

“EVERY WOMAN IS BITTER AS BILE, BUT EACH HAS TWO GOOD moments,” begins the epigraph to Prosper Mérimée’s novella *Carmen*, one of the primary sources for Georges Bizet’s immortal opera of the same name. The “two good moments” that the author cites—the first sexual, the next in the grave—establish with offensive economy the central concerns of the work: desire and death and their dangerous combination in the female sex. And few operas offer up such luxuriant depictions of both as *Carmen*. Brazenly seductive, unrepentantly exotic, recklessly strong willed, the character of Carmen has enthralled the world’s imagination for more than a century and a half, with her story told in flamenco and hip-hop, in settings from the Netherlands to South Africa, in a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon, and in more than 70 films by directors as diverse as Charlie Chaplin and Jean-Luc Godard.

For the Met’s new production of *Carmen*, which premieres on New Year’s Eve, acclaimed English director Carrie Cracknell has reinvigorated the classic story with a staging that moves the action to the modern day, setting the opera in a border town in the American Southwest replete with shipping containers, tractor trailers, and human trafficking. “It is a muscular, robust story, and I immediately became interested in how this iconic work, which has such a wide performance history, could be interpreted and reimagined,” Cracknell remarks. “Traditionally this opera has been staged by men and has characterized Carmen’s death as an act of passion, or to some extent an act of fantasy. But no woman deserves to die in this way at the hands of her intimate partner, and yet it is pervasive worldwide. So, we are trying to explore what themes are present in the piece that we can shine a new light on.” Thus, this daring new vision finds at the heart of Bizet’s classic opera issues that could not be more relevant today: gendered violence, abusive labor structures, and the desire to break through societal boundaries.

This guide approaches *Carmen* from musicological, cultural-historical, and theatrical perspectives. By delving into the libretto’s multiple sources, Bizet’s exoticist musical language, and the use of scenic design to convey the multiple social worlds in which the work takes place, among other topics—including crucial questions of race, ethnicity, and gender that pulse through the opera—students will discover what makes *Carmen* both timeless and timely.



AKHMETSHINA



BECZAŁA



BLUE



KETELSEN

THE WORK

An opera in four acts, sung in French

Music by Georges Bizet

Libretto by Henry Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy

Based on the novella *Carmen* by Prosper Mérimée and the poem *The Gypsies* by Alexander Pushkin

First performed March 3, 1875, at the Opéra-Comique, Paris, France

PRODUCTION

Carrie Cracknell Production

Michael Levine Set Designer

Tom Scutt Costume Designer

Guy Hoare Lighting Designer

rocafilm / Roland Horvath
Projection Designer

Ann Yee Choreographer

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD
January 27, 2024

Angel Blue Micaëla

Aigul Akhmetshina Carmen

Piotr Beczala Don José

Kyle Ketelsen Escamillo

Daniele Rustioni Conductor

Production a gift of Adrienne Arsht, the Berry Charitable Foundation, and Elizabeth M. and Jean-Marie R. Eveillard

The Metropolitan Opera Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera regardless of their prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with the opera. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students explore *Carmen* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that they will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

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WHO'S WHO IN CARMEN

| CHARACTER | PRONUNCIATION | VOICE TYPE | THE LOWDOWN |
|--|--|--------------------|---|
| Carmen A young woman | CAR-men (in French pronunciation, car-MEN) | mezzo-soprano | Beautiful, strong willed, and tempestuous, Carmen is forthright about her desires and capricious in her actions. While she works at the cigarette factory and serves as an ally to the smugglers, she is devoted above all to her own freedom. |
| Don José A soldier | DON zho-ZAY | tenor | A naïve soldier, Don José is dedicated first and foremost to duty—that is, until he encounters Carmen. He betrays his sense of honor to pursue her love, going against the wishes of his ailing mother to marry his sweetheart Micaëla and return to the countryside. |
| Escamillo A rodeo star | ess-kah-MEE-yo | baritone | Confident, charismatic, and celebrated by his admirers, Escamillo shares Carmen's dedication to freedom and pleasure. When he courts her, however, he soon comes into conflict with Don José, starting a romantic rivalry that nearly turns fatal. |
| Micaëla A girl from Don José's hometown | mee-kah-AY-lah | soprano | Simple and sincere, Micaëla is Don José's connection to a traditional life in his home village. She brings news from his mother, hoping to rescue him from Carmen's wiles, but doubts her own strength amid the smugglers' wild mountainside terrain. |
| Zuniga The commanding officer of Don José's unit | zoo-NEE-gah | bass | Don José's superior officer, Zuniga wants to have his cake and eat it, too. He coldly wields his power and position but cannot resist Carmen's allure—a desire that brings him into direct conflict with his corporal. |
| Moralès A soldier in Don José's unit | moh-RAH-lez | baritone | A fellow soldier, Moralès flirts with Micaëla when she first arrives looking for Don José. |
| Frasquita and Mercédès Carmen's companions | frah-SKEE-tah; mayr-SAY-dess | soprano | Women who also work at the cigarette factory, Frasquita and Mercédès try to convince Carmen to join the smugglers and warn her when Don José comes seeking revenge. |
| Remendado and Dancaïre Smugglers | reh-men-DAH-doh; dahn-kah-EER | tenor; baritone | Leaders of the band of smugglers, Remendado and Dancaïre ask Frasquita, Mercédès, and Carmen to help with their latest contraband scheme. They embrace the danger of their work and remain determined to complete their mission. |

Synopsis



Mezzo-soprano Aigul Akhmetshina sings the role of Carmen

ACT I: *A contemporary American industrial town.* Outside a cigarette factory, a group of soldiers guarding the border comment on the passers-by. A newly arrived young woman, Micaëla, asks for a soldier named Don José. Moralès, his colleague, tells her that José will return when the next shift begins. When the shift change—led by Zuniga, their commanding officer—occurs and José returns, Moralès tells José that Micaëla has been looking for him. The factory bell rings, and the men gather to watch the female workers—especially their favorite, Carmen. She tells the men that love is free and obeys no rules. Only one man ignores her: José. Carmen throws a flower at him, and the women go back to work. José picks up the flower and hides it when Micaëla returns. She brings a letter from José’s mother, who lives in the countryside. After Micaëla leaves, José reads the letter. He is about to throw away the flower when a fight erupts inside the factory between Carmen and another woman. Zuniga sends José to remove Carmen, but she refuses to answer Zuniga’s questions, and José is ordered to lock her up. Left alone with him, she entices José with suggestions of a rendezvous at a private party outside of town. Mesmerized, he agrees to let her get away. As he brings her to the lockup, José lets Carmen escape, and he is arrested.

ACT II: Carmen and her friends Frasquita and Mercédès entertain a group of locals who have gathered to party in the cargo hold of a tractor-trailer truck. Zuniga tells Carmen that José has just been released from custody. Escamillo, a rodeo star, drives along the freeway with his entourage. The vehicles stop, and people spill out onto the road, listening to Escamillo boasting about his profession. He flirts with Carmen, who tells him that she is involved with someone else. Most of the partygoers depart with Escamillo, leaving Carmen and her friends with the smugglers Dancaïre and Remendado, who try to convince the women to get involved in their smuggling scheme. Frasquita and Mercédès are willing to help, but Carmen refuses because she is in love. Dancaïre and Remendado withdraw as José approaches. Carmen and José are left at a deserted gas station. Carmen arouses his jealousy by telling him how she danced for Zuniga. She dances for José now, but when a signal sounds in the distance, he says that he must return to duty. Carmen mocks him. To prove his love, José shows her the flower that she threw at him when they met and confesses how its scent helped him hold onto hope while he was in lockup. She is unimpressed: If he really loved her, he would quit the army and join her in a life of freedom in the mountains. José refuses, and Carmen tells him to leave. Zuniga arrives at the gas station looking for Carmen, and in a jealous rage, José fights him. The smugglers return and disarm Zuniga. José, having assaulted his superior officer, now has no choice but to join them.

ACT III: The truck, last seen flying down the highway, has crashed at a high mountain pass. Smoke rises from the shattered vehicle, and women are climbing out of the back

of the truck as smugglers start to remove large boxes of guns to bring them across the border. Carmen and José quarrel, and she admits that her love is fading and advises him to return to live with his mother. When Frasquita and Mercédès turn the cards to tell their fortunes, they foresee love and money for themselves, but Carmen's cards spell death—for her and for José. Micaëla appears, frightened by the remote location and afraid to meet the woman who has turned José into a criminal. She hides when a shot rings out—José has fired at an intruder, who turns out to be Escamillo. He tells José that he has come to find Carmen, and the two men fight. The smugglers separate them, and Escamillo invites everyone, particularly Carmen, to see him compete in the next rodeo. When he has left, Micaëla emerges and begs José to return home. He agrees when he learns that his mother is dying, but before he leaves, he warns Carmen that they will meet again.

