



Bizet · CARMEN

Carmen

Music by Georges Bizet
Story by Henri Meilhac & Ludovic Halévy

Teacher-Student Study Guide

Rimrock Opera Company, Billings, Montana

March 2009



GEORGE BIZET

The Background of *Carmen*

Frenchman George Bizet (pronounced: Zhorzh Bee-ZAY) was born in 1835 into a musical family. His own talents were so extraordinary that he was accepted as a student at the Paris Conservatory when he was not quite ten-the musical equivalent of being a college freshman at that age. He proved to be talented enough as a pianist and organist that he could have had a very successful career as a performer on those two instruments. But Bizet was more interested in becoming a composer. His teachers encouraged him to enter composition contests. At the age of 18 he won first prize for a one-act comic opera which was then staged in Paris. A year later a prize for an instrumental piece he wrote awarded him a scholarship to live and study music in Italy for the next 3 years. When he returned to Paris, Bizet chose to pursue his interest in the theater. Shortly after, he wrote his first full-length opera, *The Pearl Fishers*. This opera, with its exotic setting (Ceylon, an island in the Far

East) and its strong dramatic conflicts. He was an important foundation for his masterpiece, *Carmen*, which came almost ten years later. As of today, *Carmen* is probably in the top 5 all-time list for popular, frequently performed operas.

How *Carmen* came about went like this. In 1872, the Opéra-Comique in Paris commissioned Bizet to write an opera. He was assigned two librettists (these are folks who write the words or stories), Henri Meilhac & Ludovic Halévy (Awn-REE May-YACK & Loo-doh-VEEK Ah-lay-VEE). It was Bizet's own idea to use the already existing novel by Frenchman Prosper Mérimée called *Carmen* and set it as a musical drama. The two librettists then started work to create a script for the opera, called a 'libretto' (Italian for "little book"). Once they had reduced the novel to a play and added a couple of characters for dramatic balance, Bizet began to set the words to music to create orchestral accompaniment. Bizet composed an overture (orchestra introduction piece of the opera) that had themes for the opera as kind of preview of what was to come. He wrote solo pieces (arias) for the major characters, and duets or group numbers to include secondary parts and chorus scenes. This took 2 years. When the opera premiered on March 3, 1875, it was thought to be quite scandalous and was not a wild success. Unfortunately, Bizet died after only the first few performances at the age of 36. Later, audiences began to accept the violence and longed to hear those familiar melodies.

The Story

Act I

The opera opens in a public square in Seville, Spain. On opposing sides of the stage the audience sees the entrance to a cigarette factory and a guardhouse. Moralès (Moh-RAHL-les) and the soldiers are near the guardhouse, amusing themselves by watching the people who wander by. Micaëla (Mee-kay-ay-LAH), a young country girl, walks up and asks to speak to a soldier by the name of Don José (Dawn Zho-ZAY). Informing her that José will arrive shortly with the changing of the guard, Moralès attempts to flirt with her. Micaëla leaves, saying that she will return to speak to José.

The new guard details arrive, accompanied by a chorus of boys pretending to play trumpets and marching like the soldiers. Moralès tells José that he had a visitor, a young girl. José knows immediately that it must have been his childhood girlfriend Micaëla. Zuniga (ZOO-nee-gah) and José converse, and José reveals that Micaëla is his fiancée.

He claims to have no interest in the young gypsy girls who work in the cigarette factory across the square.

Bells announce the entrance of the girls, who come out of the factory to take a work break. Some of the soldiers and men from the town attempt to mix with the women. Carmen (Car-MEN) enters, immediately becoming the center of attention. Although she flirts with every man present, Carmen takes a particular interest in Don José, who does his best to ignore her. When it is time to return to work, Carmen throws a flower at Don José.

Micaëla returns and tells José that she has come to Seville at the request of his mother, who wants him to know that she loves him and forgives him for the problems of the past. Micaëla gives José the letter that his mother has written and leaves him alone to read it. José reads and resolves to follow his mother's advice and marry Micaëla.

