

MADAME BUTTERFLY

GIACOMO PUCCINI

MUSIC: The Characters

Students will

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

Copies for Each Student: *Madame Butterfly* Synopsis, “The Characters”, Activity Worksheet

Copies for the Teacher: *Madame Butterfly* Synopsis, “The Characters”, Activity Worksheet, Answer Key

Getting Ready

Decide which section(s) of the worksheet you wish your group to complete. Prepare internet access to the *Madame Butterfly* online listening selections. Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your group.

Introduction

Have your students read the *Madame Butterfly* 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 for the class with the teacher asking leading questions to guide the discussion.

For Further Study

The teacher may want to have students further research *Madame Butterfly*. Students may also want to do additional research on Giacomo Puccini or Giuseppe Giacosa, their lives 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

Fine Arts, Music

Middle School 1

117.208. c. 4 B,C Historical and cultural relevance

The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B) describe written and aurally presented music representative of diverse styles, periods, and cultures; (C) identify relationships of music concepts to other academic disciplines such as the relationship between music and mathematics, literature, history.

Middle School 2

117.209. c. 4 B,C Historical and cultural relevance

The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B) examine written and aurally presented music representative of diverse genres, styles, periods, and cultures; (C) identify relationships of music content and processes to other academic disciplines such as the relationship between music and mathematics, literature, history, and the sciences.

Middle School 3

117.210.c. 4 B,C Historical and cultural relevance

The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (B) compare and contrast written and aurally presented music representative of diverse genres, styles, periods, and cultures; (C) compare and contrast relationships of music content and processes to other academic disciplines such as the relationship between music and mathematics, literature, history, sciences, and language.

Music, Level I

117.310. c. 5 A,C,D,E Historical and cultural relevance

The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A) compare and contrast music by genre, style, culture, and historical period; (C) identify and describe the uses of music in societies and cultures; (D) identify and explore the relationship between music and other academic disciplines; (E) identify and explore the impact of technologies, ethical issues, and economic factors on music, performers, and performances.

Music, Level II

117.311. c. 5 A,B,C,E Historical and cultural relevance

The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A) compare and contrast music by genre, style, culture, and historical period; (B) define uses of music in societies and cultures; (C) identify and explore the relationships between music and other academic disciplines; (E) identify and explore the impact of technologies, ethical issues, and economic factors on music, musicians, and performances.

Music, Level III

117.312. c. 5 A,B,C,E Historical and cultural relevance

The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A) classify representative examples of music by genre, style, culture, and historical period; (B) explore the relevance of music to societies and cultures; (C) define the relationships between music content and concepts and other academic disciplines; (E) analyze and evaluate the impact of technologies, ethical issues, and economic factors on music, performers, and performances.

Music, Level IV

117.313. c. 5 A,B,C,E Historical cultural relevance

The student relates music to history, culture, and the world. The student is expected to: (A) discriminate representative examples of music by genre, style, culture, and historical period; (B) evaluate the relevance of music to societies and cultures; (C) define the relationships between music content and concepts and other academic disciplines; (E) analyze and evaluate the impact of technologies, ethical issues, and economic factors on music, performers, and performances.

Correlates: Language Arts

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

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

Sources:

Madame Butterfly Libretto

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

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

www.aria-database.com

Madame Butterfly

Synopsis

ACT ONE

Near Nagasaki in the early 1900s

American naval officer, Pinkerton, has taken out a 999-year lease on a little house, and is making the final arrangements with the Japanese marriage-broker, Goro, for a Japanese wedding. From a discussion with the American consul, Sharpless, we gather that according to Japanese law the marriage will not be binding. Pinkerton revels in the carefree attitude as a 'Yankee vagabondo' who takes his pleasure where he finds it ('Dovunque al mondo'); Sharpless tries in vain to warn him that his 15-year-old bride, Butterfly, is serious about the marriage. Butterfly enters amid a bustle of friends and relatives, singing happily of the love that awaits her. After shyly greeting Pinkerton, she shows him her belongings - including the ceremonial dagger with which her father killed himself - and the Commissioner performs the wedding ceremony. But the festivities are short-lived; her uncle (the Bonze) arrives and curses her for converting to Christianity, and her relatives and friends immediately join him in rejecting her. Her servant Suzuki prepares her for the wedding night, and she joins Pinkerton in the garden for an extended love duet ('Viene la sera'). He is enchanted with his plaything-wife and, while she speaks tenderly of her love, ardently claims his fluttering, captured butterfly.