ACT IV: In a vast rodeo arena, a vibrant and noisy crowd gathers. Carmen arrives on Escamillo's arm, surrounded by his rodeo entourage. Frasquita and Mercédès come to warn her that José is nearby and can be seen watching her. Unafraid, she waits outside the entrance as the crowds enter the arena. José appears and begs Carmen to forget the past and start a new life with him. She calmly tells him that their affair is over: She was born free and will live free until she dies. The crowd is heard cheering Escamillo. José persists in trying to win Carmen back. She takes off his ring and throws it at his feet before heading for the arena. José stabs her to death.

Director Carrie Cracknell notes the following about the character portrayals in this production of *Carmen*: "The characters in the opera are migrants, smugglers, transitory people. We have moved away from depicting them as Romani and won't use this word in the surtitles. Our focus in the production is on economically disempowered people and its intersection with gender."

The Novella *Carmen* by Prosper Mérimée and the Poem *The Gypsies* by Alexander Pushkin



Prosper Mérimée

Like many opera libretti, Bizet's *Carmen* derives from multiple sources. Perhaps the most obvious (and most widely credited) is French writer Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen*. Mérimée shared in the mid-19th-century French fascination with exotic, bizarre, and sordid subjects. All these qualities are on ample display in *Carmen*, which was originally published in 1845 in the travel journal *La Revue des deux Mondes*, without any indication that this story of uncontrollable desire, jealousy, and murder among the Romani in Spain was a fictional account. Such a deception would not have been unheard of from Mérimée, who as a young writer had delighted in literary hoaxes, passing off his own writings as mere translations of foreign works.

The work proceeds in three sections. In the first, the narrator is touring Andalusia with a guide when they happen upon Don José Navarro, a notorious bandit. In the second, he meets a Gitana (another name for Romani in Spain) named Carmen who tells his fortune and steals his watch. Later, the author learns that Don José is to be executed and travels to meet him in prison. In the final section, Don José recounts his life story, detailing how he went from Basque nobility to an outlaw, ultimately joining Carmen's band of smugglers, killing her husband, marrying her, and then murdering a young picador in a jealous rage before stabbing Carmen to death and turning himself in. In Bizet's opera, the character Micaëla—a foil for Carmen representing the life Don José leaves behind—is an invention of librettists Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, as are Carmen's companions Mercédès and Frasquita.

The following year, *Carmen* was reprinted as a standalone volume, this time with an added fourth section containing the author's scholarly, though largely false, remarks about Romani history, culture, and language. "Their complexion is very dark, always darker than that of the peoples among whom they live," Mérimée writes. "One can compare their look to nothing save that of a wild beast." Elsewhere he describes Romani people as "crafty" and "insolent," whose "uncleanliness" is "beyond belief," in addition to noting their supposed predilections for secrecy, fortune telling, and provocative dancing.

A second source for Meilhac and Halévy's libretto was a long narrative poem, *The Gypsies* (1827) by Alexander Pushkin. Pushkin is widely recognized as the father of modern Russian literature, and several of his works have formed the basis of major operas, including Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* (1878) and *The Queen of Spades* (1890) and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (1874). Written during his political exile, *The Gypsies* recounts the tale of an outlaw, Aleko, who wanders into a Gypsy camp and is taken in by a woman, Zemfira, and her father, the Old Man. Soon Aleko and Zemfira fall in love and live happily as a couple for several years, until Zemfira begins to grow bored. When Aleko catches her with a young Gypsy man, he kills them both, leading the Old Man and the rest of the camp to abandon him. Pushkin was perhaps interested in this subject due to his own marginalization: though of noble birth, the poet was of African descent on his mother's side, a fact frequently recalled by his critics.

Mérimée himself was taken by Pushkin's poem, having read it sometime before 1840 and ultimately publishing a French prose translation in 1852. And although Bizet's opera derives its title from Mérimée's text, key aspects of the work are found in both *Carmen* and *The Gypsies*. The basic plot of the opera, some suggest, is taken from Pushkin, and other scholars note that Meilhac and Halévy likely based their libretto more directly on Mérimée's translation of Pushkin than on his own novella.

Indeed, several lines and scenes appear nearly verbatim in *The Gypsies* and the opera but have no corresponding place in the novella. The famous "Tra la la" aria from Act I has its analogue in a scene where Zemfira, to Aleko's disgust, sings of a secret lover she will never reveal. The line "*Coupe-moi, brûle-moi*" ("cut me, burn me") and others from the aria come directly from Mérimée's translation of Pushkin. In addition, the famous metaphor expressed in Carmen's habanera, "*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*" ("Love is a rebellious bird"), approximates the Old Man's counsel to Aleko: "Youth is freer than a bird; / Who can restrain love?" And, finally, Carmen's final declaration of love for Escamillo ("I love him! And even in the face of death, with my dying breath, I shall love him!") reflects the conclusion of Pushkin's poem, when Zemfira exclaims, "I'll die loving."



Alexander Pushkin

The Creation of Carmen

1838 Georges Bizet is born on October 25 in Bougival, near Paris. His parents are both amateur musicians, and his mother is his earliest musical influence.

1845 Prosper Mérimée writes *Carmen*, the novella that later forms the basis for Bizet's opera. It reflects Mérimée's abiding interest in exotic locales and fierce passions.

1848 Bizet enrolls in the Paris Conservatoire, where he receives a rigorous musical education.



Georges Bizet

1853 Bizet begins composition studies with Fromental Halévy, a member of a prominent artistic family.

1855 At age 17, Bizet composes his first opera, *La Maison du Docteur* (*The Doctor's House*).

1856 Bizet completes his second opera, *Le Docteur Miracle*, to a libretto by Léon Battu and Ludovic Halévy (the nephew of his composition professor).

1857 Bizet wins the prestigious Prix de Rome, the annual competition hosted by the Académie des Beaux-Arts. It provides him with funding to study in Italy for three years, during which he acquaints himself with Italian music and composes an opera in Italian, *Don Procopio*.

1863 Financed by a commission from the Théâtre Lyrique, Bizet composes *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*). It is the first of his full-length operas to be staged. While it receives 18 performances and strong praise from Hector Berlioz, it is not staged again until 1886. The press derides it, both for its libretto, which they consider absurd, as well as for its music, which they call noisy and offensive.

1866 Bizet receives a commission to compose another opera for the Théâtre Lyrique. The result is *La Jolie Fille de Perth* (*The Fair Maid of Perth*), based on the novel by Sir Walter Scott. While better reviewed by the press, it too achieves only 18 performances, largely due to financial difficulties at the Théâtre Lyrique.

1870 The Franco-Prussian War breaks out in July. Bizet enlists in the French National Guard along with several other well-known composers (Jules Massenet and Camille Saint-Saëns among them) and endures the Siege of Paris throughout the fall.

1871 After an armistice is signed in January, a violent uprising grips Paris, and Bizet and his wife escape to northern France. Bizet and other composers return to Paris in June with the goal of revitalizing music composition. His commissions become more regular, though he is never far from misfortune, financial hardship, and disappointment.

1873 At the invitation of the directors of the Opéra-Comique, Bizet agrees to work with librettists Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy to produce a new opera. Bizet proposes a work based on Mérimée's *Carmen*. The project moves forward despite the theater's hesitancy to treat violent death and overt sexuality on its stage.

In the same year, Bizet is invited to compose a new work for the Opéra, Paris's leading theater and long the seat of traditional French grand opera. He works quickly and by October has a complete draft of *Don Rodrigue*. On October 28, before the work can be staged, the theater burns down, and the opera is never revisited.

1874 Rehearsals begin for *Carmen*. Bizet withstands objections from not only the orchestra and members of the chorus (who are required to smoke and fight on stage) but also the theater's directors, who consider the final onstage murder too extreme for the family audiences of the Opéra-Comique.

1875 *Carmen* receives its premiere at the Opéra-Comique on March 3. The press is predictably outraged, but the opera continues for 47 additional performances.



Célestine Galli-Marié, the creator of the title role

1875 After suffering a series of heart attacks, Bizet dies on June 3 at only 36 years old. He is buried at the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.



The World of the Romanies



Mainstream culture often employed facile tropes about Romani identity as shorthand for lack of inhibition or disdain for societal norms. This popular dance music of the 1890s traded on the notion of the carefree “Gypsy” lifestyle, as did *Gitanes*, the French cigarette brand, with this 1931 advertisement.

Although Carrie Cracknell’s staging of *Carmen* transports the action from 19th-century Seville to a contemporary American border town, in Bizet’s original composition, the title character and her compatriots are explicitly described as “Gypsies,” or in French, *bohémiens*. This term, which now has largely negative connotations and is considered a slur by some, refers to the Romani people, who are believed to have originally migrated from northern India, reaching the European continent by the 14th century. The English word Gypsy derives from the Middle English term *gypcian*, or *Egipcien* (Egyptian). It thus refers to the group’s supposed origins in Egypt or northern Africa, perhaps due to their darker skin. In Spain, the Romanies are referred to as *Gitano* (or *Gitana*). Like Gypsy, *Gitano* is an exonym—that is, a name for a group of people used by those who are not part of that group. The Romanies in Spain refer to themselves by the endonym *Calé*, from their language *Caló*, which combines aspects of Latin-derived Romance languages with the Romani language.