Screams are heard from inside the cigarette factory, and Zuniga sends José inside to find out what is wrong. José returns with Carmen, who has stabbed another girl with a knife during a quarrel. Zuniga tries to question Carmen, but she responds with a mocking song. Zuniga gives José orders to tie her hands and take her to jail. Once Carmen and José are alone, however, she tries to convince him to help her escape by offering to meet him secretly at Lilas Pastia's (LEE-Lahs PAHS-tyah) tavern outside the city walls. José cannot resist her charms and loosens the rope. As they move towards the prison, she shoves him to the ground and escapes. Zuniga has José arrested for allowing her to get away.



Célestine Galli-Marié: the first Carmen

Act II

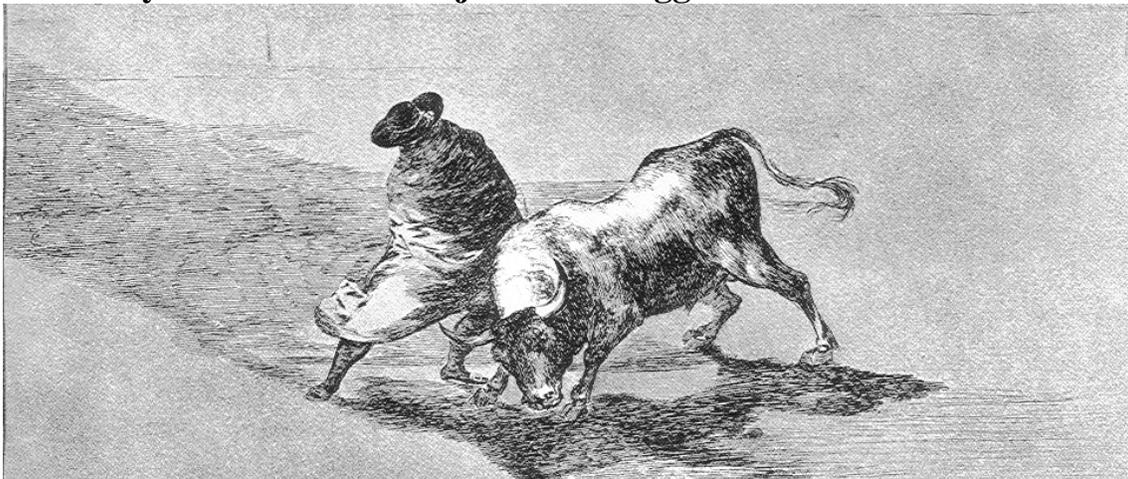
In Lilas Pastia's tavern, Carmen and the other gypsy girls are dancing for the customers, mostly soldiers. Carmen and her friends Mercédès & Frasquita (Mayr-SAY-days & Frah-SKEE-Tah) are with Zuniga and Moralès. As the crowd thins out, Zuniga tells Carmen that José has just been released from prison. Outside the tavern, there are cheers for the popular toreador, Escamillo (Ess-kah-MEE-yoh). Zuniga invites him inside for a drink and Escamillo sings of the danger and rewards of being a bullfighter. He notices Carmen and tries to get her attention, but she doesn't seem interested in him.

The crowd follows Escamillo out of the tavern, leaving Carmen, Frasquita, and Mercédès alone with their two smuggler friends, Dancaïro & Remendado (Dahn-kah-EE-roh & Reh-men-DAH-doh).

The smugglers ask for help with a new plot. Frasquita and Mercédès agree to the plan instantly, but Carmen refuses, and when the others demand her reason, she explains that she is waiting for a soldier with whom she is in love. The men find Carmen's excuse amusing at first, but when it becomes clear that Carmen is serious, they suggest that she ask the soldier to join their smuggling operations.

José can be heard singing as he approached the tavern and everyone except Carmen leaves. Carmen dances and sings for Don José, accompanying herself by playing castanets. Soon a bugle call is heard in the distance. It is a signal for Don José to return to his barracks. But when he says he must leave, Carmen becomes furious and accuses him cowardice. José removes a flower from his coat and tells Carmen that is the one she threw at him and he has saved it ever since. Carmen responds that is he really loved her; he'd carry her away to the mountains where they'd live a life of joyous freedom.

In spite of José's protest, Carmen ridicules him and a terrible argument breaks out. Zuniga returns to the tavern and orders José to go to the barracks. José's jealousy toward Zuniga is aroused and he provokes a fight. The smugglers intervene, disarming Zuniga and holding him captive. Having assaulted his superior officer, José now has no choice but to stay with Carmen and join the smugglers.

