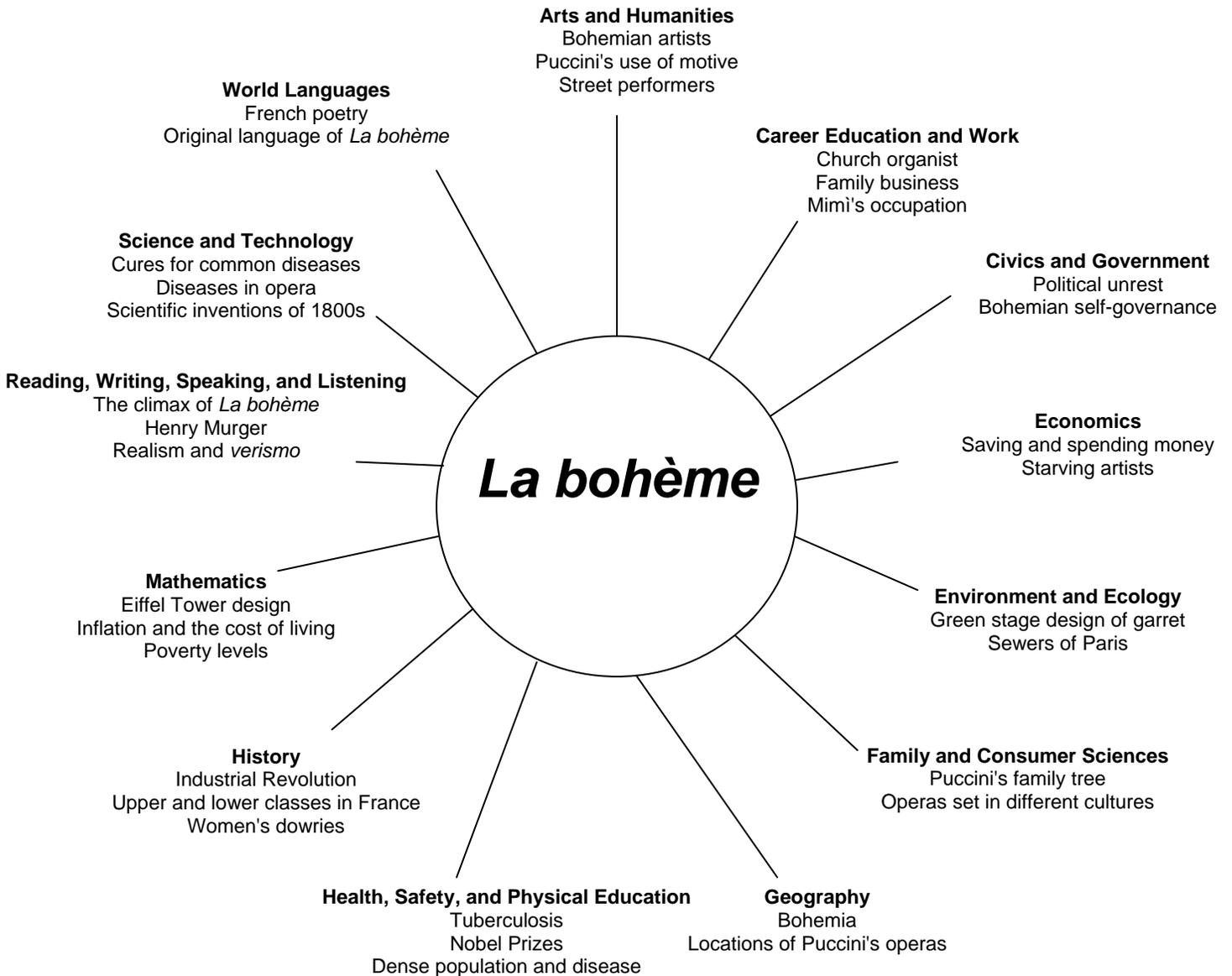


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## Curriculum Circle for *La bohème*

How does the opera *La bohème* intersect with all academic content areas?  
Begin with the opera and brainstorm connections to all curricula.



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## Lesson Plan Stems for *La bohème*

How does the opera *La bohème* intersect with all academic content areas?  
Begin with a lesson plan stem and connect the opera to classroom curricula.

### Arts and Humanities

National Standards: Dance 1-5; Music 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9; Theater 1, 6, 8; Visual Arts 1, 3, 4, 5, 6  
State Standards: 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4

Learn how to ballroom dance. Compare dances the 1800s to the dances of today to determine if the styles are similar. Also determine if dance halls have changed. Find places where the dances from 1800s Italy are still performed.

Study dances that were popular in the 1800s and create original choreography that combines 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century styles.

What role does the orchestra play in *La Bohème*? Could a piano play the same role? Does the orchestra reflect the dramatic idea of the libretto or does it serve merely as accompaniment? Does the orchestra play an independent role in developing the dramatic action?

