STUDY GUIDE

Queen Elizabeth Theatre | October 13, 19, 21 at 7:30pm | October 15 at 2:00pm
Opera in three acts
Conductor Jacques Lacombe | Director Renaud Doucet
In Italian with English and Mandarin SurTitles™

Dress Rehearsal
Wednesday, October 11, at 7pm

Opera Experience
Thursday, October 19th
Backstage Tour 5:00 pm
Performance Begins 7:30 pm

Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni
CAST IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

A Mandarin       Peter Monaghan
Liú, a young slave girl    Marianne Fiset
Calaf, the unknown prince     Marcelo Puente
Timur, his father, the dispossessed king of Tartary    Alain Couloumbe
Prince of Persia     TBD
Ping, Grand Chancellor    Jonathan Beyer
Pang, General Purveyor    Julius Ahn
Pong, Chief Cook    Joseph Hu
The Emperor Altoum    Sam Chung
Handmaids    Melanie Krueger
Princess Turandot    Karen Ydenberg

With the Vancouver Opera Chorus as guards, executioner's assistants, priests, mandarins, dignitaries, wise men and attendants, and the Vancouver Opera Orchestra.

Scenic Designer / Costume Designer    André Barbe
Associate Conductor / Chorus Director    Leslie Dala
Principal Répétiteur / Children's Chorus Director    Kinza Tyrrell
Choreographer    Roxanne Foster
Lighting Designer    Guy Simon
Wig Designer    Susan Manning
Musical Preparation    Kimberley-Ann Bartczak
Stage Manager    Ingrid Turk
Assistant Director    Kathleen Stakenas
Assistant Lighting Designer    Andrew Pye
English SurTitle™ Operator    Sarah Jane Pelzer
Assistant Stage Managers    Marijka Asbeek Brusse, Emma Hammond

The performance will last approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes. There will be two intermissions.
First produced at Milan, Teatro alla Scala, April 25, 1926. First produced by Vancouver Opera, April 27, 1972.

Scenery, properties and costumes for this production were constructed at Minnesota Opera Shops and are jointly owned by Minnesota Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Seattle Opera, Utah Opera, Cincinnati Opera and Opera Philadelphia.

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**Study Guide Objectives**

This study guide has been designed to be accessible to all teachers regardless of previous experience in music or opera. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the lessons to meet the dynamic needs of their students in music rooms, theatres and classrooms. The lessons are designed to engage students in learning about the opera they will be attending as well as and thinking critically about art and its meaning.

How deeply students go into this material will depend on each teacher. However, we do suggest the following as the **minimum commitment to preparing for the performance.**

- Students are familiar with the synopsis and at least one piece of music.
- Students are able to identify the socio-historical context of the opera (when and where it was written).
- Students are given the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their response to the performance.

The lessons are designed to be either **Quick or In-Depth** and for use **Before the Performance and/or After the Performance** to provide teachers with the flexibility to tailor lessons to their classrooms.

Each lesson also contains an Overview, specific Objectives and a list of the Materials needed for the activity.

**Connections to the Curriculum**

The study guide has been prepared in accordance with the new BC Curriculum and targets secondary classes. Each activity addresses a “Big Idea” from the new curriculum and includes specific learning objectives. Elementary teachers will be able to modify the activities to meet the needs of their students with little difficulty.

Opera is an art-form that benefits from “spoilers”; the more prepared students are in advance of attending the performance, the deeper and richer the performance will be!
GETTING READY

3 Questions You Should Ask (and Have Answered) Before Coming to the Opera

What is opera?
Opera is an interdisciplinary experience in which singers and musicians put on a dramatic production. This means that, just as in musicals, music (sung and instrumental), theatre, and visual art (the set design and creation, as well as costumes and lights) come together to tell a story. Because opera was first popular in Italy, many of the words associated with it are from the Italian language. The word "opera" means "work" in Italian, as in "work of art". Opera is usually written in the language of the composer and the language of the country it will be heard in.

Opera has been around for a while (for a little over four hundred years, in fact!), and therefore opera-singers sing without microphones, which hadn’t yet been developed by the time opera started. Opera singers have developed a special singing technique in order to be heard over the orchestra without microphones. They sing so loudly that in order to protect each other’s hearing, they make sure not to face directly towards each other while singing.

What is it like to sing opera?
If you were a top opera singer, you could make as much as $20,000 per performance! And what’s so hard about being an opera singer, you ask? Opera singers often have as many years of training as physicians. They must learn to have a voice powerful enough to project across a full orchestra, yet flexible enough to taper to a soft piano level when it is called for. Singers must also learn English, French, German, and Italian— even Russian and Czech! They must be able to memorize and sing many different operas (which can be up to 4 hours long!), and to dance and act while singing under hot lights. Critics and journalists are not always kind, and singers must also learn to brush off negative reviews in time to perform the same show the following night.