Since the Romani way of life did not seem to conform to notions of Christian morality, they were viewed by Europeans as being ruled by their basest instincts, with no regard for honor or sexual control. In strict 19th-century society, any kind of behavior that did not follow its own austere codes of conduct was seen as morally corrupt. European authors projected lurid attributes upon Romani women. They were portrayed as sexually promiscuous, immodest, and outside of “decent” society. In much of the art, music, and literature of the 19th century, they were stereotyped as free spirited, strong, deviant, demanding, sexually alluring, and impertinent. In reality, Romani culture holds women to strict ethical codes of conduct with respect to sexuality and promiscuity is not tolerated.

The *Gitano* ethnic minority in Spain have long been subject to institutional discrimination and persecution. Between 1499 and 1783, Catholic monarchs issued more than 250 anti-Romani decrees. During this period, the Romani were alternately expelled, interned, forced to abandon their trades, and forbidden to speak their own language. Today there are an estimated 725,000–750,000 *Calé* in Spain, largely in Andalusia, the country’s southernmost region. They continue to endure poorer social outcomes than most of the Spanish population, despite improved material conditions after Spain’s transition to democracy following the fall of dictator Francisco Franco’s fascist regime in 1975. In 1978, more than half of *Gitanos* were illiterate, though this number has been reduced to 10 percent in recent years. As of 2014, only five percent of Romani students completed high school, and as of 2019, 98 percent of *Gitanos* lived below the poverty line. Just last year, the Spanish congress passed a new law classifying antigitanismo as a hate crime. Still, because their government has yet to recognize the



People of Romani descent live throughout the United States. Here, in Long Beach, California, a mother and aunt of the Kalderash nation turn young Susie into a “Gypsy woman” by outfitting her in family heirlooms and colorful material. She holds a cigarette for effect. The photo was taken in 1990 by photojournalist Cristina Salvador Klensz, author of *Hidden: Life with California’s Roma Families*. More of her work in this series may be seen at americanroma.com.

Calé as an ethnic minority population, policymakers, NGOs, and other organizations lack crucial data needed to address Romani marginalization head-on.

Since Spain’s democratization in 1975, many organizations advocating for Gitano political representation—known broadly as the Roma Associative Movement—have appeared. These include political parties like the Partido Nacionalista Caló, formed in 1999, and Partido Alianza Romani, founded in 2004. Recent years have also seen a proliferation of Calé youth, feminist, and LGBTQ+ organizations, like Asociación Gitanas Feministas por la Diversidad and Ververipen. Despite their 600-year marginalization, the Romani have made significant contributions to Spanish history and culture, especially in music and dance, where the development of cultural forms like flamenco and folk songs known as Sevillanas is rooted in Gitano practice and influence.



This image from a 1918 issue of *National Geographic* magazine shows a Gitana woman in traditional garb. The caption embodies several stereotypes: “This beautiful girl of Granada represents the highest type of the aristocracy of gypsydom. She would lose caste at once if she were to work, but it is perfectly all right for her to beg or steal—your heart.”

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Hon. Ian F. Hancock in reviewing these materials. Dr. Hancock was appointed by President Clinton to represent the Romani victims of the Holocaust on the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and served as Romani Ambassador to the United Nations (ECO-SOC/DPI/NGO-UNICEF) in New York and Geneva. He is the author of *We Are the Romani People*, among other works, and received an OBE (Order of the British Empire) from Queen Elizabeth II in 2019.

An Interview with Director Carrie Cracknell

Let's go back to the beginning. How did this *Carmen*—your Met debut—come about?

Members of the Met team had seen my large-scale work in London, including a *Medea* that I made at the National Theatre with Helen McCrory that had live music composed by the British band Goldfrapp. We had been in conversation about various titles for the Met, but we couldn't make the timings work. I then came to New York to make a piece of theater at the Public with Jake Gyllenhaal and Tom Sturridge, *Sea Wall / A Life*, which transferred to Broadway. The morning after the opening night on Broadway, I came to Lincoln Center to meet with the team, and Peter Gelb asked me to direct *Carmen*.



What attracted you to *Carmen* in particular, as a director?

It is a muscular, robust story, and I immediately became interested in how this iconic work, with such a wide performance history, could be interpreted and reimaged. I am always drawn in by story, by psychology, by a feeling that I have a sense of the world of the piece. And if I am falling in love with the piece, I find that, as I'm listening to it, I am immediately running a film in my mind of how it should play. The more time I spent with *Carmen*, the stronger that interest grew.

You've described your approach as "looking through a feminist lens." Would you elaborate on that?

The piece is an iconic story that centers on the death of a woman at the hands of her ex-partner. We would now term this crime "femicide." As the #MeToo movement has changed public consciousness about how pernicious and extensive violence against women is, it has forced audiences, and storytellers, to examine more closely how we present these acts of violence on stages and screens. Traditionally, this opera has been staged by men and has characterized *Carmen's* death as an act of passion, or to some extent an act of fantasy. A Romani woman, undeterred by societal norms, who is fearless and unconventional, dares to change her mind about the man that she loves and in return is killed by Don José. There is a risk that her death feels in some way to be "what she deserves." As contemporary audiences, we need to ask ourselves why we obsessively watch narratives about rape and femicide. What do these stories do to our culture? Do they normalize this violence? Glorify it? Fetishize it?

How does your staging grapple with these questions?

We can't portray the death of *Carmen* as a crime of passion, as this has traditionally been used as a way of mitigating male responsibility. No woman deserves to die in this way at the hands of her intimate partner, and yet it is pervasive worldwide. So we are trying to explore the piece from this perspective—thinking about what themes are present in the piece that we can shine a new light on. Feminism is still a movement that creates a great deal of anxiety in many people. But it shouldn't. Its aims are for equality between men and women. Ending violence against women and reimagining the depiction of violence against women live at the center of the feminist movement.

You have updated the setting for your production, both in terms of time and place. Would you describe where and when you've set the opera?

The opening act is set outside a factory. The women are on a cigarette break from their work, and the men hang around and observe the passers-by. This gave us the idea to explore themes around male unemployment and dispossession. Themes of shame, anger, and disempowerment, which in our version of *Carmen* feed into gendered harassment and violence against women. The factory encouraged us to think about an industrial and capitalist world and to find a contemporary version of this. The world of smugglers, of border guards being "distracted" by women, led us to think about both people and things being transported across borders.

And it's set explicitly in the United States?

Yes, but the setting is not completely specific. In some ways, it evokes the world of the American Rust Belt, but we have also replaced the toreador and bullfighting with a cowboy and rodeo. The setting also speaks to the realities of other industrial communities across the ever-shrinking and increasingly homogenous globalized world.

How would you describe Michael Levine's set designs?

Bold and contemporary. They explore a world of factories, of transportation and vehicles, of transience and uncertainty. Within the set, cars, trucks, and lorries are used to describe both masculinity and Americana. His stage images are huge in scale, iconoclastic, muscular, and playful.

What about the costumes by Tom Scutt—what can audiences expect from the looks he's creating?

Tom has been driven by character and by the specifics of the imagined world we are creating. His costumes are contemporary, multilayered, and full of detail and context. They help to build the sense of a community of people who live in economic uncertainty and hardship, but who strive for heat and action and life.

You've also engaged a choreographer, Ann Yee, and I understand you've been thinking a lot about how the women in *Carmen* move.

The women in this *Carmen* dance in order to create their own pleasure. They move in a way which is wild and free and entirely their own. They don't dance for men. They don't dance because they have to. They dance to feel alive.

The production stars Aigul Akhmetshina in the title role, opposite Piotr Beczala as Don José, Angel Blue as Micaëla, and Kyle Ketelsen as Escamillo. You've spent some time with Aigul—what do you expect of your collaboration?

Aigul is an extraordinary performer. She combines an unusually defined vocal purity with a strong appetite to create vivid and truthful characterization. We share a lot of impulses and interests in the character, and we are very much looking forward to working together.

In an interview, Aigul described *Carmen* as "all about freedom." Do you agree?

Carmen is a woman striving for freedom, for sexual power, for agency over herself. She does this in a disempowered context, as a poor woman using the men around her to support her route to freedom.

Whether it's your film version of Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion* or this production of *Carmen*, it seems that you have no fear in taking on classic works and giving them a bold, modern spin. Why is that important for you?

Setting classic works in a contemporary world can give the material a more immediate and urgent relationship to its audience. It also helps to encourage younger audiences to see themselves represented in these works, and it is imperative for opera and theater to attract these new audiences so that the forms can continue to thrive. These are not museum pieces. We return to these iconic stories because they still captivate and enthrall us—we love the psychological acuity. I am always interested in finding a way to connect the classics to the now and to find the relevance to contemporary concerns.