At one point, there were two versions of *La Bohème*. There are also two versions of *Phantom of the Opera*. What are the reasons for more than one form of the work?

Which aspects of the orchestra, orchestral color, and effects are specific in Puccini's operas? Have there been attempts to Americanize the operas? Find reasons that a director would be for or against Americanizing a production.

Discuss triads, transposition, and modulation. Listen to Mimi's aria. Transpose it to another key. Does the music still have the same effect?

There are many sound effects that are used in operas, plays, musicals and movies. How are the effects produced? Are they made in the same manner for both stage and screen? Write a storm using your own sound effects.

Is music from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century similar to popular music today? Why or why not?

Explore Puccini's use of motive as well as other composers. Create your own characters; give each a motive that represents class, ideology, or disposition.

Learn the meaning of "program music." How does Puccini use program music? Does he use it in the same way other composer do?

The contemporary musical *Rent* is very similar to Puccini's *La Bohème*. How was *Rent* modernized for different audiences?

Learn about different types of street performers. Perform your own street show. Recreate a scene in *La Bohème* using puppets. Write your own script or use Puccini's.

Study theatres in 1890 Italy. Learn what was used for lighting and sound effects. Learn how the sets were designed and how the scenes changed.

Pick a character from any opera and create a monologue for your character. Perform it for the class.

Study art from different eras in order to determine the manner in which artists use their art to make political statements. Draw or sculpt something that will express your sentiments.

Draw a caricature of the characters in *La Bohème* based on their personalities.

Design and create costumes for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century production of *La Bohème*.

Determine the factors that make an artist a Bohemian artist. Find the era when Bohemian artists were common and the purpose that they served.

### **Career Education and Work**

National Standards: Civics 1; Economics 2, 7, 11, 13, 19

State Standards: Career Education and Work 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.4

What occupations were available to Mimi at the time of the opera's setting? Could a woman make a living wage as a seamstress?

Puccini worked as an opera composer instead of following the family business of working as a church musician. How common was that decision in his lifetime?

Puccini was not a good student, but became an outstanding composer. What skills did he need to learn to be successful?

Pretend you are a stage manager, the conductor, or a principal artist in *La bohème*. Research what these jobs might be like. Create a bulleted list of "To Dos" for the day before the performance for the job you researched.

## **Civics and Government**

National Standards: Civics 1, 2, 5

State Standards: Civics and Government 5.1, 5.2

In 1830, the time period of *La bohème*, there was extensive political unrest in Paris and throughout France. Does Puccini include any reference to those political times in the opera?

How did the bohemians govern themselves? Would government have been anathema to their beliefs?

## **Economics**

National Standards: Economics 2, 8, 10, 13, 14, 19

State Standards: Economics 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5

Create a role-playing game by picking one of the occupations of the four friends; imagine how each would react in a stressful situation.

If you were a financial adviser, what would you say to the four friends about saving and spending their money? Do they demonstrate good fiscal discipline?

*La bohème* is set in the 1830s. What were the prices of household staples such as bread, milk, eggs, and cheese during that era? What do those items cost today? Research price index formulas and estimate the cost of those items 70 years from today. What is inflation? How is it related to the law of supply and demand?

## **Environment and Ecology**

National Standards: Geography 1-6

State Standards: Environment and Ecology 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9

Design a green (environmentally friendly) stage set for *La bohème* that still looks like a drafty garret. What are the ramifications of having a fire inside a room?

The Latin Quarter of Paris is famous for its sewer system. Research how to take a tour of the sewers and how they are maintained.

## **Family and Consumer Sciences**

National Standards: Health 6

State Standards: Family and Consumer Science 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4

Trace Puccini's family tree and the custom of naming children for their ancestors. How many names did Puccini have?

Puccini set his operas in many different cultures. Listen to excerpts from *La bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Girl of the Golden West*, *Turandot*, and *Tosca*. Would you describe them as essentially Italian operas? Did Puccini write music to suggest the setting of each opera, namely France, Japan, western United States, China and Italy?

## **Geography**

National Standards: Geography 1-6

State Standards: Geography 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4

Create a map of Mimi's home. Make the map to scale and include the topography.

On a map, locate all of the locations that Puccini sets his main operas in (France, Japan, western United States, China and Italy). Why do you think Puccini chose different locations and different cultures for each? What is his favorite location? Look for similarities in stories that have the same settings.

Locate Bohemia and study the culture. Also study the culture in Paris and compare the city in the years 1800 and 2000. Write and perform a very short skit that begins in 1800 and rapidly progresses to 2000. Why did Puccini place *La bohème* in Paris?

Locate the latitude and longitude of the city where *La Bohème* premiered. Then locate the city when the opera was written. Find the distance between the cities. Compare other operas from this season. Are the other distances similar?

