

Social Studies: Historical Settings for Opera

Students Will:

- Read for information
- Research a civilization and landmarks in which to set a story
- Write a brief setting and story as the basis for an opera

Copies for the Student: Article: “**Our Composer, Puccini**” and the **Social Studies Activity**

Getting Ready: Prepare internet access for possible research guided practice or group work. Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your group.

Introduction: Have your students read “**Our Composer, Puccini.**” Give each student a copy of the **Social Studies Worksheet** or display it on screen. Give an overview of the assignment, and point out the information your students are expected to research and write about. To align with Texas TEKS, it is recommended that research topics be tailored according to grade level:

Grade 6: Societies of the contemporary world.

Grade 7: Texas history, from natural Texas to present.

Grade 8: United States history from the early colonial period through Reconstruction.

U.S. History Studies since 1877: U.S. History from Reconstruction to the present day.

World History Studies: Societies of ancient Greece, Rome, India, Persia, China, and Medieval to Renaissance Europe.

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 select topics and begin research. This can be done in class or individually as an outside assignment. Have students fill in their research information, characters, and write a short summary of their dramatic plot. 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 chose their settings and story elements.

Evaluation: Have students present their ideas to the class for discussion and evaluation. The teacher may want to guide the discussion.

For Further Study: Students may want to do additional research on civilizations and landmarks in which to stage a drama 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. For more in-depth video tutorial, see <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL14hRqd0PELHpYZwltntfiJ7M2ulHasOn0>

TEKs:**Social Studies:****Grade 6** (113.18.C.14.A/113.18.C.19.A)

Culture. The student understands that all societies have basic institutions in common even though the characteristics of these institutions may differ. The student is expected to identify institutions basic to all societies, including government, economic, educational, and religious institutions.

Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including technology. The student is expected to differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as oral, print, and visual material and artifacts to acquire information about various world cultures.

Grade 7 (113.19.C.20.A)

Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including technology. The student is expected to differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas.

Grade 8 (113.20.C.23.C/113.20.C.29.A)

Culture. The student understands the relationships between and among people from various groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. The student is expected to identify ways conflicts between people from various racial, ethnic, and religious groups were addressed.

Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including technology. The student is expected differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States.

United States History Studies Since 1877 (113.41.D.25.C/113.41.D.28.F)

Culture. The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. The student is expected to explain how the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, gender, and religious groups shape American culture.

Social studies skills. The student understands how historians use historiography to interpret the past and applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including technology. The student is expected to formulate and communicate visually, orally, or in writing a claim supported by evidence and reasoning for an intended audience and purpose.

World History Studies (113.42.D.24.A/B) (113.42.D.28.F)

Culture. The student understands how the development of ideas has influenced institutions and societies. The student is expected to summarize the fundamental ideas and institutions of Eastern civilizations that originated in China and India; summarize the fundamental ideas and institutions of Western civilizations that originated in Greece and Rome.

Social studies skills. The student understands how historians use historiography to interpret the past and applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including technology. The student is expected to formulate and communicate visually, orally, or in writing a claim supported by evidence and reasoning for an intended audience and purpose.

Language Arts:**6th Grade** (110.22.B.7.B)

Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to analyze how the characters' internal and external responses develop the plot.

7th Grade (110.23.B.7.B)

Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to analyze how characters' qualities influence events and resolution of the conflict.

8th Grade (110.24.B.7.B)

Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to analyze how characters' motivations and behaviors influence events and resolution of the conflict.

English Language Arts and Reading, English I (110.36.C.6.B)

Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to analyze how authors develop complex yet believable characters in works of fiction through a range of literary devices, including character foils.

English Language Arts and Reading, English II (110.37.C.6.B)

Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to analyze how authors develop complex yet believable characters, including archetypes,

through historical and cultural settings and events.

English Language Arts and Reading, English III (110.38.C.6.B)

Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to analyze how characters' behaviors and underlying motivations contribute to moral dilemmas that influence the plot and theme.

English Language Arts and Reading, English IV (110.39.C.6.B)

Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to analyze how characters' behaviors and underlying motivations contribute to moral dilemmas that influence the plot and theme.

Gardner's Intelligences

Verbal-Linguistic

Logical/Mathematical

Bloom's Taxonomy

Knowledge

Comprehension

Application

Synthesis

Evaluation

Sources

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

Freeman, John W., *The Metropolitan Opera Stories of the Great Operas*, W. W. Norton and Company, 1984.