ACT TWO

Part One: The same house, several years later

Butterfly and Suzuki are alone. Pinkerton sailed for America three years ago, but Butterfly remains fiercely loyal and describes to Suzuki her dream of his return ('Un bel di'). Sharpless, knowing that Pinkerton has taken an American wife and will soon be arriving in Nagasaki with her, attempts to prepare Butterfly for the shock. But Butterfly will not listen and remains stubbornly faithful; she shows Sharpless the child she has borne Pinkerton without his knowledge, convinced that this revelation will ensure her husband's return. Sharpless leaves, unable to face Butterfly with the truth. A cannon shot is heard and Butterfly and Suzuki see Pinkerton's ship coming into harbor. Butterfly jubilantly prepares for his return, filling the room with flowers and again donning her bridal costume. With preparations complete, the two women and the child sit down to wait for Pinkerton's arrival. Night falls; as Suzuki and the child sleep and Butterfly waits motionless, a humming chorus is heard in the distance.

Part Two

It is dawn and Butterfly has fallen asleep at her post. Suzuki rouses her and she carries the sleeping child into the next room, singing a lullaby. Pinkerton and Sharpless arrive and ask Suzuki to talk to Pinkerton's new wife, Kate, who is waiting outside. Suzuki agrees, but the sight of her distress, together with memories of the past, overcome Pinkerton. He is filled with remorse ('Addio fiorito asil'), and he leaves rather than face the woman he deserted. Butterfly rushes in, searching desperately for Pinkerton, but she sees only the strange woman waiting in the garden. Suzuki and Sharpless manage to break the news that this is Pinkerton's wife, and that her husband will never return to her. Butterfly seems to accept the blow, and agrees to give up her son, asking only that Pinkerton come in person to fetch him. Kate and Sharpless leave; Suzuki tries to comfort Butterfly, but she asks to be left alone. She takes her father's dagger from the wall and prepares to kill herself. Suzuki pushes the child into the room, and Butterfly drops the dagger, momentarily deterred. After an impassioned farewell ('O a me, sceso dal trono'), she sends the child away, and commits ritual suicide just as Pinkerton rushes in calling her name.

The Characters

Goro (Goh-roh) (Baritone): A marriage broker. He has arranged for a house, servants, and a wife for Pinkerton. His concern is purely business.

B. F. Pinkerton (Tenor): A U.S. Naval Officer whose ship is in Nagasaki, Japan. Pinkerton wishes to have a wife and home while in Nagasaki. He looks on the arrangement as temporary, and wishes to have an American wife someday. He is only concerned with his own pleasure and comfort while in Japan.

Sharpless (Baritone): The American Consul (representative of the U.S. government) in Nagasaki. Pinkerton confides in Sharpless, telling him that the marriage is only temporary. Sharpless warns Pinkerton that Butterfly seems very much committed to the marriage.

The Bonze (Bahnz) (Bass): Butterfly's uncle and leader of the family. He is a Buddhist priest, and is outraged that Butterfly has decided to abandon their family's faith and adopt Christianity. The bonze calls for the family to have nothing further to do with Butterfly.

Suzuki (Soo-zoo-kee) (Alto): Butterfly's faithful, long time maid. She remains with Butterfly during Pinkerton's three year absence.

Madame Butterfly (Soprano): Her real name is Cio-Cio San (Choh-choh **sahn**) Butterfly is joyful about marrying Pinkerton. She is committed to the marriage, and very much in love. She adopts his Christian religion, causing her family to disown her.

Links to Musical Excerpts:

"Qui verran" – Tito Gobbi, Orchestra of the Rome Opera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OQsbEmQI9A>

Goro, the marriage broker, has arranged for a Japanese wife and a home for Pinkerton. Goro tells Pinkerton what guests will attend the marriage ceremony of Pinkerton to Butterfly.