The Global Habanera

Perhaps the most recognizable piece from Bizet's opera, and easily one of the most famous arias in the entire operatic repertoire, is "*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*" (Track 1) from Act I, known simply as the "Habanera." In this scene, Carmen charms curious onlookers with her daring, free-spirited philosophy of love. The term habanera refers to the Cuban contradanza, a genre of dance music popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries, based upon a simple rhythmic unit in 2/4 meter:



In the aria, this rhythm is first articulated in the cellos accompanying Carmen's opening phrases before being picked up in turn by the soprano and chorus. Though the name of the dance derives from the city of Havana, Cuba, the form's origins are multiple and disputed. The current consensus suggests that it began with the English country dance, which spread across Europe in the 18th century. From there, the contredanse—as it became known in France—made its way across the Atlantic ocean to Cuba through one of the following ways: settlers from Spain brought it directly to the island, which remained a Spanish colony from roughly 1492 until its independence in 1902; or French exiles from Saint-Domingue (current-day Haiti), which saw the colony's enslaved population successfully overturn French imperial rule in the territory between 1791 and 1804, brought their version of the contredanse when they fled to Cuba.

Either way, the story did not end there. Once in Cuba, the dance form was reinvigorated primarily by Black musicians on the island. It is widely believed that the characteristic syncopation of the habanera rhythm, which features an accented upbeat in the middle of the bar, likely comes from African-derived rhythmic forms. The habanera—a term coined when European sailors introduced the dance to their home countries, where it became popular with composers, particularly in France and Spain—eventually influenced the development of additional dance forms like the Cuban danzón and Argentine tango, whose basic rhythmic unit is nearly identical to that of the habanera.

When writing *Carmen*, Bizet adapted the melody for "*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*" from a popular habanera of the era, which he believed to be a Spanish folk song. It



was not: The melody was lifted from a composition by Basque composer Sebastián Yradier (1809–65) called “El Arreglito.” When he discovered that it was not in fact a folk song but a relatively recent cabaret song, Bizet added a note to the vocal score of his opera citing the proper source.

Although it uses a borrowed melody and popular rhythmic structure, *Carmen*’s famous habanera diverges from its template in several ways. First, this aria is the only piece in the opera with text written by the composer himself and not by his librettists Meilhac and Halévy. Second, the lyrics of typical habaneras usually assume the perspectives of men, especially sailors and fisherman, who reflect upon their work and romantic relationships. Rather than mirror the longings of men in search of an idealized beauty, *Carmen* sings the aria as an alluring woman whose desire cannot be so easily contained by the men who pursue her. And finally, the contredanse and habanera are social dances traditionally performed by couples facing each other in a long line or in a square formation. *Carmen*’s habanera exhibits just the opposite: a woman dancing by herself, for herself, and for the amusement—not benefit—of those watching.

FUN FACT

With *Carmen*, Bizet intended to transform the opéra comique genre and to inject a new realism into a field he considered stagnant. His creative foil in this effort was *La Dame Blanche* by Adrien Boieldieu, an enormously popular work that had been performed more than 1,000 times at the Opéra Comique. Bizet once described it as “a loathsome opera, without talent, with no ideas, no esprit, no melodic invention, no anything whatsoever in the world. It is stupid, stupid, stupid!” *Carmen* had only attained its 33rd performance when Bizet died suddenly. On the day of his funeral, the Opéra Comique replaced the scheduled performance of *Carmen* with another work: *La Dame Blanche*.

The Fate Motif

One of the most pervasive and recognizable musical ideas of the *Carmen* score is a short phrase sometimes called the “fate motif.” We hear it for the first time at the end of the prelude, immediately following the conclusion of the “Toreador” theme. The motif is made up of three musical elements: a fortissimo tremolo in the strings, a descending chromatic melody, and two foreboding, pulsating low notes played by the double bass and bass drum (**Track 2**).



The melody recurs several times throughout the opera, signaling to the listener that the action on stage relates to Carmen’s ultimate fate. It first returns in Carmen and Don José’s Act II duet (“*Je vais danser en votre honneur*”), when Carmen dances for José while accompanying herself on the castanets. He suddenly asks her to stop when he hears a signal calling the soldiers back to the barracks. She ignores his request and continues dancing until José reiterates that he must leave at once. Carmen’s mood immediately changes from playfulness to outrage and embarrassment, her seductions no match for the call of duty. José tries to reassure her of his love, but she remains unconvinced. Their disagreement reaches a fever pitch until José commands Carmen to listen to him. Then, as he draws from his vest the flower Carmen threw at him in Act I, the motif appears (**Track 3**). This scene’s profound shift in tone from flirtatious teasing to open conflict reflects the broader dramatic structure of the opera, which begins with lighthearted ribaldry and ends in tragedy. As this scene progresses, Carmen beseeches Don José to abandon his life of rules and order while he begs her for mercy. When they seem finally to part ways for good, the motif again returns, as if to suggest that the two lovers are not, in fact, finished with each other (**Track 4**).

The next time the motif returns in quite a different setting, where Don José is notably absent from the action. At the beginning of Act III, we learn that the smugglers have crashed their tractor trailer on the mountain pass. Carmen’s companions, Mercédès and Frasquita, tell their fortunes, and Carmen joins them in an ensemble piece known as the “Card Trio.” As the three women take turns learning their fates, the contrast

becomes obvious. Mercédès will marry rich and inherit her husband's fortune, while Frasquita will find a bold, powerful pirate who treats her to his lavish treasures. But Carmen's cards spell only one thing: death. As she shuffles the cards and prepares to learn her fate, the motif appears three times in quick succession, played by the flute (**Track 5**) with pizzicato accents in the violins and violas. The motif repeats three more times before Carmen reveals her mortal destiny. This fate is sealed when the basses and cellos quickly repeat the motif at the conclusion of the trio.

The last recurrence of the motif, perhaps expectedly, is found just moments before Carmen and José's final duet, where he stabs her to death in a jealous rage. In this instance, Bizet cleverly transforms one motif into another to signal Carmen's ill-fated romance with the cowboy Escamillo and her murder at the hands of José. Before her final meeting with Escamillo, Carmen is warned by Mercédès and Frasquita that José is nearby, but she insists that she is not afraid. She waits outside the amphitheater where Escamillo is competing in a rodeo, and José approaches her. As soon as the rodeo begins offstage, the toreador motif—famously from the "Prelude" and "Toreador Song"—is heard softly on flute, followed by a series of descending chromatic lines in the strings echoing the fate motif (**Track 6**). This thematic collision suggests how Carmen is literally caught between her two loves.

The third time the toreador motif is heard, the end of the phrase morphs into the fate motif. Here, Bizet takes advantage of the similarity between the two themes. The end of the first phrase of the toreador motif is nearly identical to the fate motif, with one crucial difference: Where the toreador motif ends on an ascending gesture, the fate motif instead continues in a downward descent.

This likeness between the two motifs gives Bizet the opportunity, through rapid repetition, to convert one into the other. The shift in tone signals that Escamillo has left the scene, and José has reappeared to deliver Carmen's fate once and for all, as the fate motif passes from the clarinets and bassoons to the strings—the violins and violas in quick 16th notes, the cellos and basses in foreboding eighth notes.



MATERIALS

Handout

COMMON CORE**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6–11-12.1**

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Philosophical Chairs

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element is what happens next: Participants discuss their point of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussions.

Each topic statement is deliberately open-ended yet ties into several of the themes present in *Carmen*—including competing visions of love, understandings of character, and philosophies of human nature. Offer students a brief overview of the opera's plot, setting, and context, and remind them how to build a safe space for productive conversation. Some of the topics might be confusing or hard—that's okay! As you and your students explore and learn about *Carmen*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

A NOTE TO FACILITATORS: Between statements, provide some clarity as to why that statement was chosen. Explain to students where and how each theme shows up in the opera, or invite students to offer their own explanations.

STEP 1. INQUIRE

Distribute the included handout with guidelines and statements, making sure to review the rules of engagement as a group. Next, invite students to read one of the statements—out loud as a class, to themselves, or in small groups. As they read, they should ask themselves:

- Do I understand the statement?
 - If not, what questions might clarify it for me?
- What immediately comes to mind when I read the statement?
 - What is my initial reaction: Do I agree or disagree?
- What led me to that decision?
 - What opinions do I hold about this statement?
 - What life experiences may have led me to think this way?

STEP 2. RESPOND

Read the statements again out loud and ask students to commit to one side. They can agree or disagree, but there is no middle ground. (Many will not be completely comfortable committing to one side over the other—that’s part of the game. It will help foster conversation and debate.)

STEP 3. DISCUSS

Start a conversation! Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- Does anyone feel very strongly either way? Why or why not?
- Does anyone feel conflicted? Why or why not?
- Give voice to what you thought about in the first step:
 - What led me to make my decision?
 - What opinions do I hold with regard to this statement?
 - What life experience may have led me to think this way?
- What might you have not considered that others are now bringing up in the discussion?
- Did any new questions arise during the discussion?

As the conversation continues, students are free to change their minds or develop more nuanced perspectives.

Repeat steps 1 through 3 for each statement.

FUN FACT

Bizet is best remembered for *Carmen*, but he wrote several other operas, some of which were left incomplete or never performed. Besides *Carmen*, the only ones staged in his lifetime (and occasionally revived today) are *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*, 1863), *La Jolie Fille de Perth* (*The Fair Maid of Perth*, 1867), and *Djamileh* (1872).