Goulding, Phil G., *Ticket to the Opera*, Fawcett Columbine/Ballantine, 1996.

Online Resources

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

www.wikipedia.com

Our Composer, Giacomo Puccini

Giacomo Puccini was born in Lucca, Italy on December 22, 1858. His great-great grandfather had come to Lucca to become the choirmaster and organist of the Cathedral of San Martino. Puccini's father was the third generation to hold the same post, and a well regarded musician. Giacomo was performing as an organist by the age of fourteen. His mother made sure he had musical training from an early age. Giacomo took his place as choirmaster and organist at the Cathedral. His mother wrote to the Queen of Italy and secured a scholarship for him to attend the Milan Conservatory. At the age of seventeen he saw his first opera. From then on, all he wanted to do was write opera.

During his last year at the Conservatory, Puccini wrote an opera, *Le villi*, to enter in a contest. He did not win. Puccini graduated from the Conservatory and moved home. His mother sent him back to Milan with letters of introduction that helped him meet members of society who could help him. At a salon attended by some well-known musicians, he was asked to play some of his opera. The veteran musicians loved it, and asked why it had not been entered in their contest. Puccini informed them that it had indeed been entered. Finally, everyone realized that his entry had been thrown away because of his awful handwriting. The judges for the contest never saw it.

On May 31, 1884, *Le villi* was performed in Milan. It was a great success. After the final performance, Puccini returned home. His mother was gravely ill and died a few days later. Giulio Ricordi, head of G. Ricordi & Co. Music Publishers, loved *Le villi*. In 1889 he hired Puccini to write a second opera, *Edgar*. From then on, Ricordi worked with Puccini throughout his career, until Ricordi's death in 1912.

Puccini had a heart attack and died on November 29, 1924. All of Italy grieved.

Puccini's final opera, *Turandot*, premiered in 1926. The final scene was completed by Franco Alfano. Alfano composed the final duet between Princess Turandot and Calaf and the last scene, based on the libretto and notes left behind by Puccini. Both were revised after the premier by the conductor Arturo Toscanini. Puccini designed these last portions as essential to the opera, but neither version seems to have done justice to the rest of the opera. At its premier, Toscanini conducted. At the point at which Puccini's own writing stopped, the conductor stopped the performance and explained to the audience that this was the point at which the master Puccini had stopped writing.

Puccini's appeal to audiences is strongly rooted in his sensuous, magnificent melodies, easy to follow plots, skilled orchestration, and continually moving action. His success in opera is also due to his uncanny sense of what would appeal to the audiences of the day. Music scholars say

that Puccini was the natural successor to Verdi, but at the same time foreshadowed by the innovations in music that Verdi made. *Turandot* is often compared to Verdi's *Aida*.

The practical Puccini accepted the audiences of the day and their love of Verdi. He established himself in their hearts before evolving his music. That way he took the audience with him through his innovations to the art form.

Social Studies Activity

The work of Giacomo Puccini, Renato Simoni, and Giuseppe Adami made the historical drama *Turandot* the success that it is today. The opera, based on Carlo Gozzi's 1762 play and set in ancient China, tells a compelling story of love conquering all odds. The characters and plot could possibly be set in any time period in any society on earth. A political ruler, his influential daughter, a young man who has lost his country, his downtrodden father, a devoted servant—all could be easily reinterpreted to other settings and eras you have studied. Or maybe a different story is in order. After all, the human animal is pretty much the same from the Inuk to a German supermodel.

You will plan a new historical opera of your own. You will select a time period, society, or culture that you may have previously read about in social studies. You may plan your characters and their story. You will also select a place for the action to happen. It may be a real place, like the acropolis in Athens, Machu Picchu in Peru, the Alamo, or even Stonehenge. In one production of this opera, it was performed in the Forbidden City of China, where the actual Emperors lived. That setting was authentic, even though the characters are fictional. You will need to do a little research on your topics, obtain information and possibly images, write out your idea, and present your plan to the class.

Your Plan

Your plan for a new dramatic opera should contain the following:

1. What era, civilization, or society would be the basis for your opera?
2. What characters would you use? Names are not necessary, but tell us who these people are.
3. What place would be the setting? Would you use a landmark that still exists, or something generic, like a Native American village in Texas?
4. Briefly tell the story you would like to portray.
5. Tell why you chose the time and place that you selected, and share your research on the topic, either from the library or web based.

All of this information can be as brief or as detailed as your teacher requests. The basic facts would probably fit on a single sheet of notebook paper. Your research may yield much more information.