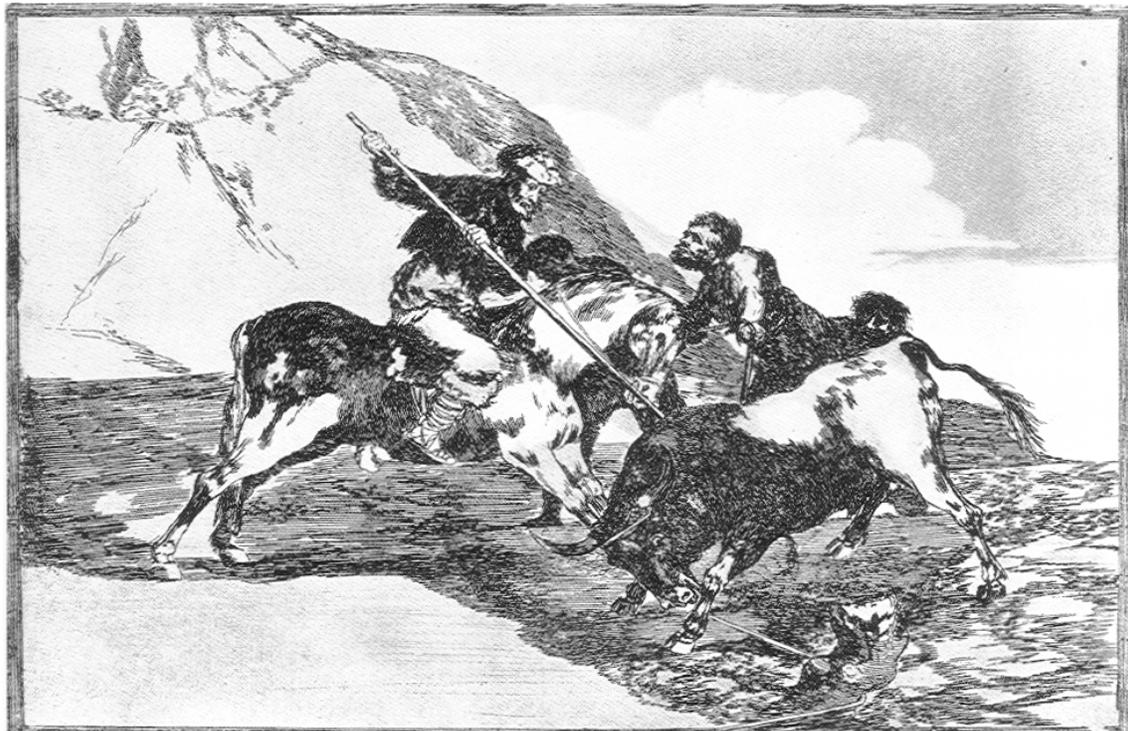


Act III

Carmen, José, Frasquita, Mercédès, and the smugglers have camped in the mountains for the night. José regrets his decision to join the smugglers, knowing that he has let his mother down and dishonored his

uniform. Carmen taunts him. Meanwhile, Mercédès and Frasquita amuse themselves telling their fortune with cards. Carmen also spreads the cards to read her own fortune, but she repeatedly draws ones which predict her death. Dancaïro enters and asks the three women to come with him and distract the customs officials while he sneaks the illegal goods through the mountain pass. José stays behind the guard the camp.

As daylight breaks, Micaëla appears. Searching for José, hoping to convince him to return home with her, she spots him as he is firing his rifle at Escamillo, whom he mistakes for a customs official. Micaëla hides in terror, and Escamillo, who has actually come to look for Carmen, enters. Initial friendliness between him and José soon turns to jealousy and leads to fighting, but Carmen enters and stops the fight. Escamillo leaves after inviting Carmen to his next bullfight and José turns on her in a jealous rage. Remendado discovers Micaëla hiding place and drags her out. When Don José learns from Micaëla that his mother is dying, he agrees to leave with her, but he warns Carmen that he is not finished with her and that she will see him again.



