January 10 – Black gold, another name for oil, is discovered at Spindletop oil field near Beaumont, Texas and thus launches Texas into 100 years of oil exploration, electronics, and manned space travel.

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SAMPLE

Part II

Class Presentation

Event 1842 Anesthesia is used for the first time.

Event Details

American medical student, William E. Clarke of Berkshire Medical College, became the first person to administer an inhaled anesthetic to facilitate a surgical procedure (dental extraction). In January 1842, Clarke returned to his hometown of Rochester, New York, during a break in the lecture schedule. He discovered that the sister of one of his classmates, a Miss Hobbie, needed a tooth extracted. Using a towel, Clarke applied ether and the tooth was painlessly removed. However, Professor E. M. Moore, Clarke's instructor, told him that the entire incident could be explained as the hysterical reaction of women to pain. At Moore's suggestion, Clarke discontinued his experimentation.