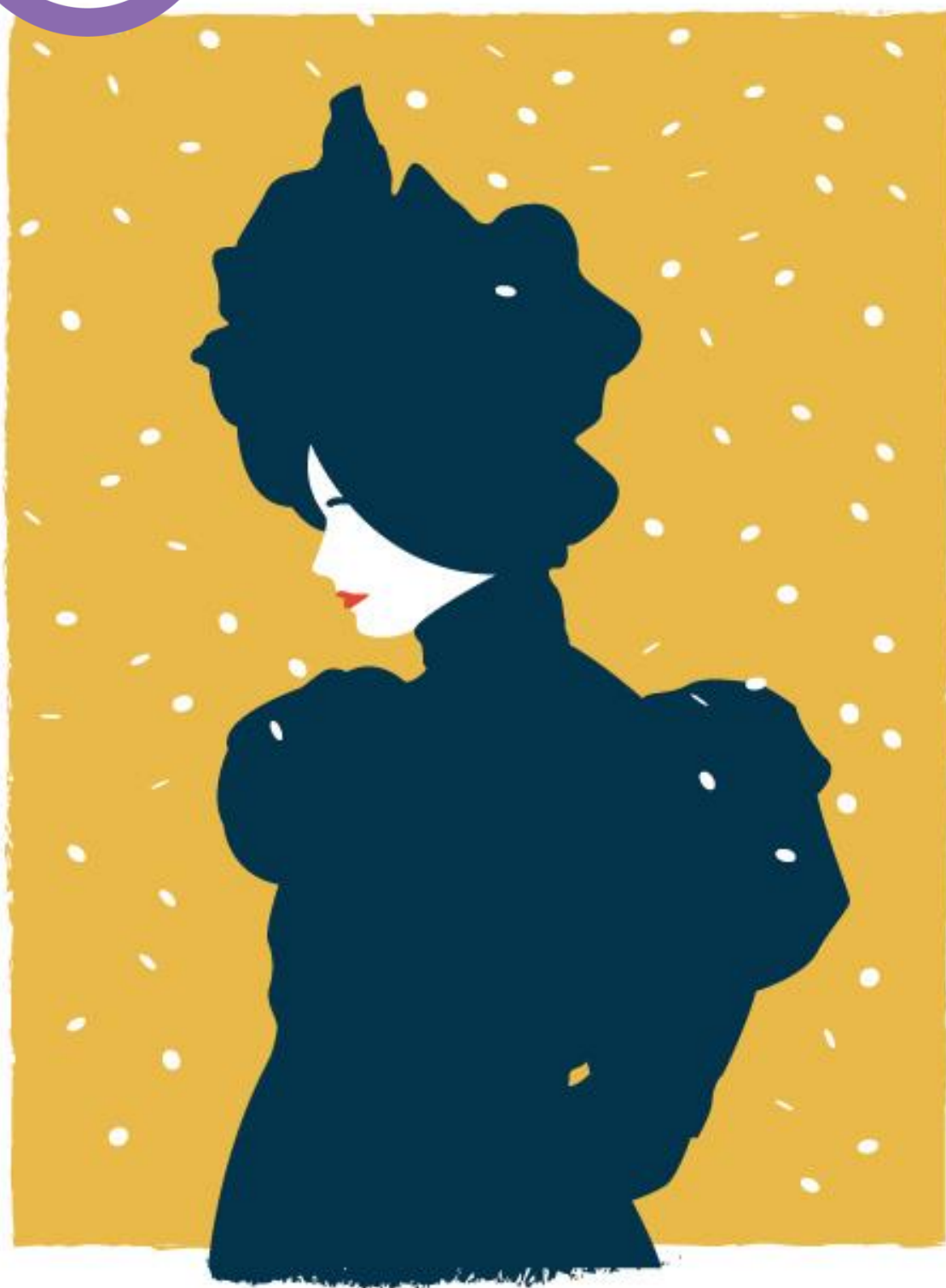




**OPERA**  
**COLORADO**



LA BOHÈME 

**2017-2018 GUIDEBOOK**

# A Letter to the Teachers

Dear Teachers,

Opera Colorado is pleased to provide engaging educational programs and performances for students across Colorado. What follows is a guide that we hope you and your students find useful, as we explore Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*. In the spirit of exploration, we have included various lessons that connect *La Bohème* with different subjects of learning. The lessons reference the new Colorado Department of Education's Academic Standards: specifically, focusing on the fourth grade expectations. This does not mean, however, that these lessons should be limited to this age group. While we would be very pleased if you used these lessons in the exact format provided, we encourage you to expand, alter, and adapt these lessons so that they best fit your students' abilities and development. After all, the teacher knows their student's needs best. We would appreciate your feedback on our teacher evaluation form found at the end of this guide, and we hope that you enjoy all that Opera Colorado has to offer!

*Thank you!*

*Opera Colorado makes every effort to ensure that the information provided in this guidebook is as accurate as possible. With the exception of materials used for educational purposes, none of the contents of this guidebook may be reprinted without the permission of Opera Colorado's Education & Community Programs department. Dictionary definitions were taken from [www.Merriam-Webster.com](http://www.Merriam-Webster.com), and unless marked otherwise, educational information was gathered from [www.Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com). Unless otherwise noted, the materials in the *La Bohème* guidebook were developed and compiled by the Manager of Education and Community Engagement, Parisa Zaeri.*



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# La Bohème

**Music by Giacomo Puccini – Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa & Luigi Illica**

based on the novel *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* by Henri Murger

Premiered in Turin, Italy, on February 1, 1896

**Rodolfo**.....a poet.....tenor  
(roh-DOHL-foh)