Act IV

Outside the bullfight in Seville, the crowd is in a festive mood. Carmen and Escamillo enter arm in arm. Frasquita and Mercédès warn Carmen that they have seen Don José in the crowd, but she refuses to worry about what he might do. After the procession of bull fighters and

officials has led the crowd into the arena, Carmen remains outside to wait for Don José. He appears and begs Carmen to return to him. Carmen tells José that she will never go back to him because she is now in love with Escamillo. José refuses to let her go and she angrily throws the ring he gave her in his face. Furious, he stabs her, just as the crowd inside the arena roars in celebration of Escamillo's victory over the bull. As the crowd pours out of the arena, José collapses in grief over Carmen's lifeless body.

Characters (in order of appearance)

Moralès, *baritone*

Micaëla, *soprano*

Don José, *tenor*

Zuniga, *baritone*

Carmen, *mezzo-soprano*

Frasquita, *soprano*

Mercédès, *mezzo-soprano*

Lilas Pastia, *actor*

Escamillo, *baritone*

Bret Weston, Billings, MT

Carolyn Coefield, Billings, MT

Jeffrey Grant Kitto, Belgrade, MT

Dennis Rupp, Billings, MT

Heidi Rae, Belgrade, MT

Megan King, Kansas City, MS

Meghan Dibble, San Francisco, CA

Robert Port, Billings, MT

Christopher Holmes, Salt Lake City, UT



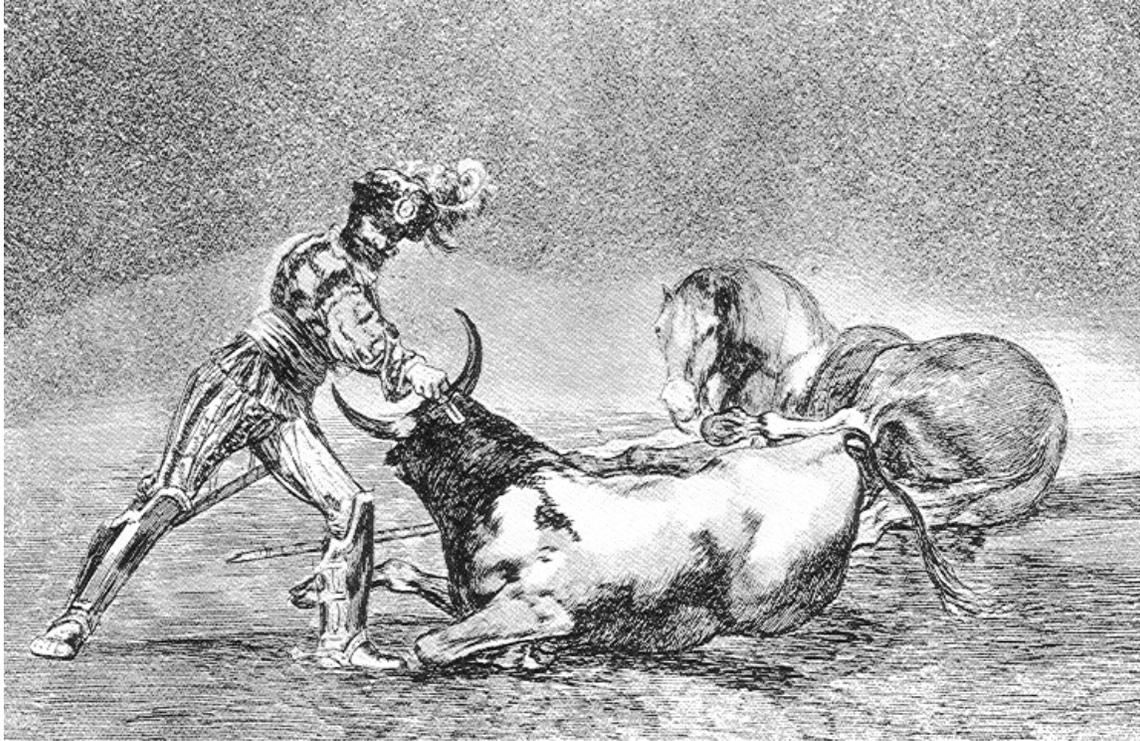
A bull fighter

El Dancaïro, *baritone*

El Remendado, *tenor*

Chris Sheppard, Billings, MT

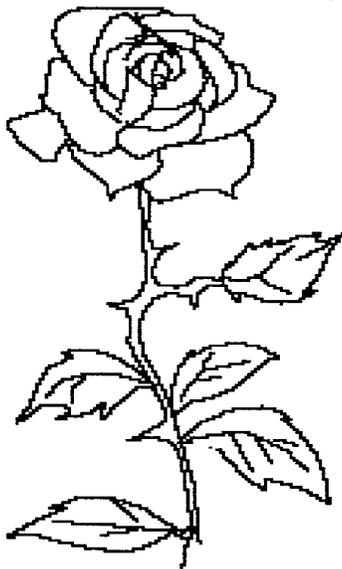
Isai Jess Muñoz, New York, NY



A bullfight

Conductor	Andy Anderson, Kansas City, MS
Director	Douglas Nagel, Billings, MT
Chorus Master	Dr. Chris Sheppard, Billings, MT
Children's Chorus Director	Amy Logan, Billings, MT
Rehearsal Pianist	Sandi Rabas, Billings, MT
Stage Manager	Stephen Baker, Palm Springs, CA
Technical Director	Randy Jordan, Billings, MT
Wigs/Make-up	Angela Stidham, Billings, MT
Stage Props	Lucinda Butler, Billings, MT
Costume Director	Jill Port, Billings, MT
Lighting Designer	Alex Heyneman, Absorakee, MT
Sets	Stivanello Sets, New York
Costumes	Westendorf Costumes, Keota, IA
Orchestra Players	Rimrock Opera Orchestra
Orchestra Manager	Richele Sitton, Billings, MT
Orchestra Technician	Jack Webb, Billings, MT

Bizet's Carmen Word Find



BULLRING	ESCAMILLO	SEVILLE
CARMEN	FRASQUITA	SPAIN
CIGARETTE	MERCEDES	TAVERN
DANCAIRO	MICAELA	TOREADOR
DONJOSE	MORALES	ZUNIGA
DRAGONS	REMENDADO	

Heidi Rae, *mezzo-soprano* Carmen