How does an opera go from words and notes on the page to fully staged performance?
The first thing to happen is the assembly of a creative team which includes the music director, stage director, singers, orchestra musicians, and set and costume designers. Everyone works with the score and libretto to prepare for the first rehearsals. Opera singers are expected to arrive at the first rehearsal “off book”, meaning that they must have the entire score memorized in advance! Once the designers have completed their designs, artists and sewers work to create all of the props, sets and costumes. Lighting designers work with the stage director to add light and shade to the stage. At first the opera is rehearsed in sections—one scene at a time. During “tech week”, everyone moves into the theatre and all aspects of the opera from the acting to the music to the moving of the sets is practiced over and over again. Finally, opening night arrives. Et voila! There is an opera!
SYNOPSIS

Act 1
Outside the Imperial Palace in Peking, a mandarin reads an edict to the crowd: any prince seeking to marry the princess Turandot must answer three riddles. If he fails, he will die. The most recent suitor, the Prince of Persia, is to be executed at the moon’s rising. Among the onlookers are the slave girl Liù, her aged master, and the young Calàf, who recognizes the old man as his long lost father, Timur, vanquished King of Tartary. When Timur reveals that only Liù has remained faithful to him, Calàf asks why. She replies that once, long ago, Calàf smiled at her. The mob cries for blood but greets the rising moon with a sudden fearful silence. When the Prince of Persia is led to his execution, the crowd calls upon the princess to spare him. Turandot appears, and with a contumacious gesture orders that the execution proceed. As the victim’s death cry is heard from the distance, Calàf, transfixed by the beauty of the unattainable princess, strides to the gong that announces a new suitor. Suddenly Turandot’s three ministers, Ping, Pang, and Pong, appear to discourage him. Timur and the tearful Liù also beg him not to risk his life (“Signore, ascolta!”). Calàf tries to comfort her (“Non piangere, Liù”) but then strikes the gong and calls Turandot’s name.

Act 2
Inside the palace, Ping, Pang, and Pong lament Turandot’s bloody reign, praying that love will conquer her heart and restore peace. The three let their thoughts wander to their peaceful country homes (Trio: “Ho una casa nell’Honan”), but the noise of the people gathering to hear Turandot question the new challenger calls them back to reality. The old emperor asks Calàf to reconsider, but he will not be dissuaded. Turandot enters and describes how her beautiful ancestor, Princess Lou-Ling, was abducted and killed by a conquering prince. In revenge, she has turned against men and determined that none shall ever possess her (“In questa reggia”). Facing Calàf, she poses her first question: What is born each night and dies each dawn? “Hope,” Calàf answers, correctly. Turandot continues: What flickers red and warm like a flame, yet is not a flame? “Blood,” Calàf replies after a moment’s thought. Shaken,
Turandot delivers the third riddle: What is like ice but burns? Tense silence prevails until Calàf triumphantly cries, “Turandot!” The crowd erupts in joy, and the princess vainly begs her father not to give her to the stranger. Hoping to win her love, Calàf offers Turandot a challenge of his own: if she can learn his name by dawn, he will forfeit his life.

**Act 3**

In the Imperial Gardens, Calàf hears a proclamation: on pain of death no one in Peking shall sleep until Turandot learns the stranger’s name. Calàf is certain of his victory (“Nessun dorma!”), but Ping, Pang, and Pong try to bribe him to leave the city. As the fearful mob threatens him to learn his name, soldiers drag in Liù and Timur. Calàf tries to convince the crowd that neither of them knows his secret. When Turandot appears, commanding Timur to speak, Liù replies that she alone knows the stranger’s identity and will never reveal it. She is tortured but remains silent. Impressed by such fortitude, Turandot asks Liù’s secret. It is love, she replies. When the soldiers intensify the torture, Liù tells Turandot that she, too, will know the joys of love (“Tu, che di gel sei cinta”). Then she snatches a dagger and kills herself. The crowd forms a funeral procession and the body is taken away. Turandot remains alone to confront Calàf, who impetuously kisses her (Duet: “Principessa di morte!”). Knowing emotion for the first time, Turandot weeps (“Del primo pianto”). Calàf, now sure of winning her, reveals his identity. Once again before the emperor’s throne, Turandot declares she knows the stranger’s name: it is Love.