**Mimi**.....a seamstress.....soprano  
(mee-MEE)

**Marcello**.....a painter.....baritone  
(mar-CHEHL-loh)

**Musetta**.....a singer.....soprano  
(moo-ZEHT-tah)

**Schaunard**.....a musician.....baritone  
(shoh-NAHR)

**Colline**.....a philosopher.....bass  
(koh-LEE-neh)

**Benoît**.....the landlord.....bass  
(ben-WAH)

**Alcindoro**.....a state councillor.....bass  
(ahl-cheen-DOH-roh)

**Parpignol**.....a toy vendor.....tenor  
(par-peen-YOHL)

**A customs Sargeant**.....bass

*Students, working girls, townsfolk, shopkeepers, street-vendors, soldiers, waiters, children*

# Synopsis



**Act I** In their tiny abysmal one-room attic apartment in Paris' Latin Quarter, the painter Marcello and his poet friend Rodolfo tear pages from Rodolfo's latest literary work and throw them into the small stove, hoping to keep the fire burning long enough to make it through the cold Christmas Eve night. Their roommates Colline (a philosopher) and Schaunard (a musician) return home with food to eat, wine to drink, cigars to smoke, fuel to burn, and a bit of money collected from an eccentric man who hired Schaunard to play the violin to his dying parrot.

Benoit, the landlord, stops by to collect the rent, and the four young men get him a little tipsy on wine then kick him out. The boys decide to go out Cafe Momus, but Rodolfo stays behind to write, promising to catch up with them later. After everyone leaves, Mimi, their pretty neighbor knocks at their door. Rodolfo opens the door to find that Mimi's candlelight has blown out.

After he relights it for her, she realizes she has lost her key. As they frantically look for it, both of their candles blow out.

They continue to look for her key within the room lit only by the moonlight. When their hands accidentally touch, something comes over Rodolfo. He tells Mimi about his dreams in the aria "Che gelida manina." In return, she tells him that she used to live alone in a small loft apartment where she would embroider flowers while waiting for the blossoms of springtime.

In the streets below the window, Rodolfo's roommates shout at him to join them. Rodolfo hollers back that he will be with them shortly. Mimi and Rodolfo are happy to be with each other and they set out to the cafe hand in hand.