A scene from the Met's 2018 production of *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*

Diorama Drama

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Theater, visual art, design, creative writing

MATERIALS

Handouts
Construction paper or poster board
Index cards
Scissors
Glue or tape
Miscellaneous art materials
Illustrated Synopsis (optional)
MOoD clips (optional)

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.2

Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CORE ARTS

VA:Cr2.1.1.a

Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design.

VA:Cr1.2.2.a

Make art or design with various materials and tools to explore personal interests, questions, and curiosity.

VA:Cr1.1.3.a

Elaborate on an imaginative idea.

As indicated by Bizet in the original composition, each of *Carmen's* four acts takes place in a distinct, but not distant, locale: A public square in Sevilla, a tavern on the outskirts of the city, a mountain hideout, and the entrance to an amphitheater. Carrie Cracknell's brand-new staging of *Carmen*, which debuts at the Met on New Year's Eve, moves the action of Bizet's work to an altogether different time and place—a modern-day border town amid a band of human traffickers.

Drawing inspiration from this reimagining of *Carmen*, this activity asks students to construct a revolving diorama set model representing each of the opera's four acts. Dioramas allow students to use their skill and imagination to create three-dimensional scenes, and this rotating pyramidal structure allows students to depict all four acts. The material nature of the project adds a tactile dimension to student learning and provides more accessibility for visually impaired students while also centering questions of adaptation, directorial choice, and design.

STEP 1. REVIEW

Begin by having students review the plot of *Carmen*, either individually or as a group. You can distribute copies of the included synopsis or the Met's Illustrated Synopsis (metopera.org/carmen-illustrated).

If you're working with students in middle or high school, encourage them to examine how each setting functions in the opera. Act I, for example, takes place in a central location where people of different classes intermingle—factory workers go on break while nearby soldiers look on—whereas the events in Act II are set in a place removed from the social constraints of the previous scenes. Act III occurs in a covert and treacherous hideaway for illicit schemes, and the opera's final act returns to the town where, in the shadow of a major sporting event, a murder takes place.

After reviewing the synopsis, you might also prompt students to reflect further by asking these questions:

- What do you notice about the set and/or setting of the opera?
- How do you know when or where the opera takes place? What clues point you in that direction?
- What is the role of set design in conveying the mood, plot, and vision of the production?
- How important is set design, and how can those design choices be complemented by costumes, wigs, makeup, and lighting?

STEP 2. ADAPT

Using the included handout, have students devise an adaptation of *Carmen* in a setting of their choice. As they work individually or in small groups, students should pay special attention to the following:

- **Where** is the action taking place (e.g., a high school, movie set, or alternate world)?
- **When** is the action taking place (e.g., in contemporary times, in a historical period, in the distant future)?
- **Why** does this setting make sense for the opera’s plot?
- **Who** are the individual characters and what roles do they play in this new setting (e.g., Escamillo is a football player, Carmen is a cheerleader, Micaëla is a geek, etc.)?
- **What** should the set design look like for each act (e.g., school hallway, football field, bowling alley)?

Have students sketch their set designs, encouraging them to use all three dimensions and consider what goes in the foreground, middle ground, and background of each scene.

STEP 3. BUILD

Next, students can begin building their diorama pyramids. Using the included handout as a guide, fold a piece of square construction paper along both diagonals. Then, cut from one corner to the center of the paper and fold the two triangles adjacent to the cut onto each other, fastening them with glue or tape. Repeat this process three more times to create four separate dioramas, one for each act of *Carmen*. Students can now transfer their design ideas to each diorama, using whatever materials they choose—colored markers or pencils, pipe cleaners, string, popsicle sticks, straws, felt, clay, etc. Once all four dioramas are complete, glue or tape them together to form a pyramid.

STEP 4. WRITE

Distribute four index cards to each student or group. On these cards, students should describe each setting and why they chose it to represent the events in each act. The diorama pyramids can be displayed together on a table or, with the use of a string, hung at eye level. Invite students to do a gallery walk, seeing how their peers adapted *Carmen* to different times and places.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

World history, music literacy, world music, social studies, music performance

MATERIALS

Handouts
Four-line staff paper (optional)
Five-line staff paper (optional)
“The World of the Romanies” essay
Audio tracks

COMMON CORE**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4**

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CORE ARTS**MU:Cr1.1.5.b**

Generate musical ideas (such as rhythms, melodies, and accompaniment patterns) within specific related tonalities, meters, and simple chord changes.

TH:Cn10.1.6.a

Explain how the actions and motivations of characters in a drama/theatre work impact perspectives of a community or culture.

MU:Cn11.1.8.a

Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

**The Rhythm of the Romanies**

Dance plays a vital role in bringing the spirit of *Carmen* to life. Exuberant, passionate, and wild, the “Gypsy Song” from Act II gives us a glimpse into Carmen’s character and the principles that guide her way of life.

In this activity, students will learn about the history of the Romani people and the term “Gypsy,” analyze an excerpt from the opera to identify elements of musical exoticism, learn the melody of Carmen’s famous “Gypsy Song” (“*Les tringles des sistres tintaient*”), and create their own 24-measure body-percussion piece that reflects the driving energy of Bizet’s score and Carmen’s character.

STEP 1. INQUIRE

On an electronic platform of your choosing, such as Mentimeter, have your students create a word cloud with words that come to mind when they hear the term “Gypsy.”

After everyone has had time to submit and read over the generated word cloud, ask students:

- What similarities do you see?
- Do any words in the word cloud surprise you or make you think differently about the term “Gypsy?”
- What preconceived notions do you have about the term “Gypsy?”

STEP 2. DISCUSS

Distribute the included Deep Dive essay, “The World of the Romanies,” and have students read it aloud. The first two paragraphs are excerpted below:

Although Carrie Cracknell’s staging of *Carmen* transports the action from 19th-century Seville to a contemporary American border town, in Bizet’s original composition, the title character and her compatriots are explicitly described as “Gypsies,” or in French, *bohémiens*. This term, which now has largely negative connotations and is considered a slur by some, refers to the Romani people, who are believed to have originally migrated from northern India, reaching the European continent by the 14th century. The English word Gypsy derives from the Middle English term gypcian, or Egipcien (Egyptian). It thus refers to the group’s supposed origins in Egypt or northern Africa, perhaps due to their darker skin. In Spain, the Romanies are referred to as Gitano (or Gitana). Like Gypsy, Gitano is an exonym—that is, a name for a group of people used by those who are not part of that group. The Romanies in Spain refer to themselves by the endonym Calé, from their language Caló, which combines aspects of Latin-derived Romance languages with the Romani language.

Since the Romani way of life did not seem to conform to notions of Christian morality, they were viewed by Europeans as being ruled by their basest instincts, with no regard for honor or sexual control. In strict 19th-century society, any kind of behavior that did not follow its own austere codes of conduct was seen as morally



A Seville café in 1885 offered flamenco music and dance as entertainment. Romani musical traditions have long been a part of mainstream Spanish culture.

corrupt. European authors projected lurid attributes upon Romani women. They were portrayed as sexually promiscuous, immodest, and outside of “decent” society. In much of the art, music, and literature of the 19th century, they were stereotyped as free spirited, strong, deviant, demanding, sexually alluring, and impertinent. In reality, Romani culture holds women to strict ethical codes of conduct with respect to sexuality and promiscuity is not tolerated.

Then, have students listen to Carmen’s Act II aria, “*Les tringles des sistres tintaient*” (Track 7).

STEP 3. REFLECT

Ask students:

- Have you ever heard of the term “exotic” before?
- What might that mean when referring to music?
- How might music be exotic?
- What about the word “exoticism?” Has anyone ever heard that term before? In what context?
- How might a composer portray a distant, or exotic, location musically?

Explain to students that musical exoticism often portrays distant lands by using musical elements that are drawn from a composer’s perceptions of people, places,



Troy Kinney's etchings of flamenco dancers found their way into the collection of eminent choreographer Jerome Robbins.
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, JEROME ROBBINS DANCE COLLECTION

and cultural practices from cultures other than their own. If students have not already naturally done so, turn the conversation directly back to Bizet's music. Ask students:

- How does Bizet portray Romani people in his Act II "Gypsy Song"? (You may want to play the audio a second time.)

Have students identify specific musical elements they are hearing and ask them to consider what Bizet may have thought of the Romani people and how Carmen is portrayed.

- Do you think composers depict cultures different from their own positively and accurately, or do you think composers often turn to caricatures of those cultures?
- In what ways might musical exoticism, or musical caricatures, offend a person that belongs to the culture that is being depicted?
- Do you think composers should depict cultures outside of their own? Why or why not?
- What are ways that composers could be more thoughtful, considerate, and intentional when portraying other cultures different from their own?

STEP 4. RESPOND

Teach the "Tra la la" melody from the song students have just analyzed, which is included in this guide, in one of three ways:

- Have students sightread the melody using whichever method they are used to (solfege, numbers, or neutral syllables).
- Provide students with staff paper, key signature, and time signature and have students dictate the melody on staff paper.
- Teach the melody by rote.

