



Bizet · CARMEN

Carmen

Music by Georges Bizet
Story by Henri Meilhac & Ludovic Halévy

Teacher-Student Study Guide

**Rimrock Opera Company, Billings, Montana
Final Dress Rehearsal
October 24, 2002, 12 NOON**



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

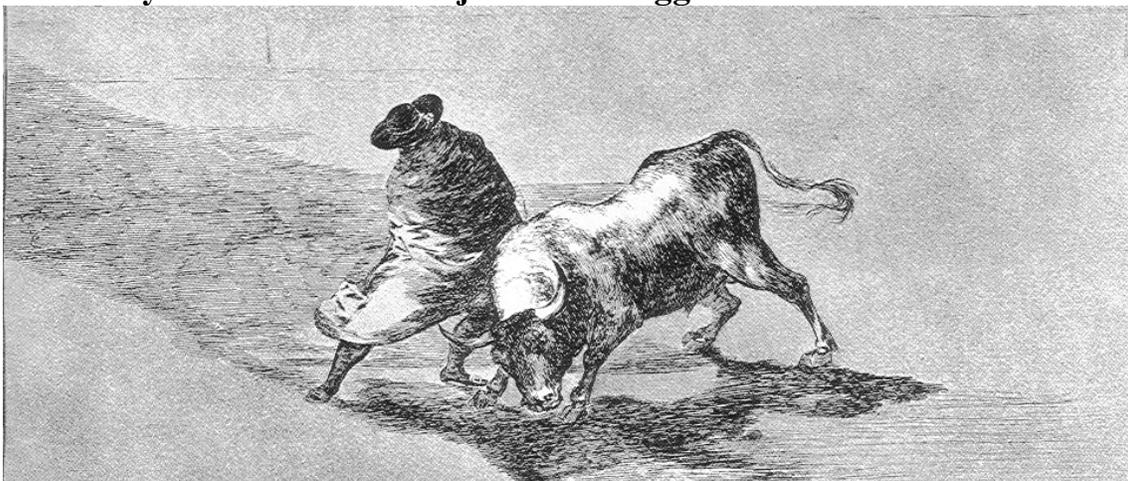
Act II

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.

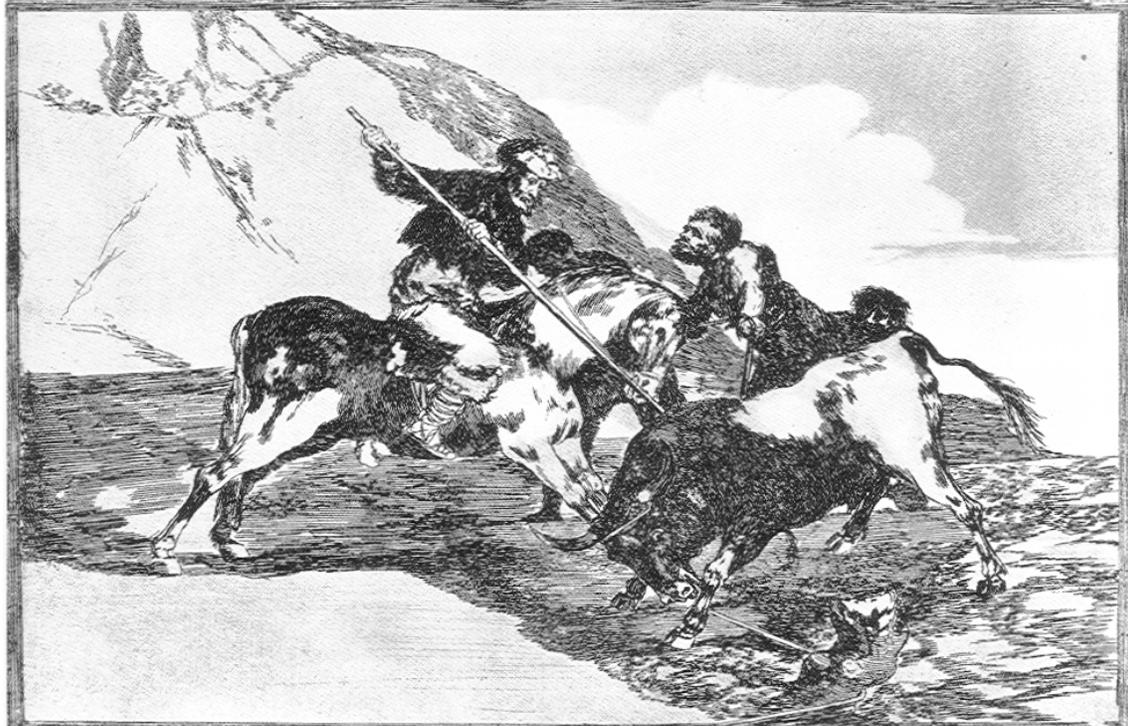
In spite of José's protest, Carmen ridicules him and a terrible argument breaks out. Zuniga returns to the tavern and orders José to of to the barracks. José's jealousy toward Zuniga is aroused and he provokes a fight. The smugglers intervene, disarming Zuniga and holding him captive. Having assaulted 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*