Find the best way to get to the Benedum if you are coming from the North, South, East, or West. Also, find the best way for the scenery trucks to arrive from every direction. If needed, find detours from the PennDot website.

## **Health, Safety, and Physical Education**

National Standards: Health 2, 3, 7; Physical Education 4, 5, 6, 7

State Standards: Health, Safety and Physical Education 10.1, 10.2

Find the health hazards of the time of *La bohème*. Which disease caused the most fatalities? How did they treat the disease? How is it now treated, and what knowledge had to be acquired prior to modern treatment?

How could Mimi have contracted tuberculosis? What were her medical options to get well? Could she have infected the other friends with TB? How can we stay safe today?

The Nobel Prizes were established in 1896, the year that *La bohème* premiered. Who discovered how TB was spread? Did he receive a Nobel Prize for his work?

Using a map of Italy, shade the areas that are more densely populated. On a different map shade the areas that have the most deaths each year. Are the shaded areas the same on both maps?

## **History**

National Standards: U.S. History 3; World History Era 9

State Standards: History 8.1, 8.3

Study the Industrial Revolution in Europe. How might this have affected Puccini? How did the Industrial Revolution affect the people? What changes did they bring?

Study the French educational system in the 1800s. For one day, act as though your classroom was in that time period.

Find the cultural restrictions, in regard to behavior, placed on the upper class in the early 1800s. Compare them to the restrictions of the lower classes.

Learn about the culture in Paris. Working in groups, promote a product that existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century France. For your promotion create a television commercial, a radio commercial, and a billboard.

What was the structure of the judicial system in 1890 France? Compare that to 1790 and 1990. How have the judicial systems improved or deteriorated?

Examine the class struggle in Italy. Explain why a woman who didn't have a dowry wasn't likely to get married.

Find the health hazards of the time of *La Bohème*. Which disease caused the most fatalities? How did they treat the disease? How is it now treated, and what knowledge had to be acquired prior to modern treatment?

After watching *La bohème*, list some items that should not be in the opera because they didn't exist in 1890, the time the Opera was set.

Study the roles that women played in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century America, including stage and everyday life. Compare that to women's roles today.

What was happening in both Italy and the United States during Puccini's lifetime, 1858-1924? Were the controversies similar?

Learn about 19<sup>th</sup> century culture in Paris. Working in groups, promote a product that existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century France. For your promotion create a television commercial, a radio commercial, and a billboard.

Explore the reasons different cultures use different cooking ingredients. Prepare food for the class from different cultures. Do an experiment to determine if people's tastes come from their genes or from their geography.

### **Mathematics**

National Standards: Mathematics 1, 4, 6,

State Standards: Mathematics 2.2, 2.3, 2.7,

Locate and study all aspects of the Eiffel Tower, including the architecture. Why was it a technological wonder? Compare it to other structures from the same time period and to other buildings that have notable architecture.

Find the minimum amount of nutrition a human needs to survive and the criteria that are used to determine poverty. Which of the characters in *La bohème* would be classified as poor? As malnourished?

Create charts and graphs that compare the level of poverty in different parts of the globe. Compare the prices of bread, milk, and other such items in the same countries as well as people's salaries.

Study the cause and effect of inflation. Create a budget as though you were living in an apartment and had a fixed income. Determine the smallest amount necessary to pay bills, eat, and to maintain your apartment today, 100 years ago, and 200 years ago. Has inflation risen proportionally to the cost of living?

Study mathematics in music such as how pitch relates to sound waves.

Graph the population density in relation to the number of deaths each year. How does today compare to the 1800s?

Make a model of the theatre where *La bohème* premiered. Discuss the importance of scale to architects using the Cad-Com program on the computer.

Graph the life expectancy 200 years ago, 100 years ago, and today. Predict what the like expectancy will be 100 years from now.

Determine the number of buses would be needed to transport the performers, costumes, and scenery for a tour. Find the total cost for transporting the show.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century includes the same years as the 1700s. What century are we living in today? In what century was the opera composed? Would the years be classified as BC or BCE? Why?

For *La bohème* determine the cost of the total production, include labor, materials, performing artists, understudies, lighting and sound crews, theater rental, copyrighting fees, publicity, printing, renting rehearsal space, directors, ushers, costumers, and creating or renting costumes. How many tickets would have to be sold at what cost to make a profit?

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, art was developing new styles such as cubism and futurism. Both styles involved architecture, precise angles, and planes relating to one another. Find relationships between trigonometry and art in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century includes the same years as the 1700s. Write the centuries that 2000s and 1800s are equivalent to.

### **Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening**

National Standards: Language Arts 1, 2, 8,

State Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8

Read Henry Murger's novel, *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, and compare his realistic descriptions of bohemian artists to the characters in *La bohème*.