**Act II** Rodolfo happily brings Mimi inside the cafe to introduce her to his friends. Moments later, Musetta, Marcello's former lover, makes her grand entrance while hanging on the arm of a wealthy elderly man named Alcindoro. Musetta has clearly grown tired of the old man's affections and resorts to attracting Marcello's attention instead. Finally after singing her famous aria, "Quando m'en vo," she is able to rid herself of Alcindoro and fall back into Marcello's arms. When it is discovered that none of them has the money to pay for their meal, Musetta tells their waiter to charge everything to Alcindoro's account. With the sight of a group of soldiers marching past the cafe's windows, the bohemian friends quickly depart. Alcindoro returns to the table only to find a bill.

Photos from Opera Colorado's 2010 production of *La Bohème*





**Act III** In a tavern on the edge of Paris' city limits, Mimi wanders in while searching for Marcello and Musetta's new home. It isn't long until Marcello arrives and speaks with her. Mimi is concerned for Rodolfo.

Ever since they fell in love, he has been extremely jealous. She tells Marcello she feels it is in their best interest if they separate for a while. Meanwhile, Rodolfo has made his way down to the same tavern. When he enters, Mimi quickly departs, but instead of leaving, she hides in a nearby corner while Marcello and Rodolfo are unaware.

Rodolfo pulls up a seat next to Marcello and tells him that he wants to separate from Mimi.

Marcello questions his reasoning and Rodolfo replies that he can't stand her sudden mood swings. Marcello doubts Rodolfo is being honest and pressures him into telling the truth. Rodolfo breaks down and confesses he fears for Mimi's life. She is constantly coughing and he believes their poverty is only making things worse. Mimi is overcome with sorrow and comes out of hiding to wish her lover a fond farewell.

Together, they remember their past happiness. Marcello, on the other hand, catches Musetta flirting with a strange man. He leaves the tavern with her as they hurl insults at each other. Mimi and Rodolfo stay behind and make a pact to stay together until spring, after which they can separate.



**Act IV** Several months have passed and blossoms are emerging from the dormant earth. Marcello and Rodolfo find themselves in their apartment alone as their girlfriends left weeks before. Colline and Schaunard enter with a small meal, and it is decided among them that they will lighten their spirits with a lively dance. All of a sudden Musetta barges into the apartment informing them that Mimi awaits on the street below, too weak to climb the stairs. Rodolfo rushes down to greet her and carries her back up to their apartment.



Musetta hands Marcello her earrings while asking him to sell them so that she can buy medicine for Mimi. The other men clamor together to find things to sell and they all quickly rush down to the crowded streets. The two lovers are left alone and they think about the first time they met. Their memories are interrupted with violent fits of coughing. Finally, everyone returns, but Mimi's condition worsens. She drifts in and out of consciousness while Rodolfo holds her in his arms. Moments pass before he realizes that Mimi is no longer breathing. In his grief, he lays over her lifeless body while calling out her name.

*adapted from [www.thoughtco.com](http://www.thoughtco.com)*

# Giacomo Puccini

## COMPOSER



*“Art is a kind of illness.”*

*Giacomo Puccini*

Giacomo Puccini was born on December 22, 1858, in Lucca, Italy. Like many great composers, Puccini was born into a musical family, and it was expected that he would take on the legacy of being the organist and composer at the Cathedral of San Martino just as his father had done. Oddly enough though, Puccini showed very little interest in music as a boy and wasn't a particularly brilliant student in school either. However, his mother, Albina, refused to give up on him and enrolled him in studies with a tutor at the local music school. Over time, he began to show signs of progress, and by the age of 14, he had gone on to fulfill his family's legacy as the organist of San Martino.

Puccini's career trajectory forever changed when he and one of his brothers attended a performance of Verdi's *Aida*. They walked nearly twenty miles to the nearby city of Pisa to see this production. It was this experience that planted the seeds of what would eventually become a lucrative career in opera.