Alex Scopino, New York
Leslie Mauldin, Boise, ID
Kenneth Gayle, Chicago, IL
Gregory Paul Johnson, Billings, MT
Michelle Berger, Billings, MT & Zurich, Switzerland
Gretchen Mundigner, Helena, MT

Mercédès, *mezzo-soprano*
Lilas Pastia, *actor*
Escamillo, *baritone*

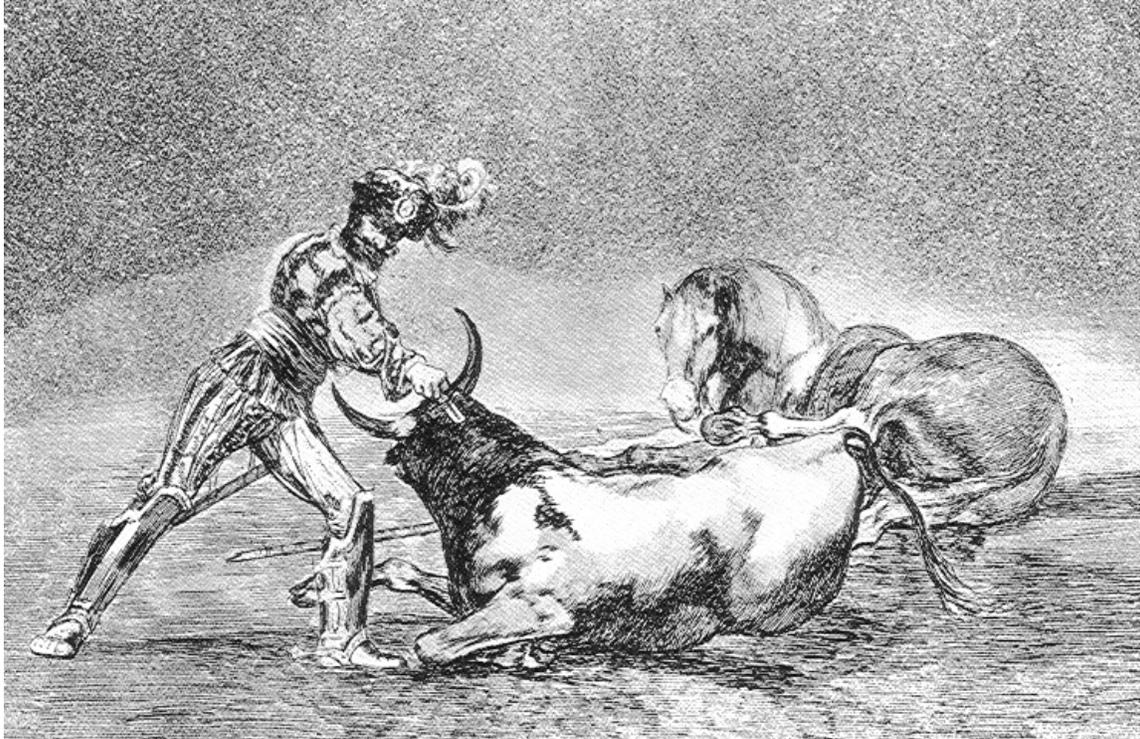
Jennifer Cooper, Billings, MT
TBA
Jan Michael Kliever, Powell, WY



A bull fighter

El Dancaïro, *baritone*
El Remendado, *tenor*

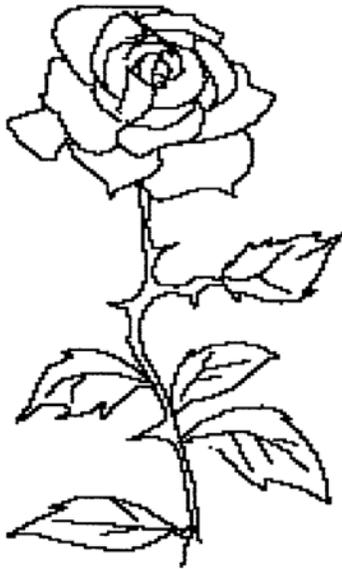
Joseph Massman, Helena, MT
Shawn Rasch, Billings, MT