Heidi Rae's passion for music started at a young age and has led her to excited singer opportunities. Originally from Central Montana, Heidi Rae got her career start fresh out of college with Rimrock Opera singing the role of Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*. She has performed professionally for various companies along the western United States including Opera San José, Opera Idaho, and internationally acclaimed Baz'Luhrmann's *Bohème on Broadway*. Leading roles she has premiered include Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mercedes in *Carmen*, and featured soloist for multiple symphonies in the Montana area. Heidi Rae recently completed her masters in vocal performance and a teaching certification in music from the University of Idaho. She currently lives in Gallatin County where she teaches vocal lessons, writes music, directs choir, and offers music programs to area children. This is Heidi Rae's debut in this title role.

Jeffrey Grant Kitto, *tenor*

Don José

Jeffrey Kitto made his Rimrock Opera main stage debut as Nemorino in *Elixir of Love*. Jeffrey was most recently seen performing on Wyoming Public Television singing Vaughn Williams *Hodie* and before that sang for the Spokane Opera in their “Hot August Night” concert series. In previous engagements, Jeffrey sang Rodolfo in *La bohème* with Rose Opera, Portland, as well as the Helena Symphony. Some of Mr. Kitto’s more recent roles also include Rinnuccio in Opera Theater of Oregon’s production of *Gianni Schicchi*, covering Tamino in the Intermountain Opera Association’s production of *The Magic Flute*, Pirelli in *Sweeney Todd*, El Remendado in *Carmen*, and Normanno in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. A native of Montana, Jeffrey completed his bachelor’s degree in music from MSU-Bozeman, where he performed roles in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Old Maid and the Thief*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *L’Orfeo*, *Così fan tutte*, *La bohème*, *Miss Saigon*, and *Rent*, among others. A multiple recipient of The Metropolitan Opera Auditions National Council Awards as well as a past winner of the National Association of Teachers of Singing Artist Award, Mr. Kitto was a five-year scholarship recipient of the Intermountain Opera Association while studying with well-known clinicians Lowell Hickman and Dr. David Cody. Jeffrey was a founding member of national recording artists, *The Clintons*, with whom he performed, toured, and helped release two albums including their 2002 release of the album.