Throughout the learning process, ask students if they notice any repeating patterns. Share with students that the repeating pattern they are hearing is called a sequence—a restatement of a motif at a higher, or in this case lower, pitch. Ask students: How many times does the sequence occur? (After the initial statement, the two-bar motif is heard in sequence two more times). How many measures are there in a phrase?

(Eight.) What is the form of the melody? (AA'—for upper-level music students, ask them to identify the cadences at the ends of each phrase).

STEP 5. PERFORM

Put students in small groups of about four or five and have them use the included handout to create their own 24-measure rhythmic body percussion ensemble with layered ostinati. Students may stomp, pat, clap, and snap. Have students notate their body percussion ensemble on four-line staff paper. Remind students of the following:

- Focus on simple ideas that can be repeated over and over. Create one rhythmic cell, or building block, that is one measure, and repeat it to create your ostinato.
- Be mindful of creating direction in your rhythmic ensemble. How will you incorporate different dynamics, growth of the line, tension, and release?
- The students' footwork may include more than just stomping. Ask students, "How might something different than a loud stomp look when notated on the staff?"
- Encourage the use of syncopation, offbeat accents, and polyrhythms. But ... "Boring" is often better; keep it simple.

Once students have composed, rehearsed, and perfected their body percussion ensemble, it is time to perform them for the class. Instead of going one group at a time, stopping in between each performance, create a new class composition with the "Tra la la" melody as a ritornello—a recurring passage or, in pop music, a chorus. If you have four groups, assuming each group did something different, the form of your class composition will be:

A *Ritornello*
("Tra la la...") B *Ritornello* C *Ritornello* D *Ritornello*

DIVING DEEPER

Consider adding to or replacing the stomp, snap, pats, and claps with unpitched percussion instruments. You can also have students create ostinati to complement the "Tra la la" melody. Alternatively, they can add body percussion and/or unpitched percussion instruments to the "Tra la la" melody. Finally, try increasing the tempo toward the end of your class's composition to add an *accelerando* reflecting the frenzied nature of this scene.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Though expertly crafted to trigger the anxieties of 19th-century Europe regarding the attitudes and behaviors of women, *Carmen* has enthralled the world's imagination for more than a century and a half. Her story has been told in flamenco, in hip-hop, in settings from the Netherlands to South Africa, in a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon, in a Broadway musical, and in more than 70 films by directors as varied as Charlie Chaplin and Jean-Luc Godard. What do you think accounts for this particular work's translatability across space, time, language, and medium? What about *Carmen* is so universal that it keeps getting remade?

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Music theory, theater, visual arts, design

MATERIALS

Handouts

Audio tracks

Colored pencils or markers (optional)

COMMON CORE**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5**

Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5

Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

CORE ARTS**MU:Re7.2.6.a**

Describe how the elements of music and expressive qualities relate to the structure of the pieces.

MU:Re8.1.5.a

Demonstrate and explain how the expressive qualities (such as dynamics, tempo, timbre, and articulation) are used in performers' and personal interpretations to reflect expressive intent.

VA:Cr1.2.7.a

Develop criteria to guide making a work of art or design to meet an identified goal.

Entr'acte Entry Points

Divided into four short acts, *Carmen* makes brilliant use of entr'actes, or musical interludes, to forge musical transitions among the distinct settings in which each act takes place: a border crossing, a party in the back of a tractor trailer, a mountain pass, and outside a rodeo. Along with the opera's famous prelude, these entr'actes frame the dramatic action to follow, establishing important themes or motifs or setting the tone for upcoming scenes accompanying extended dance sequences.

In this activity, students will be led through a series of "listening maps," or visual designs that organize, highlight, or classify various elements of a piece of music. Each listening map will be dedicated to either the prelude or one of the opera's entr'actes and focus on a particular aspect of the score: theme, orchestration, and dynamics. Finally, students will have the chance to design their own listening maps for an additional section of *Carmen*, emphasizing whatever characteristics of the piece they find most interesting.

STEP 1. REVIEW

Begin by going over the musical structure of the opera, which comprises four acts and a prelude. Acts I, II, and III are each followed by an entr'acte (French for "between the act"), a short musical interlude that serves to transition between larger sections of a play or musical work. You might encourage students to brainstorm why a composer like Bizet might include entr'actes in an opera like *Carmen*. Ask:

- What dramatic purpose does an entr'acte serve? Why might it be useful or impactful to divide the acts of an opera with different pieces of music?
- How might entr'actes serve a theatrical purpose? Are the settings on either side of each interlude the same? Why might the scenic design be relevant to the use of musical interludes?
- What could be the musical reasons for including entr'actes? If they are accompanied by dance sequences or some other kind of choreography, what purpose might that serve?

STEP 2. LISTEN

First, distribute the handouts included with this guide. There are individual listening maps for the prelude and first and third entr'actes, as well as a blank template for students to design their own visualization of the second entr'acte.

Have students turn to the first map handout and play the opera's prelude (**Track 8**) until the "fate motif," when the score suddenly shifts from A major to D minor. Students should listen as they follow along with the prelude listening map. You are welcome to play the piece multiple times until students feel like they know it well.

The prelude listening map highlights the piece's use of phrasing and theme. Each image of a horse represents a phrase, and the position or appearance of each horse

(i.e., whether it's running at full speed or walking steadily) suggests the musical character of that phrase. Rearing horses, meanwhile, represent cadences or ends of phrases—which can be enlarged or extended depending on the case. The sizes of the individual horses can also indicate dynamics.

Once the class has listened to the prelude multiple times, you can open a class discussion about how they understood the map. Ask:

- What aspects of the piece does this diagram represent?
- How many sections are there in this part of the prelude? Do any of them repeat?
- What does each image represent? Why are some of the horses different? Why are some running, while others are walking? Why are some standing on two legs? Why are some smaller or larger?
- Why does this map use images of horses to represent musical phrases? (It begins with the primary motif from the "Toreador Song" in Act III!)
- Are there any similarities or differences among the individual phrases, for example in terms of length, structure, or tone?

After covering the prelude, move on to the Act I entr'acte (**Track 9**) and distribute the corresponding listening map, which focuses on orchestration. As with the previous excerpt, have students listen to the piece several times while following along on their maps. They are welcome to take notes or make observations on their handouts.

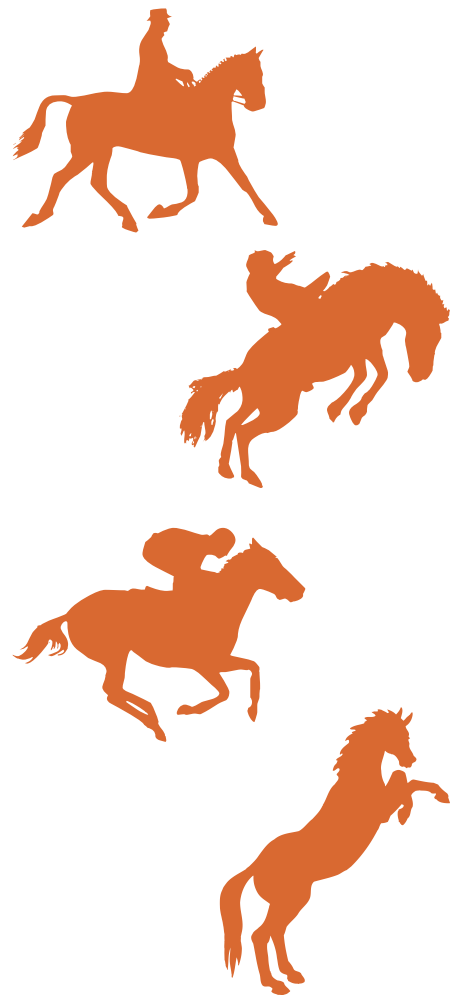
Once the class has listened to the first entr'acte multiple times, you can open a class discussion about how they understood the map. Ask:

- What aspects of the piece does this diagram represent?
- Do you recognize any of the images used in the map? If so, what are they? Do they clue us in to what elements of this piece the visual is conveying?
- How many sections are there in the first entr'acte? Do any of them repeat?
- Which instruments are used most frequently in this interlude? Which are used together, and which on their own?
- How does this choice of instruments contribute to the sound of the piece? Would it feel or sound different if played on different instruments?

Finally, students can continue to the Act III entr'acte (**Track 10**). Distribute the corresponding listening map, which focuses on dynamics, and have students listen to the piece several times while following along with their handouts.

Once the class has listened to the third entr'acte multiple times, you can open a class discussion about their understanding of the map. Ask:

- What aspects of the piece does this diagram represent?



CRITICAL INQUIRY

Carrie Cracknell's new staging of *Carmen* transports the action of the opera from 19-century Seville to a contemporary border town in the American Southwest. The original setting of Bizet's work, in the southernmost region of Spain known as Andalusia, has for centuries been home to the Romani people—known as Gitanos in Spanish—to which *Carmen* belongs. There is no comparable Romani community on the U.S.–Mexico border, although the music and text of the opera still explicitly reference that group. How does this relationship between the original setting and the adapted setting inform your approach to the opera? What might be gained by altering where and when an opera takes place, and what might be lost?