A bullfight

Conductor	Dean Williamson, Seattle, WA
Director	Douglas Nagel, Billings, MT
Chorus Master	David Barnett, Billings, MT
Assistant Director	Dorinda Doolittle, Medford, OR
Rehearsal Pianist	Sandi Rabas, Billings, MT
Stage Manager	Bernard Rose, Billings, MT
Technical Director	Jeff Boschee, Billings, MT
Wigs/Make-up	Danyale Cook, Boise, ID
	Gerri Englert, Billings, MT
Stage Props	Deanne Leckie, Billings, MT
Costumes	Pro Eto Costumes, Austin, TX
Sets	Stivanello Sets, New York
Orchestra Players	Rimrock Opera Orchestra

Bizet's Carmen Word Find



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

Soprano Michelle was born in Billings, Montana, graduated from West High School and studied vocal performance and theater, first at the University of Montana and, then at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Following this, she continued her vocal studies in Vienna, Austria. She has lived in Europe for a number of years, mostly in Switzerland which accounts for her fluency in the German language. Ms Berger has been a soloist with, among others, the Girona Music Festival in Spain, Colorado Opera Festival, and Central City Opera. She has performed such roles as Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*), Mercédès (*Carmen*), Maddalena (*Rigoletto*), Marcellina (*The Marriage of Figaro*), and the Witch (*Rapunzel*). Following a fach change from lyric mezzo to dramatic mezzo, the roles Ms Berger now sings are: Ulrica (*The Masked Ball*), Azucena (*The Troubadour*), Dalila (*Samson & Dalila*), Carmen (*Carmen*), and Erda (*Das Rheingold*). As a concert artist, Ms

Berger has performed Vivaldi's *Gloria*, the Beethoven's *Chorale Fantasie*, Schubert's *Mass in A-Flat*, Mozart's *Spatzenmesse* and *Krönungsmesse*, to name a few. Ms Berger has been a prize winner in several competitions, including those of the National Association of Music Teachers, and the Metropolitan Opera Auditions.



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

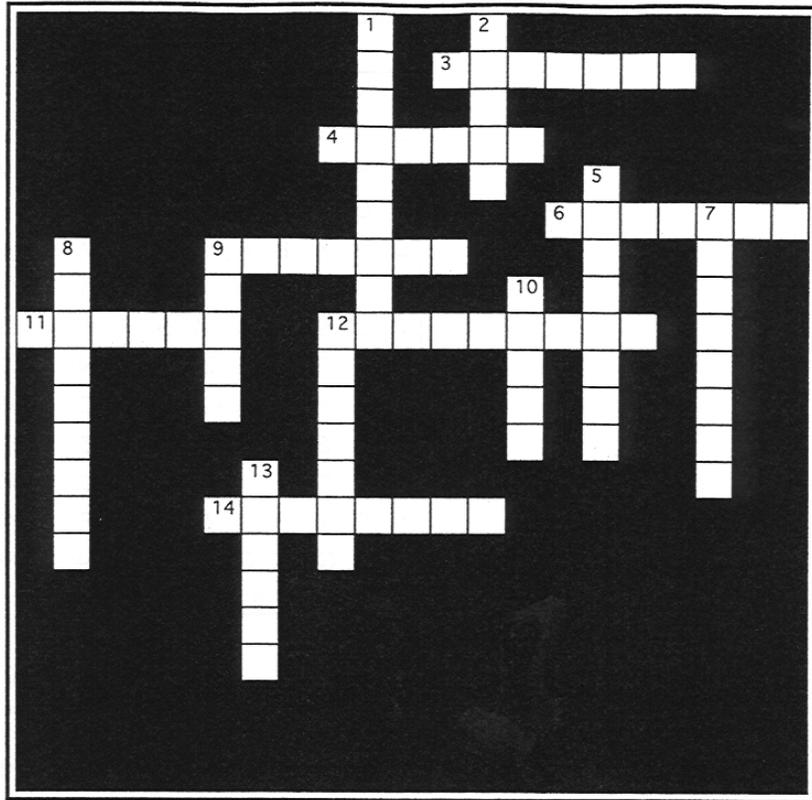
Kultur 6

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

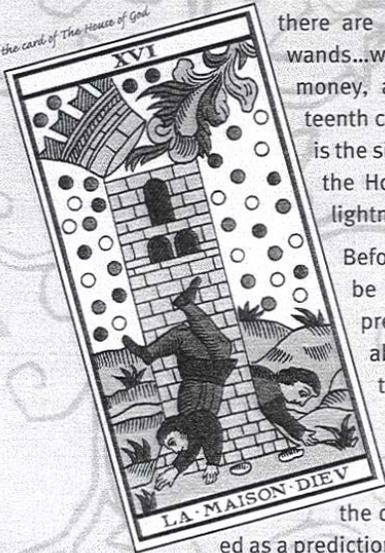
- 1 He almost loses his life twice in the hills.
- 2 He died before ever knowing his opera was a smash hit.
- 5 The popular name of Carmen's first aria.
- 7 We hear this before the curtain rises.
- 8 Doncairo and Remendado can be classified as these.
- 9 Where the opera takes place.
- 10 Where the opera 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!**