- Synopsis from the Metropolitan Opera
ABOUT TURANDOT

The Composer

- Giacomo Puccini is one of the world’s most famous opera composers. He was born in Italy in 1858 and died in 1924.
- He wrote many of the most frequently performed operas all over the world including including Madama Butterfly, La Bohème, and Tosca.
- Puccini was very famous while he was alive - basically an early version of a rock star!
- Puccini died before completing the score and thus the final duet was written by Franco Alfano. Puccini was living with cancer during this time. He died after surgery in an attempt to remove a tumor in his throat. He never recovered from the surgery, dyeing a week later. Alfano took a further six months to complete the work.
- At the opera’s premiere at La Scala in Milan in 1826, the famous conductor Toscanini stopped the performance at the point where Puccini’s music ended and reportedly turned to the audience and said, “This is where the maestro put down his pen.”

The Story

- Puccini’s opera was based on a play with the same name that was brought to his attention while he in Berlin. History of the story itself
- The original fairy tale might have originated as a Persian folk tale – a 12th Century work from Azerbaijani poet and philosopher Nizami Ganjavi.
- It was included in the French collection of fairy tales by Francois Petis de la Croix – “The thousand and one nights”.
- Puccini’s opera is not the only opera based on the story of Turandot – preceded by operas by Antonio Bazzini in 1867 and Ferruccio Busoni in 1917 (Bazzini was one of Puccini’s teachers)

Turandot in China

- Turandot was banned for decades because it was felt that the opera was disrespectful of Chinese culture.
- In a grand production, it was reintroduced by 1988 in the Forbidden City (where the Emperors actually lived). The production was enormous – conducted by Zubin Mehta and Chinese film Director Zhang Yimou (Beijing Olympics) thoughts on production – documentary as well as being accessible on Youtube
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Lesson One: The most famous aria in the world

Big Idea: Dance, drama, music and visual arts each use their own unique sensory language for creating and communicating.

Category: Before Performance, Quick or In Depth

Overview: “Nessun Dorma” is one of the most popular arias around the world. Made famous by Lucianna Pavarotti, it has been recorded and performed by a wide variety of artists including Aretha Franklin and guitarist Jeff Beck,

Objective: Active listening activities build student capacity to describe music in the same way that they are able to describe text or visuals. Repeating the lesson with different styles of music will build their vocabulary. This activity is ideal for students with a variety of musical experiences as it encourages.

Materials:

- A high quality video of “Nessun Dorma”. Suggestions include Luciano Pavarotti or Marcello Giodani.
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lW2rnLmEH8E – Marcello Giodani
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bG22eS2_h4 – Luciano Pavarotti
- English translation of the words

Activity:

2. Go deeper into the text by exploring the meaning of the lyrics. What are the emotions being expressed through the language? What does the audience learn about the character?

3. Listen to the aria without the video. Brainstorm words to describe the music including both music vocabulary and language that describes art and emotions in general.

4. Finally, watch a performance of the aria. How does the movement on stage reflect the lyrics as well as the music?

5. Review the synopsis of the opera. Have students consider where in the opera this aria might take place. After the performance, return to this discussion and have reflect on their initial thoughts.

Extension:

Many different artists have recorded “Nessun Dorma”. Students can create a compare and contrast T chart using the information they gathered in the Listening Activity. Have them seek out different versions for comparison. How do different interpretations change their response to the music?
Lesson Two: Music from a mythical China

Big Idea: The arts provide opportunities to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of people from a variety of times, places and cultures.

Category: Before and After, In Depth

Overview: Puccini based Turandot in a mythical China that never truly existed. The story of Turandot originated as a fairy tale with Puccini making the decision to set his opera in Ancient China. He also included musical references to a Chinese folk song as a way of adding sounds that suggested China to Italian audiences. This activity encourages students to think about the role of “borrowing” music from other cultures and other artists.

Objective: Students will apply an active listening approach to learning how Puccini used the song “Jasmine Flower” in the score of Turandot. After seeing the performance, students will consider the use of songs from other cultures in relation to the music they listen to.

Materials:
- Recording of “Jasmine Flower” with notation
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmiwiOMNa0Y
- Recording of “Jasmine Flower” in concert
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9M4qca_uLB4
- Recording of “La sui monti dell’Est” from Turandot
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PkS2HQj9ZE
- Lyrics to both “Jasmine Flower” and “La sui monti dell’Est”

Activity – Pre- Performance

1. Using a blank piece of paper, have students create a chart with three columns. Title each column with the following:
   - Melody only
   - In Concert
   - Puccini’s interpretation

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2. Introduce students to the melody of “Jasmine Flower”. Start with the short video that includes notation. After listening, elicit a description of the melody based on their response to it and have students record their findings.

3. Listen and watch the performance of “Jasmine Flower” as performed on Chinese instruments in concert. Add to the description based on their response to the performance in the second column.