A modern day bull fight

Suggested Recordings and Videos

RCA Gold Seal 6199-2 (3 CDs)

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra & Chorus. Herbert von Karajan, conductor

London 414489-2 (3 CDs)

London Philharmonic Orchestra. Sir George Solti, conductor

DG 427440-2 (3CDs)

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Leonard Bernstein, conductor

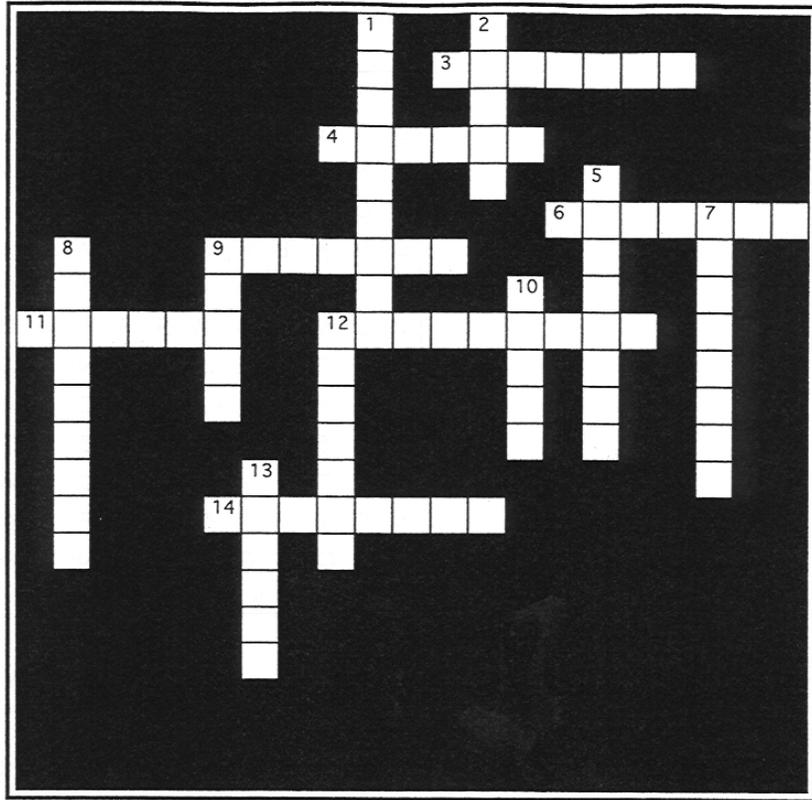
Kultur 6

Royal Opera House Video. Zubin Mehta, conductor

DG 72509

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra Video. James Levine, conductor

Carmen Crossword



ACROSS

- 3 Mom says to marry her.
- 4 Troublemaker
- 6 The girls work in one.
- 9 City where Jose and Carmen meet.
- 11 The captain of the guard.
- 12 Escamillo and Micaela encounter
Don Jose in the _____.
- 14 A Bull fighter en Espagnol.

DOWN

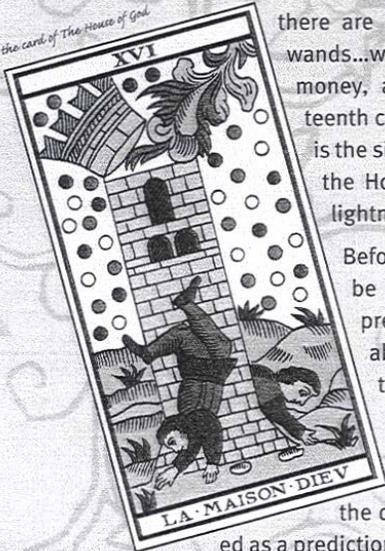
- 1 He almost loses his life twice in the hills.
- 2 He died before ever knowing his opera was a smash hit.
- 5 The popular name of Carmen's first aria.
- 7 We hear this before the curtain rises.
- 8 Doncairo and Remendado can be classified as these.
- 9 Where the opera takes place.
- 10 Where the opera had its premiere.
- 12 He wrote the original story.
- 13 Carmen tells Don Jose to go to her.

Carreau! Pique!...La Mort!