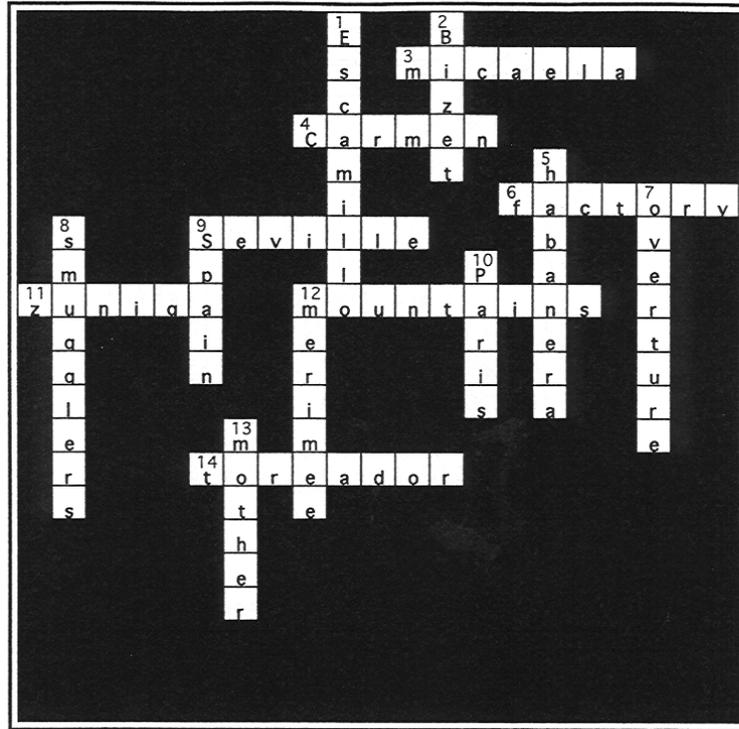
Dear Abby,

**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!**

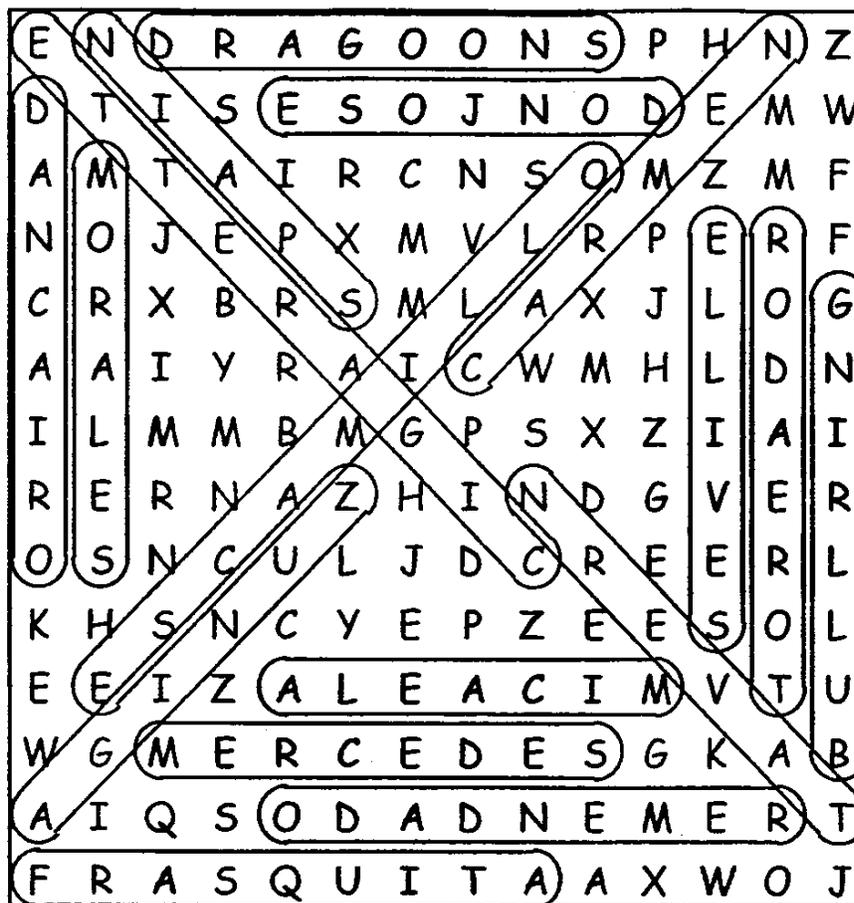
Topics to Study:

- **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