- Do you recognize any of the images used in the map? If so, what are they? Do they clue us in to what elements of this piece the visual is conveying?
- How many sections are there in the third entr'acte? Do any of them repeat?
- How does the structure of this piece compare to the first two examined? Is it more or less complex?
- How does the dynamic organization of the entr'acte contribute to the sound or tone of the piece? How might it sound with different dynamics?

STEP 3. DESIGN

After listening to the three tracks and learning how various kinds of listening maps can highlight distinct elements of individual pieces, students are now ready to create their own interpretive diagrams. Distribute the final handout, which is a blank listening map template for the Act II entr'acte, with one section dedicated to each appearance of the main theme. Then, have students listen to the piece (**Track 11**) several times before they begin designing. In fact, you may decide to play the piece on a loop while students are brainstorming their own maps. You can also distribute colored pencils or markers or other craft materials if students would like to use them.

Before students begin designing, encourage them to consider the following questions:

- What is the structure of this entr'acte?
- How many sections are there? Do any repeat?
- What aspect of this piece do they want to highlight?
- How will they visually represent that element (e.g., with a particular image, color, text)?
- Are there any elements from the previous maps that they would like to include in their own?
- Are there any elements from the previous pieces that those maps didn't highlight? How would their own map convey that aspect of this piece?
- How can they make sure other students could read and understand their map?

STEP 4. SHARE

When every student has finished their listening map, invite them to share with the class. Encourage other students to try to guess what each map is highlighting and how its imagery works. Did any students focus on similar elements of the piece? Do any maps seem to contradict each other? You can also ask the class what they found most difficult about the exercise, and if they would do anything differently if they had another chance to complete it.

DIVING DEEPER

If students are using laptops, tablets, or other devices in class, you can invite them to create their own listening maps with software like PowerPoint or Keynote or online resources like Canva. Or, for a homework assignment, you can ask students to select an additional section from *Carmen*—for example, an aria or chorus number—and have them complete a digital listening map using any kind of visualization tool they find useful. In addition, students can submit a written portion describing how their listening map works and why they chose to analyze that particular piece.



FUN FACT

Carmen has been adapted in many forms and media, from silent movies to a flamenco-themed film. One of the most acclaimed versions is *Carmen Jones*, a 1943 Broadway musical that combines Bizet's original music with new English lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein (co-creator of *The Sound of Music* and *The King and I*) and places the story in an African-American setting during World War II. The movie version with Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte was released in 1954. In 2018, a new production of *Carmen Jones* opened off Broadway, starring Anika Noni Rose.

Philosophical Chairs

Active listening, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue (even when we disagree about something) are learned skills. Everyone can learn them, and no one can perfect them without practice. Philosophical Chairs is designed to help us develop these skills while also learning about the opera.

You might find these statements challenging—and you might find it challenging to talk with someone who has a different answer from your own. That’s okay! Take your time with each statement, embrace uncertainty, and know that changing your mind when you learn new information is a sign of strength, not weakness. Before you begin your discussion, take some time to review the rules of engagement:

Be sure you understand the statement. If something is unclear, ask!

Face each other. Body language helps show that you’re listening carefully and respectfully.

Only one speaker at a time. Everyone will get their turn to speak.

Think before you speak. Be sure that what you’re going to say is what you really mean.

Summarize the previous person’s comments before adding your own.

Address ideas, not the person. Challenging ideas or statements is good only if we respect the individuality and inherent value of the person who expressed them.

Three before me. To make sure everyone’s voice is heard, you may not make another comment until three others have shared their thoughts.

The Statements

- Love is fleeting—here today, gone tomorrow.
- Love is free and obeys no rules.
- Love can make one do crazy things.
- True love controls you.
- Wandering eyes are harmless.
- Tarot cards can predict the future.
- Everyone has a fate which they cannot run away from.
- Your reputation is important to uphold.
- Other people’s opinions of you matter.
- Rodeo and bullfighting are mere sports, and therefore ethical.
- Looks are the biggest factor in finding love.
- You can never think too highly of yourself.
- Jealousy is part of human nature.
- Status and recognition should be attained at any cost.
- Temptation is powerful beyond measure.
- In the end, you will always get what you deserve.

Diorama Drama

Where is the action taking place (e.g., a high school, movie set, or alternate world)?

When is the action taking place (e.g., in contemporary times, in a historical period, in the distant future)?

Why does this setting make sense for the opera's plot?

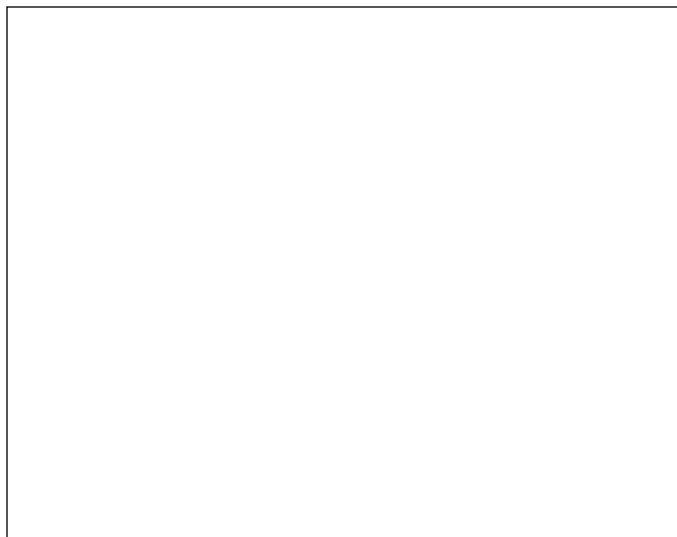
Who are the individual characters and what roles do they play in this new setting (e.g., Escamillo is a football player, Carmen is a cheerleader, Micaëla is a geek, etc.)?

What should the set design look like for each act (e.g., school hallway, football field, bowling alley)?

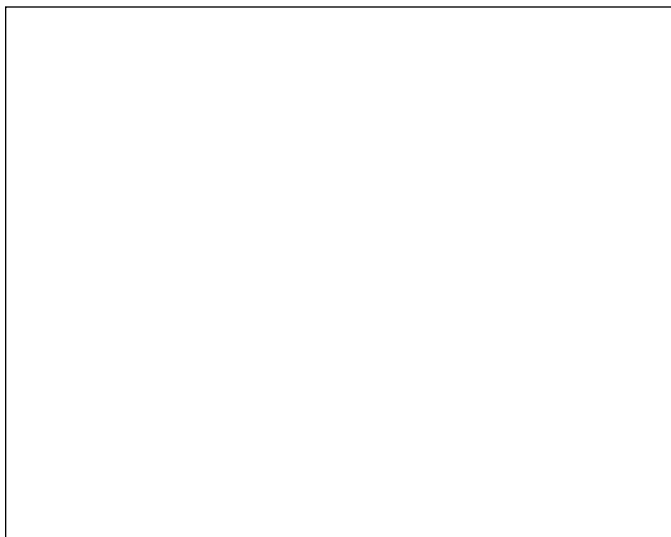
Diorama Drama

Sketch your design for each act of *Carmen*.