Gypsies had many ways to tell fortunes, including crystal balls and palm reading, but the use of Tarot cards was the most important. In the Act III card scene Carmen reads her own cards and comes up with a prediction of death. A real Gypsy would have used Tarots, but Bizet used traditional cards, setting the words "Carreau! Pique!...La Mort!" (Diamonds! Spades! Death!). Legend has it that the original Carmen, Celestine Galli-Marié, used real Tarot cards and drew the death card on the night Bizet died. She was so shaken that she became faint.

The twenty-two numbered Tarot cards trace the history of the gypsy migration from India to Europe. Like our contemporary cards there are four suits...cups, tentacles, swords and wands...which correspond to matters of the heart, money, aggression and spirituality. The thirteenth card is the death card but the worst card is the sixteenth card, the tower, which depicts the House of God being struck to ruin by lightning.

Before cards are dealt, a question must be posed, then the spread of cards is interpreted by a reader. The meaning of a card is not absolute, but read in the context of the question and subject to interpretation. A card can be read as a firm prediction of the future, or it can be a warning...something that might happen if the person does not change. Carmen sees the death card as her fate, unchangeable and absolute, but the card does not always mean death. It can also be interpreted as a prediction of a life-altering transition, as in the passing of something that must end in order to pave the way for gain.



BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE...

Discuss how a live performance is different from seeing a performance on television or film.

Explain to the students that they may not understand every word, especially when Characters sing extremely high or when two or more characters are singing at the same time. Encourage them to listen for the sense of each song and to remain especially attentive when the voice gets higher or louder or when the music becomes more complex.

Explain to the students that the repetition found in opera texts serves an important purpose – words you miss the first time become clear when they are repeated several times. Repetition also adds significance to important words and phrases.

Prepare the students to be a good audience. Talk about appropriate theater etiquette – the importance of being quiet so as not to disturb the other audience members or performers; waiting for the music to end before applauding.

GLOSSARY OF OPERA TERMS....

Aria	a solo song in Opera
Bravo	often used by audience members after an exceptional performance
Blocking	Specific movements given by the stage director
Composer	the person who writes the music for the opera
Director	the person who supervises all stage movement
Duet	A song for two people
Ensemble	A piece of music for multiple singers
Finale	the musical piece in an act or opera
Libretto	the script of an opera or the words that the singers sing

OPERA VOICE TYPES...

Soprano	the highest female voice
Mezzo-soprano	the middle female voice type
Alto	the lowest female voice type
Tenor	the highest male voice type
Baritone	the middle male voice type
Bass	the lowest male voice type

Write “Dear Abby” Letters. After reading the following letters, have the students respond, offering advice.

Dear Abby,

**I am 18 years old and my best friend is a mess! She is involved with one guy but always flirting with all the other guys. Meanwhile her ‘first’ boyfriend is starting to act really weird – showing up at unexpected times, threatening her and anyone she’s with, following her around. Honestly, I’m scared for her safety. What should I do?
Signed, Confused**

Dear Abby,

**I used to date this guy and have figured out that we’re just not right for each other. I’ve tried to break it off, but he won’t let the relationship go. He’s been following me around and scaring off other guys that I want to out with. I can’t go on like this. I feel like he’s always watching me. What do I do?
Signed, Help!**

