



Georges Bizet

CARMEN: UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

AN ADAPTATION OF BIZET'S ORIGINAL MASTERPIECE

STUDY GUIDE

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◀ DIGITAL ▶

STUDY GUIDE OBJECTIVES

Opera is an art form that benefits from spoilers; the more prepared students are in advance of attending the performance, the deeper and richer their experience will be!

This study guide has been designed to be accessible to all teachers regardless of previous experience in music or opera. The lessons within this guide provide opportunities for students to learn about the opera they will be watching and think critically about art and its meaning. Lessons can be either quick or in-depth; used either before and/or after the performance; and can be adapted to meet the dynamic needs of the students.

How deeply students go into this material will depend on each teacher. However, we recommend 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 can 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.

CONNECTIONS TO THE CURRICULUM

The study guide has been prepared in accordance with the new BC Curriculum and targets secondary classes. Each activity includes specific learning objectives and can be adapted for use in most arts and humanities coursework. Elementary teachers will be able to modify the activities to meet the needs of their students with little difficulty.

Throughout the secondary arts education curriculum, the big ideas are connected to the role the arts play in society and in our individual lives. The activities within this study guide address the following themes found within the specific big ideas at each grade level:

1. Dance, drama, music and visual arts are all unique languages for creating art and communicating.
2. The arts are an essential aspect of building community and interpersonal relationships.
3. The arts react and respond to the cultures within which they are performed. Creative works are socially constructed and often challenge the status quo.
4. Personal and collective identity is explored, expressed and impacted through arts experiences.

These larger concepts can be linked to the big ideas found in the social studies and English/French language arts curriculum. The study guide has also been prepared in consideration of the First People's Principles of Learning and whenever possible, activities will include resources that address the learning standards related to Indigenous knowledge and education.

The study guide for *Carmen: Up Close and Personal* was prepared by music teacher Rebecca Paulding and Jacci Collins, Vancouver Opera's learning and engagement coordinator.

GETTING READY

Three questions to ask (and have answered) before watching an opera:

1. 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, 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 *opus* means work in Italian, as in work of art. Opera is more than one work. It is usually written in the language of the composer and the language of the country it will be heard in.

2. 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.

Opera has been around for over 400 years therefore opera singers sing without microphones, which hadn't yet been developed at the time opera started. Opera singers have developed a special singing technique to be heard over the orchestra without microphones. They sing so loudly that to protect each other's hearing, they make sure not to face directly towards each other while singing. They must also 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, Italian, and 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.

3. 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 (the music) and libretto (the text) to prepare for the first rehearsal. The 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 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—are practiced over and over again. The dress rehearsal is the final rehearsal that takes place in front of a live audience in which everything is done as it would be in a real performance. Finally, opening night arrives. Et voila! There is an opera!

ABOUT *CARMEN: UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL*

Music by Georges Bizet

Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy

Georges Bizet (October 25, 1838 – 3 June 3, 1875), born as Alexandre César Léopold Bizet, was a French composer of the Romantic era. Best known for his operas in a career cut short by his early death, Bizet achieved few successes before his final work, *Carmen*, which has become one of the most popular and frequently performed works in the entire opera repertoire. During a brilliant student career at the Conservatoire de Paris, Bizet won many prizes, including the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1857. He was recognized as an outstanding pianist, though he chose not to capitalize on this skill and rarely performed in public. Later commentators have acclaimed him as a composer of brilliance and originality whose premature death was a significant loss to French musical theatre.

Cinematic Adaptation

This version of *Carmen* is a cinematic adaptation of the original opera composed by George Bizet. Due to COVID-19, the original full-length opera could not be performed for a live audience. Vancouver Opera has adjusted our season to a digital format, meaning that all of our operas are now being pre-recorded on film at various venues throughout Vancouver. *Carmen: Up Close and Personal*, was filmed at Vancouver’s iconic Orpheum Theatre, and has been adapted to accommodate an audience watching from the comfort of their own home. As such, it is 75 minutes in length rather than the original version, which typically runs over 3 hours.

History of the Romani People

The term “Gypsy” is used quite frequently in Bizet’s *Carmen*; however, the word Gypsy is now considered a derogatory term for the Roma—a culture that can be traced to a group that lived in Northwest India in the 10th century. Gypsy was a term coined by Europeans who believed that the Roma culture originated in Egypt, leading to the name “Gyptians,” which then became “Gypsy.” Today however, we use the term “Romani” or “Roma.” For many years, the Romani people have traveled far and wide across Europe, making it difficult to trace origins or roots of certain families. The Roma people have populated many countries and regions, as traveling was often because of necessity, not choice. They have also suffered great persecution well into the 20th century, often stereotyped as fortune tellers, or people with no sense of community or contribution to society. Since immigrating to

North America in the late 1800s, the Roma people have brought with them a rich culture filled with music, dance, and stories!