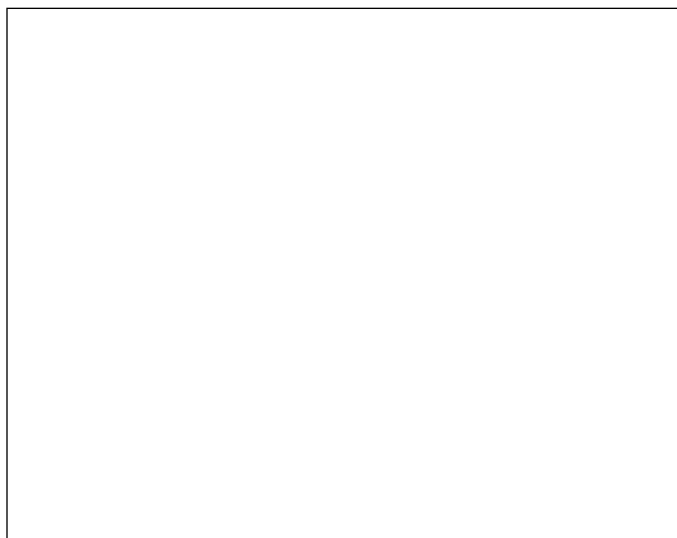
ACT I



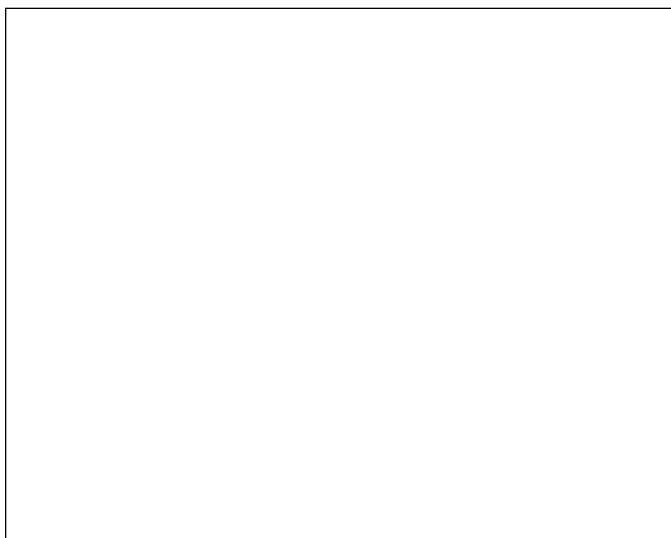
ACT II



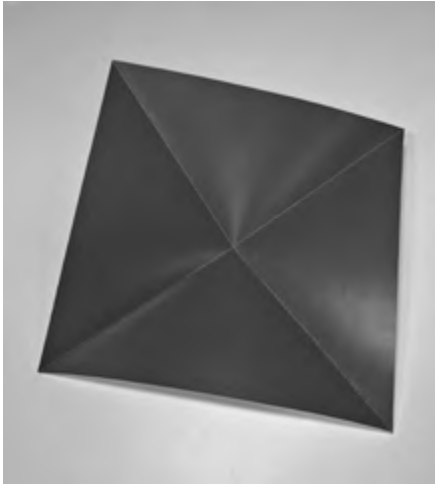
ACT III



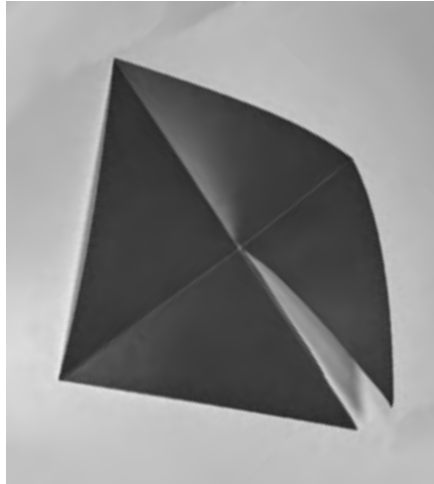
ACT IV



Diorama Drama



Fold a piece of square construction paper along both diagonals.



Cut from one corner to the center of the paper



Fold the two triangles next to the cut onto each other and fasten with glue or tape.

The Rhythm of the Romanies

Excerpt from Act II: "Les tringles des sistres tintaient" (comfortable key)

Voice

Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la

5

Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la

9

Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la

13

Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la

The Rhythm of the Romanies

Excerpt from Act II: “Les tringles des sistres tintaient”

(original key)

Voice

Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la

5

Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la

9

Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la

13

Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la

The Rhythm of the Romanies

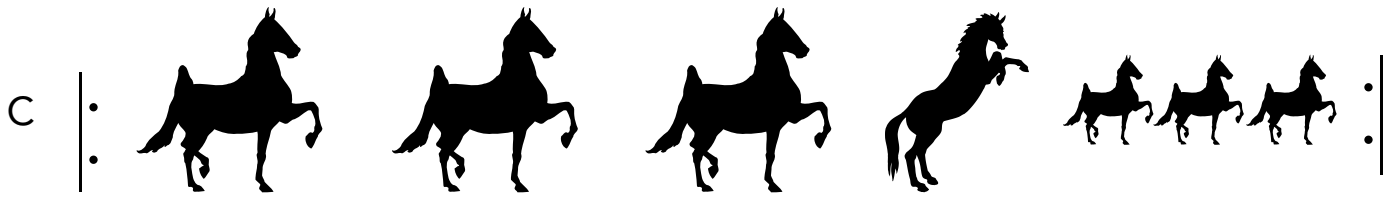
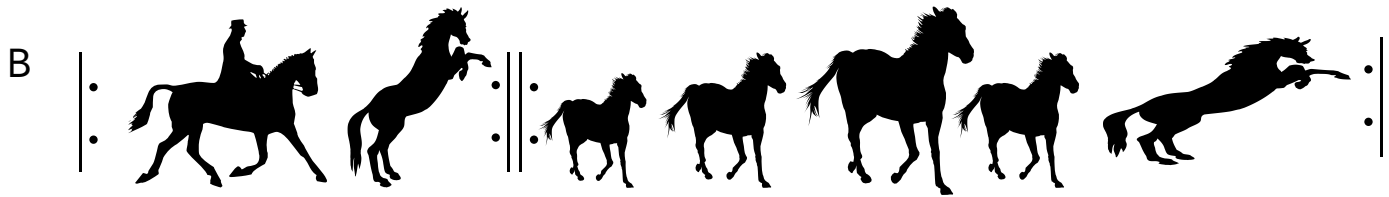
Group Members: _____

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|-------|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SNAP | $\frac{3}{4}$ | | | | | | | | |
| CLAP | | | | | | | | | |
| PAT | | | | | | | | | |
| STOMP | | | | | | | | | |

| | | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
|-------|---------------|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| SNAP | $\frac{3}{4}$ | | | | | | | | |
| CLAP | | | | | | | | | |
| PAT | | | | | | | | | |
| STOMP | | | | | | | | | |

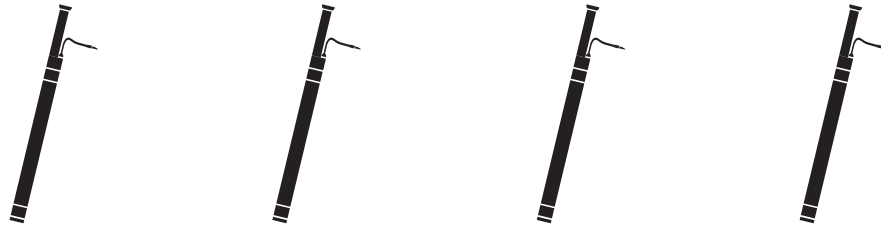
| | | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
|-------|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| SNAP | $\frac{3}{4}$ | | | | | | | | |
| CLAP | | | | | | | | | |
| PAT | | | | | | | | | |
| STOMP | | | | | | | | | |

Entr'acte Entry Points | Prelude

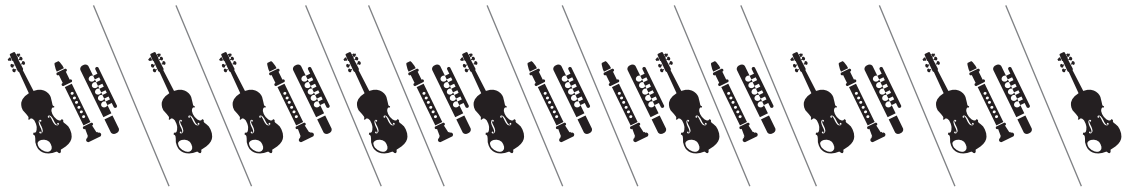


Entr'acte Entry Points | Act I

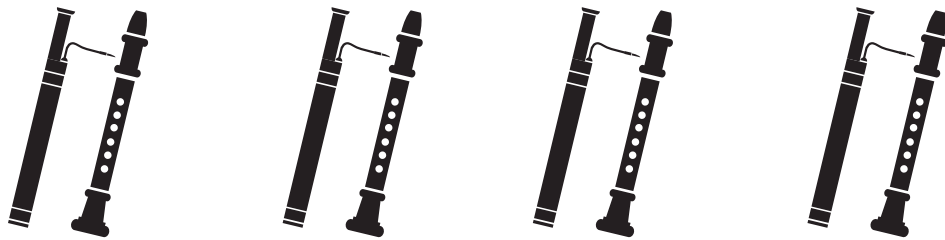
A



B



A



A



Entr'acte Entry Points | Act III

A *ff* > *dim*

B *pp*

C *pp*

B *pp*

C *pp*

D *ff* *p* *ff* *p*

E *p*

F *pp* *sf*>*p* *sf*>*p* *sf*>*p*

B *p*

C *cresc.*

G *ff* > *dim*

A *pp*

B *p*

C *p*

B *p*

E *pp* > *ppp*

Entr'acte Entry Points | Act II

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

Opera Review: *Carmen*

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *Carmen*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what would you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about the opera and this performance at the Met!

| THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE | ACTION | MUSIC | SET DESIGN / STAGING |
|---|--------|-------|----------------------|
| Micaëla arrives at the soldiers' barracks looking for Don José. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Street children watch the changing of the guard. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Men gather to watch the cigarette factory girls at work. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Micaëla delivers a letter to José. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| The cigarette factory girls accuse Carmen of starting a fight. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| After being apprehended, Carmen convinces José to release her. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Carmen escapes, and José is arrested. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Carmen and her friends are entertaining locals in the back of a tractor trailer as Escamillo arrives, accompanied by his admirers. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |

| THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE | ACTION | MUSIC | SET DESIGN / STAGING |
|---|--------|-------|----------------------|
| The smugglers try to convince Carmen to join their plot. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| José comes to find Carmen. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| José fights Zuniga and joins the smugglers. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Carmen and José argue while the smugglers gather in the mountains. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Carmen tells her own fortune. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Micaëla searches for José in the mountains. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Escamillo and José fight over Carmen. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Micaëla begs José to return home to his mother. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| A crowd watches the rodeo. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Carmen and José meet for the last time. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE: | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ | ☆☆☆☆☆ |