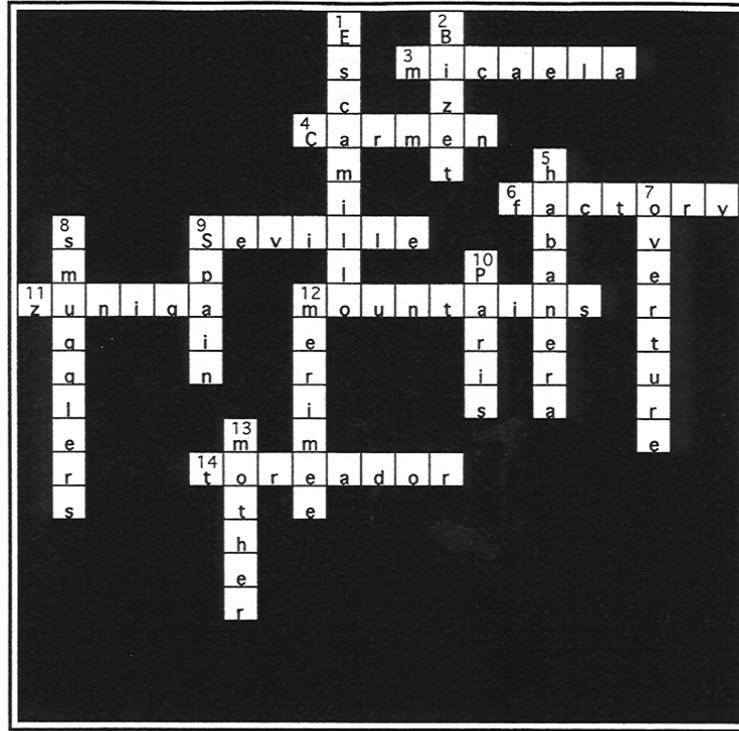
Dear Abby,

**I’m a guy who falls for a girl who is sweet to me. My current girl friend was at first, very friendly to me, and now sees another guy. Just like that she dumped me. Should I fight for her, or let her go?
Signed, Hooked!**

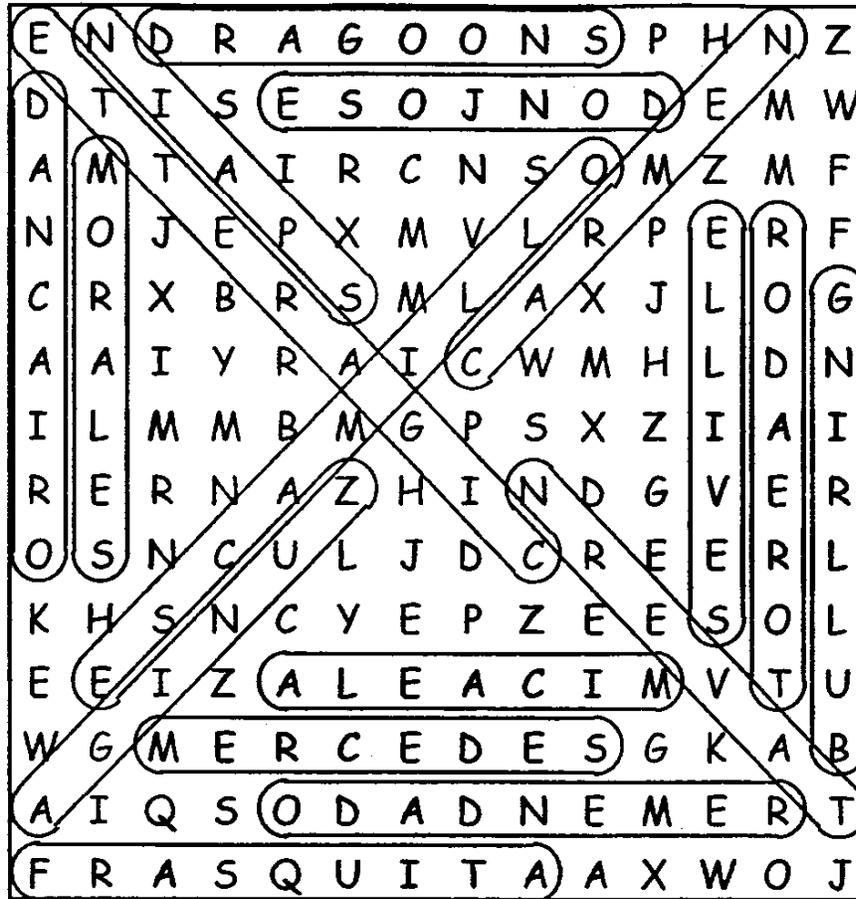
Topics to Study:

- **Gypsies**
- **Toreadors**
- **Bullfights**
- **Seville, Spain**
- **Tarot Cards**

Carmen Crossword Key



Carmen Wordsearch Key



BULLRING
 CARMEN
 CIGARETTE
 DANCAIRO
 DONJOSE
 DRAGOONS

ESCAMILLO
 FRASQUITA
 MERCEDES
 MICAELA
 MORALES
 REMENDADO

SEVILLE
 SPAIN
 TAVERN
 TOREADOR
 ZUNIGA