Synopsis

After reveling in memories of her Bohemian lifestyle and music, Carmen sits down and prepares a tarot reading. As she deals the cards and turns the first card over, a young soldier José enters and is captivated by her beauty. She is taken with him; despite the warning she gets from the cards.

They are quickly interrupted by the entrance of the soldier's childhood sweetheart, Micaëla. She has been looking all over for him. After his sordid and violent past, she brings him a message of love and forgiveness from his mother. She also brings him a ring which his mother hopes he will give to Micaëla.

Their reminiscing is interrupted by Carmen who, having watched their naïve love, shares her beliefs in what love is and the consequences of loving. Micaëla is affronted by Carmen's flirtation with José and lunges towards her. A conflict ensues resulting in the blameless Carmen being blamed and hauled off to prison. Left alone with José, Carmen tries every trick in the book to escape. Eventually through a combination of her own cunning and José's infatuation she escapes. José is blamed for her escape and sent to prison, but he keeps with him Carmen's promise to meet him and be his.

Time passes, and as the tarot cards say Fate continues to move the pieces. Carmen meets Escamillo, the famous bullfighter of Grenada While she is interested in him, it is José that she longs for and he returns to her that very night. Upon his return she dances for him, reveling in the new experience of committed love. However, the trumpet call from the soldiers' barracks is heard, and José must leave her once again. Distraught, Carmen fights with José claiming he doesn't truly love her, or he would come away with her. Eventually José gives in, deserting the army and placing his mother's ring on Carmen's hand.

As Fate and time continues to move on, Micaëla returns searching for José. But she is not the only one. Escamillo has also returned searching for Carmen; he has come to sweep her off her feet. José flies into a jealous rage at the idea of Carmen leaving him. Carmen breaks up the fight, but Escamillo won't be put off so easily and invites both of them to see his upcoming bullfight in Seville. As they prepare to leave, Micaëla is discovered. She confesses to José that his mother has sent her to fetch him home. Carmen, now understanding José's insane jealousy and instability, tells him to go home to his mother, sending José into a passionate rage. Only Micaëla is able to stop him by telling him that his mother is dying, and he must return home. José agrees to leave but warns Carmen that he will be back.

As predicted in the cards, José returns begging Carmen to forgive him so their lives can continue together. Carmen confesses to him that no matter what he does, she will not be his. She was born free and will remain free. Taking his mother's ring off her finger, she gives it back to him. José raises his knife and moves towards her...

We return to the beginning. Carmen has finished her tarot reading. She has seen her future. The young soldier enters again....

LESSON ONE

Learn Before You Listen

Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each a unique language for creating and communicating. Experiencing art is a means to develop empathy for others' perspectives and experiences.

Category: Before Performance/Quick

Overview: Bizet's opera, *Carmen*, is one of the most famous operas of all time. Its epic and dramatic storyline consists of famous and intoxicating melodies, beautiful harmonies, and even some bullfighting! The sensual "Habanera" sung by Carmen herself, is woven together with a most memorable melody line and haunting lyrics. "Love is a wild bird that no one can tame." This aria appears in the beginning of the opera, and here is sung by the famous mezzo soprano Elina Garanca.

Objective: The objective of this lesson is to ensure students are familiar with what is happening in the opera. They should be able to consider the impact of repeated listening to enhance their understanding of a piece of music. In this particular case, students will be exposed to a variety of famous operatic arias within a contemporary performance work.

Materials:

High quality recording of:

- "Habanera" sung by Carmen <https://youtu.be/K2snTkaD64U>
- Royal Opera House video: voice types <https://youtu.be/hLfvkwTnJVM>
- 8.5" by 11" piece of paper divided into three sections (labeled Hearing Feeling Questioning)

Lesson:

1. This lesson makes an ideal opening activity for the three or four classes before watching a performance. Simply have the students listen to the aria straight through while writing down what they are hearing, feeling and questioning each time.
2. To get them started the first time, brainstorm a list of things they could listen for including:
 - Type of voice (female, male, unsure, soprano, tenor, etc.) Here's a helpful video in identifying each voice type from the Royal Opera House <https://youtu.be/hLfvkwTnJVM>
 - Instruments they hear (violin, cello, trumpet, piano, etc.)
 - Tempo – fast, slow, both, etc.
 - Form – does the aria have sections they can identify – does anything repeat?
 - How does it start? How does it end?
 - What emotions could be used to describe the music?
 - How does it make them feel?
 - What questions do they have? I wonder..?
3. At the end of each listening session, collect the paper and continue with the lesson.
4. Repeat the listening activity at each lesson and encourage the students to add to their list. The questions can be used again to focus on new aspects of the aria.