"Amore e grillo" – Richard Tucker and Guisepppe Valdengo, The Metropolitan Opera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTSgc6QHUTQ>

Pinkerton is concerned only with his own pleasure and comfort while in Japan. Pinkerton describes his carefree attitude about life as a sailor, traveling the world and finding pleasure wherever he goes.

"Ler l'altro il Consolato" – Robert Kerns and Luciano Pavarotti, Weiner Staatsoper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L8uOUbzJD4>

Sharpless, the American Consul in Nagasaki, tells Pinkerton about Butterfly's visit to the consulate. Sharpless does not approve of Pinkerton's attitude about his upcoming marriage. He warns that Butterfly seems very serious about the marriage and could be very hurt.

"Cio-Cio San!" – Raymond Aceto, Orchestra e Coro dell'Accademia Nazionale Di Santa Cecilia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fFrqcCnMSQ>

The Bonze is Butterfly's uncle and a Buddhist priest. As the head of her family, he is heard demanding if it is true that Butterfly has abandoned the family's faith. He demands that the entire family renounce her.

"E Izaghi ed Izanami" – Klara Takacs, Hungarian State Opera Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOVdFN25byw>

Butterfly's maid Suzuki weeps and prays for assistance from the ancient Japanese gods. Unlike Butterfly, Suzuki does not believe that Pinkerton will return.

"Viene la sera" – Jussi Bjorling and Victoria de los Angeles, Orchestra e Coro del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDOb9L7T5hE>

After the wedding ceremony, Butterfly sings of her love for Pinkerton. Pinkerton sings of his satisfaction at having such a lovely wife.

"Un bel di vedremo" – Angela Gheorghiu, Lincoln Center

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uut6X4E-Kgk>

Pinkerton has been gone for three years. Butterfly still believes that he will return to her. She sings of her hope for a future life with Pinkerton as her proud husband.

Activity Worksheet

The drama in the story of *Madame Butterfly* is created by the differing backgrounds, cultures, and views of its characters. Consider the following conflicts between or within characters. Write your answers on separate paper to share with a group or the class.

1. Sharpless does not approve of Pinkerton's carefree attitude about his marriage. He is expected to give Butterfly bad news more than once. Write or tell about a time you have had to give bad news to someone or watch as someone else made bad decisions that hurt others.
2. Butterfly takes her marriage very seriously. Pinkerton does not. Discuss how this situation in a relationship can cause hurt feelings. Do you think two people should marry if they are not both equally committed to the relationship? Why?
3. Butterfly and Pinkerton come from very different backgrounds and religions. Butterfly's family is upset that she adopts Pinkerton's religion. Discuss and write about other characters or situations you have read about where peoples' different backgrounds can affect their relationship with each other. Do you think it is a good idea for two people of very different backgrounds to be together? Why?
4. Butterfly is clearly an optimist—someone who believes that a situation will work out for the best or that a person will do the right thing. She believes that Pinkerton will return, while Suzuki is certain he will not. Discuss other situations you have known or read about where one person remains very hopeful and confident that things will work out, only to be very disappointed.
5. Butterfly is faced with losing her child to Pinkerton and his new American wife. Try to imagine what it would be like for your mother to give you up or one of your brothers or sisters. Could she do it?
6. Pinkerton has conflicting emotions because of the way he has treated Butterfly. He is unable to even face her at the end of the opera. Have you ever treated someone badly and been unable to face them? Have you ever had someone treat you badly and feel too ashamed to face you? What feelings do you have about Pinkerton?

A **concept opera** is one that has a story that can be presented in a variety of places and time periods. *Madame Butterfly* is set in Japan in the early 1900s, but the conflicts in the story could take place today in other parts of the world – perhaps even on another planet.

Decide for yourself where and when you would portray this same story. What would the conflicting cultures be? What would be Butterfly's occupation? Would Pinkerton be a military man or in some other occupation that would keep him away for a long period of time? Write your own ideas for retelling the same basic story in another time and place.

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1-6 All answers will be individual and unique. They should stay true to the story line, but show individual creativity and personal viewpoints.

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Answers will be individual and unique. They should stay true to the story concepts and character traits. Students can show individual creativity in setting and time. Subtle changes may be needed in character descriptions may be needed to reflect the changes in setting and time.