Study the literary changes that took place during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Literature went from containing heroic characters to portraying real life (realism). Study the Maurice Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869). How do those stories relate to the story of *La bohème*?

Learn why Puccini chose Mimi's death as the climax of *La bohème*. How did he craft the most powerful elements for the deepest impact on the audience? Create a new ending to *La bohème*. Determine if other literary works of the 1890s also ended at the climax.

Explore the importance of the written word in Italy. Learn and practice the art of calligraphy.

Write three different sketches of bohemian life using the three circumstances below. 1. All characters are equal. 2. Women are more dominant. 3. A princess is looking for a groom.

Find the elements that determine if a writer is described as a French writer, a realist, or both. Write a scene in each style.

Explain why Puccini set *La bohème* in the 1830s when he was producing it in the late 1890s. Compare *La bohème* to Mark Twain's *Huck Finn*, which was written in the 1880s but set in the 1840s. Why did both authors set their stories in a different time period?

Begin with any one known opera, musical, play, book, or movie. Develop a sequel that describes the events of the next day.

In many operas important action occurs offstage. Find all the ways the audience knows what happened.

Analyze the relationships between the characters in the opera. Would these relationships be plausible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Write two new versions of *La bohème*, the first from Mimi's perspective and the second from Rodolfo's. What are the differences from the original opera?

Choose a character and create a diary for that person, or write diary entries for each character after Mimi's death.

Read the literature from famous playwrights of the 1830s in Italy. Read the literature from famous playwrights of the 1830s America. Are the writing styles similar?

### **Science and Technology**

National Standards: Science 6

State Standards: Science and Technology 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8

Using a mortar and pestle, crush holly berries. Then, practice writing with the ink that you have made. Fill one page, then determine the time necessary to write the libretto for *La bohème*.

In what ways do scientific inventions of the Industrial Revolution influence modern science and our lives today?

How many people died in 1800 because of diseases? Consumption, polio, malnutrition, anemia, cholera, dysentery, and typhus? How many in 2000? What percentage has the death rate of each disease increased or decreased? When compared to the population increase, have the diseases become more or less widespread?

Study the many characteristics of fire and heat. Experiment to find the best way start a fire and to keep it going. What is the fastest and slowest burning material? How can something be made fireproof?

Find illnesses that were plaguing the children in the 1890s. What are the ways that people today prevent or cure the illness? Determine the effects of plagues.

Study some of the common illnesses in opera such as tuberculosis, gangrene, mental illness, plague, starvation, and poison. Why are these types of diseases so common in operas?

Study various 18<sup>th</sup> century inventions. Learn about the lives of some 18<sup>th</sup> century scientists. Invent or improve upon a current product.

Astrology was a very important part of history. Study the different types of telescopes throughout the ages, then construct your own.

In what ways did climate play a part in the way buildings are built? Build your own model house and expose it to the elements. Build a second house using only materials that were available in 1980.

Discover the scientific inventions of the Industrial Revolution. Are these discoveries still relevant in today's modern science?

### **World Languages**

National Standards: Foreign Language 1-5

State Standards: World Languages 12.3, 12.5

Translate the characters' names in *La bohème* from Italian to English, German, and French. Determine why some of the names can be translated but others can't. What are French terms for the characters' occupations? Create a scenario in which each occupation is needed to solve a problem. Perform the scenes.

Learn the basic plot of *La bohème*. Listening to excerpts of the music, use your knowledge to determine which scene is being sung.

Examine *La bohème*, viewing both the original and translated versions. Find places where the meaning has been altered because of translation. Write and perform scenes illustrating how communication and translation problems can be avoided.

Learn to speak some French words. Write a sonnet explaining why French is described as the language of love. Practice pronouncing sounds that are spoken in the French language but not in English.

Read a French poem and translate it to English. Then, compare the same poem translated by a publisher.

How can music be used instead of language? Using instruments, create a play.

### **Character Themes for *La bohème***

The Heartwood Institute lists seven universal character attributes: Courage, Loyalty, Justice, Respect, Hope, Honesty, and Love.

Discuss two attributes—hope and respect—after reading the synopsis of *La bohème*:

- *Loyalty is being faithful to a person, group, or ideal based on understanding that we are all part of something greater than ourselves.*
- *Hope guides our future through faith and aspiration, helping us to rise above selfishness and despair.*

1. How do Rodolfo, Mimì, Marcello, and Musetta demonstrate their loyalty to each other?

2. What purpose can hope serve during trying times in our lives? Is it difficult to choose hopeful action in the face of abject poverty?

3. How does Colline demonstrate hope for Mimì when he sells his coat?

4. What are some actions taken by the four friends that were part of something greater than themselves individually?

5. What ideals do bohemians choose that inform their actions?