4. Finally, listen and watch the excerpt from Turandot that features a very similar melody. Fill in the third column with describing words including their emotional response.

5. Based on teacher preference, the English lyrics for both songs can also be included as part of the comparative activity. How are the lyrics similar or different? What stories are being told? Considering that “La sui monti dell’Est” is sung before a beheading, how do the students respond to the ways in which the music is situated?

Activity – Post Performance

1. Review the classroom discussions that took place about “Jasmine Flower” before attending the opera. Did they recognize the melody when it appeared? What was happening on stage whenever the melody was present? (Hint – it is motif for Princess Turandot).

2. Ask students to make a list of songs that they like that include music from other artists, genres, or cultures. Have students share out their responses with the class.

3. Open a discussion about the morality of using the music of others. Is it always okay? Is it appropriate if the artist gives permission? What about music that has strong cultural meanings for a specific group of people? Is sampling music the same? Have students write a short paragraph arguing from both sides.

   Using the music of other cultures and artists without permission is not okay.

   Reinterpretation of other styles and genres of music is how music evolves.

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Jasmine Flower – English Translation

Flower of jasmine, so fair!
Flower of jasmine, so fair!
Budding and blooming here and there,
Pure and fragrant all do declare.
Let me pick you with tender care,
Sweetness for all to share.
Jasmine fair, oh Jasmine fair.

La sui monti dell’Est – English Translation

There, on the Eastern mountains, the stork sang.
But April blossomed no more, and the snow didn’t thaw.
From the desert to the sea, can’t you hear
a thousand voices sighing:
“Princess, come down to me!
All will blossom again, all will be resplendent!”
Ah!
Lesson Three: The Art of the riddle!

Big Idea: Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy.

Category: After, Quick

Overview: Princess Turandot’s use of riddles is at the centre of the opera. Get them right and you can marry the Princess. Get them wrong and they will lose their head. Riddles are an fun and entertaining way to play with language which is a great access point into poetry and creative writing.

Objective: Students will experiment with two ways of writing riddles. The first is an introduction to the humour of simple riddles. The second uses homophones to create more complex riddles similar to the three riddles in Turandot.

1. Post the three riddles from Turandot on the board (see synopsis). Have students break down the structure of the riddles by identifying the use of metaphors, homophones, and plot devices.

   Q1. What thing is reborn every night? ...A. ‘Hope’
   Q2. What burns hot, but is not fire? ...A. ‘Blood’
   Q3. What ice can make fire? ...A. ‘Turandot’

2. Working in partners, have students come up with some fun, simple riddles that they either know (why did the chicken cross the road?) or that they make up in the moment.

3. Students can then move around the room asking each other their riddles.

4. Introduce the meaning of homophones – words that sound the same but have different meanings. Elicit riddles that use homophones to list on the board.

   “Why is six afraid of seven?” “because seven eight nine”

5. Returning to their partners, have students create a list of words with multiple meanings and then work together to create 2 or 3 riddles.

6. Finish the activity with students again sharing out their riddles with each other.
FURTHER RESOURCES

1. Writing reviews of concerts and performances encourages students to think critically about what they experienced in the theatre. Any student reviews would be greatly appreciated at the Vancouver Opera office!! There are many resources to assist students with the process of writing a review. The following questions work well for critiquing live performances.

   What was the overall plotline of the story?
   How did you respond to the performances of the singers?
   What did you think of the music? How did the music help to tell the story?
   What did you think of the costumes and the sets? What was your response to the visual aspects of the opera?
   Would you recommend this performance to others? Why or why not?

2. For a great overview of Turandot including historical context and further listening suggestions visit [www.theopera101.com/operas/turandot/](http://www.theopera101.com/operas/turandot/)

3. Metropolitan Opera produces detailed study guides to accompany the HD broadcasts.

4. Racial Issues in Turandot
   Opera Philadelphia brought in specialists to speak to “orientalism” in Turandot as part of their presentation of the same production in 2016. The articles provide detailed background and context around the issues inherent in the opera. They provide a great resource for teachers and a potential opportunity for research for older students.

UPCOMING DATES AT VANCOUVER OPERA EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>Dress Rehearsal</th>
<th>Opera Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L’Elisir D’Amore</td>
<td></td>
<td>7:00 pm Wednesday, Jan 17th, 2018</td>
<td>7:30 pm Thursday, Jan 25th, 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Onegin</td>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>begins early April</td>
<td>7:00 pm Wednesday, Apr 25th, 2018</td>
</tr>
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For more Information about Vancouver Opera’s Education Programs for elementary and secondary students, please visit vancouveropera.ca/learn