5. After the final listening session, lead a group discussion on how their understanding and appreciation of the music changed over time. Did it grow on them? Were they able to anticipate each section? What did they hear in the final listening session that they didn't hear the first time around? Compare and contrast with a neighbour!

Extension: Repeat the listening activity by having students bring in a song that is unknown to others in the class. Encourage students to use music that is meaningful to them, and repeat the process. When does a piece of music "stick?" Why is some music easy to listen to repeatedly while other music becomes less interesting over time? Think, Pair and Share!

LESSON TWO

Carmen in a Minute: An Overture Zine

Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each a unique language for creating and communicating. Artists experiment in a variety of ways to discover new possibilities and perspectives.

Category: After performance/quick

Overview: Bizet's overture of *Carmen* is one of the most famous pieces of music ever written. It consists of a "teaser" of all the hits found within the opera, and possibly provides some foreshadowing of how the dramatic tale will end. Listen closely, you might just recognize some of the tunes!

Objective: The objective of this lesson is to focus on ONE aspect of opera: the music! After becoming familiar with the music excerpt, students will then create their own comic zine to go along with the overture. The idea is to use the overture music as the storyline - telling the dramatic tale of *Carmen* in under 5 minutes using drawings, colours and humour!

Materials:

- Bizet's Overture: <https://youtu.be/pmuFOuh3QHs>
- Zine instructions/how to video: <https://youtu.be/gZtlkQw4GTs>
- 11" X 17" paper preferred
- Scissors
- Pens/pencils, crayons, pencil crayons, sharpies, etc.

Lesson:

1. Listen to Bizet's overture of *Carmen* a few times to get a sense of each melody change (During Vancouver Opera's production of *Carmen: Up Close and Personal*, the overture will be a shortened version.)
2. Students will then fold their paper into a zine - instructional video included above!
3. Provide a front and back cover to your comic.
4. There are several distinct changes in Bizet's overture. Students can provide a page or two in their zine for each change found at:
 - 0:30
 - 0:47

- 1:01
 - 1:48
 - 2:06
5. Once the zine is complete, have students swap their comics with other students in the class, turn on the *Carmen* overture, and enjoy reading the epic short story!
 6. Students may of course add text/text bubbles for their characters, or simply keep it wordless. Endless options!

Extension: Have students expand the comic even more, creating more scenes. If technology is available, create a short stop motion video in groups. Students can cut out images they've created, OR create new images using clay, playdough, paper, etc. Use the *Carmen* overture in the background of the short video! Here is a how-to video for stop motion creation: <https://youtu.be/T0v3IYPN7Mw> Most stop motion videos can be created using the FREE app "Stop Motion Studio".

LESSON THREE

Carmen Through the Ages: What Would You Do?

Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each a unique language for creating and communicating. Experiencing art is a means to develop empathy for others' perspectives and experiences.

Category: After Performance/In Depth

Overview: Bizet's *Carmen* has been adapted, re-written and modernized through the years. As its iconic storyline is so captivating, it is easily accessible and entertaining.

Objective: Students will view YouTube links as a class and will have an open discussion about the various settings and adaptations of the famous tale. Be critical and curious! What works and what doesn't? After a class discussion, students may break off into groups and create their own adaptation of *Carmen*. Students will have the opportunity to do a set mockup, costume idea board, hair and makeup chart, and anything else they may need!

Materials:

- 2001 "Carmen: A HipHopera" featuring Beyoncé, The Cards Never Lie <https://youtu.be/CRG14xfXCEw>
- 1962 Tom and Jerry "Carmen Get It!" Part One <https://youtu.be/-JtuXIC8WHE>
- Tom and Jerry Part Two <https://youtu.be/VeebsOUuYqw>
- Tom and Jerry Part Three <https://youtu.be/fQiHo78c8Wo>
- 1954 "Carmen Jones" Dat's Love https://youtu.be/_88YGrzRcmw
- 1970 "The Naked Carmen: A Rock Opera" listen until 1:34 (the overture) <https://youtu.be/X7NGzlwOtCc>
- "From Broadway to Beyoncé: The Many Adaptations of Bizet's *Carmen*" [From Broadway to Beyoncé, The Many Adaptations of Bizet's 'Carmen' - Opera Wire](#)
- Paper (any size)
- Pencils/crayons/pencil crayons/paints/colouring tools
- Sketch pads/iPad/Sketching tools

Lesson:

1. View YouTube links as a class. Have students take notes on what they like, don't like, and find interesting!
2. Have a class discussion on the resources - what worked? What didn't? Did you have a favourite adaptation?
3. Break off into groups to plan your own version of *Carmen*.
4. Students should clearly state what time period their version of *Carmen* is set in, and then proceed to come up with a simple set design and costume ideas.
5. If time allows, students can also create a hair and make-up look for a specific character.
6. Share and Tell - pair up with another group and share your *Carmen* adaptation.

Extension: Have students expand on their *Carmen* adaptation and write a short script to go along with it! Simple costumes can also be created, as well as makeup and hair. Have groups perform their adaptations for each other, OR film ahead of time and view as a class. Students may wish to add music overtop - and may want to choose one of the many musical hits from *Carmen* OR something new! Experiment, create, explore and enjoy!

LESSON FOUR

Stomping and Clapping and Singing: Ole! (A look into Flamenco culture and dance)

Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each a unique language for creating and communicating. Artists experiment in a variety of ways to discover new possibilities and perspectives.

Category: After Performance/In Depth

Overview: Flamenco is a Spanish art form typical of Andalucía, the southern region of Spain, made up of 3 elements: song (cante), dance (baile) and music (toque). Flamenco dancers, known as bailaoras and bailaores, are serious and passionate. Typical of flamenco dance, a dancer will often stand motionless and free of expression for the first few moments of a song. As the dancer begins to feel the music, the dancer might begin a steady beat of loud hand clapping. Then, as emotion builds, the dancer will begin a passionate dance. The dancing often involves fierce stomping, sometimes made louder with percussion attachments on the shoes, and graceful arm movements. Castanets are sometimes held in the hands for clicking, and folding fans are occasionally used for visual impact. The Spanish culture really influenced Bizet's writing of *Carmen*. If you listen closely, you can hear the rhythmic centred choruses, sensual melodies and dramatic dialogue. Traditionally, *Carmen* contains Flamenco choreography, with the use of castanets.

Objective: In this lesson, students will be introduced to the Flamenco dance style and culture, and if space allows, will try their newly learned Flamenco dance moves! Flamenco requires no partner work and is very focused on the individual dancer's passion and connection to the guitar, soulful singing, and rhythmic stomping and clapping. SHOES are required for this dance - something sturdy like a good runner. Flip flops or shoes without a back are not recommended!

Materials:

- Very easy guide to Flamenco: Basic Step <https://youtu.be/7X-0zGpghEI>
- Rhythmic centred footwork: Elementary level Flamenco https://youtu.be/rk3sbZ6Oy_M
- Flamenco Festival in New York <https://youtu.be/cm9IYSDxagc>
- Estrella Morente: Flamenco artist <https://youtu.be/U9iw1gMVoO0>
- Flamenco resources: [Flamenco Dance Online with Arleen Hurtado | Flamenco Dance Online](#)
- Karen Flamenco Vancouver: Carmen [Karen Flamenco Vancouver](#)
- SPACE OUT - make sure students have tied shoelaces and room to explore, create and express!
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Lesson:

1. Watch the Flamenco Festival recording from New York City - have an open class discussion after the video. What did you notice? What did you see? What did you hear? What did you feel? <https://youtu.be/cm9IYSDxagc>
2. Watch Karen Flamenco's short clip of *Carmen* - how does this compare to the opera? What did you notice? What was different? Does the story of *Carmen* still come across in this art form? https://youtu.be/K_HcqsVf8I0
3. Put on your dancing shoes! Try your hand (and feet!) at Flamenco! Clear the classroom, or music room, space out and watch the YouTube clips provided below. Go at your own pace! Another idea is to simply CLAP the rhythms instead of putting them into the feet right away. These flamenco rhythms could also be played on different instruments or percussion instruments. Be creative! <https://youtu.be/7X-0zGpghEI> https://youtu.be/rk3sbZ6Oy_M
4. Listen to Estrella Morente's haunting and passionate voice in this live recording. Morente is a famous Flamenco singer, and has performed around the world! Think Pair Share: Write down one thing you liked, and share it with another classmate <https://youtu.be/U9iw1gMVoO0>

Extension: If time allows, have students watch this incredible Flamenco production of *Carmen* by the famous duo Antonio Gades and Carlos Saura filmed in the Teatro de Madrid (Theatre of Madrid), Spain. <https://youtu.be/IYu9rxWrESU>

FURTHER RESOURCES

Canadian Opera Company, Study Guide:
[Carmen COC Study Guide 1516 FINAL.pdf](#)

Manitoba Opera Study Guide:
[Carmen-Study-Guide-2020.pdf \(mbopera.ca\)](#)

Atlanta Opera Study Guide:
[StudyGuide Carmen FINAL.pdf \(atlantaopera.org\)](#)

Met Opera Study Guide:
[carmen.14-15.guide.pdf \(metopera.org\)](#)



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