Motivated by his newly-sparked passion, Puccini threw all of his efforts towards his music in his early 20's. He gained admittance into the Milan Conservatory and studied with several notable teachers during his three years there. His first attempt at opera came shortly after his graduation, when he composed the one-act

*La villi* for a local competition. Though the judges weren't too impressed, both Puccini and his work found a loyal following who ultimately funded the premier of this work at the Teatro dal Verme in Milan in 1884.

It was this premier that caught the ear of well-known publisher Giulio Ricordi. Ricordi then commissioned Puccini to compose an opera to be performed at La Scala, one of the most famous and historic opera houses in the world. This work, titled *Edgar*, was a total flop, but even so, this did not shake Ricordi's faith in the young composer. The failure was blamed on the poor libretto – the text of the opera – and so Puccini was determined to find himself some excellent writers with whom to collaborate on his next venture. With his successful premier of *Manon Lescaut* in 1893, he finally felt that he'd found the perfect writers: Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica.

Puccini's next three compositions would be arguably the most important of his entire career. Between 1896-1904, Puccini composed *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*. *La Bohème* was premiered in Turin in 1896 and was incredibly successful. The composer's fame continued to spread internationally, and he spent the next few years traveling the world to ensure that each of his productions were held to the same high standards set in their premiers.

# Giacomo Puccini

COMPOSER  
[continued]

While dealing with ongoing personal crises in his life – particularly those pertaining to his love life – Puccini continued to compose. Between 1910 and 1920, he wrote *The Girl of the Golden West* (which Opera Colorado presented in its 2016-2017 season), *Il Trittico*, *La Rondine*, and *Turandot*. Though the first three of this list are not as well-known as some of his other works, *Turandot* (which he began composing in 1920) was Puccini's last attempt to achieve the fame and glory he had previously seen. Though he passed away before he could realize his ambitions with this work, it remains one of the most popular pieces in operatic repertoire today.

In 1923, after complaining of a sore throat for quite some time, Puccini finally sought medical advice. The diagnosis turned out to be worse than expected: Puccini was suffering from throat cancer. He traveled to Brussels in 1924 for an experimental radiation treatment, but by that point, he was too weak to endure the procedure and died in the hospital a week later. He left behind 23 pages of manuscripts for *Turandot* which one of his contemporaries, Franco Alfano, eventually finished for him. At the time of his death, Puccini had become the most commercially successful opera composer, worth the equivalent of almost \$200 million.

*adapted from [www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com)*





# Luigi Illica & Giuseppe Giacosa

## LIBRETTISTS

A **librettist** is a person who writes the text of an opera. Puccini's collaboration with librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa was likely one of the most successful in the history of Italian opera! Check out the facts below to learn about each man's active career.



**Luigi Illica** began his literary career in 1879 in Milan, Italy. He was immediately productive and released a collection of prose sketches titled *Farfalle, effetti di luce* in 1882. He followed this with the completion of his first play, *I Narbonnier-Latour*, just one year later. His most successful play wouldn't come until almost ten years later, with the completion of *L'eredità di Felis* (1891).

Illica found himself more and more frequently occupied with librettos in 1889. While he is best known for the three librettos he completed for Puccini, he also wrote for several other composers as well, including Giordano and Mascagni. By the end of his career (marked by his enlisting in the military at age 58), Illica had worked on more than thirty librettos.

**Giuseppe Giacosa** began his career in law. He graduated with a law degree from Turin University and set out to work in his father's firm. His career officially shifted to literature when his one-act comedy, *Una partita a scacchi*, became a popular

success. At the same time, he also held the chair of literature and dramatic art at Milan University from 1888-1894.

With Ricordi having taken the young Puccini under his wing, he was determined to find the best writers for the composer, and he found them in both Illica and Giacosa. The three had a very clear division of responsibilities: Illica would set up an organizational plan for the opera (ie., the division of acts and scenes) and draft the dialogue, Giacosa would transform prose to verse, and Puccini would set the verse to music.

This collaboration ended with the death of Giacosa in 1906. For a time, Puccini continued to discuss plans of turning the story of Marie Antoinette into an opera with Illica, but the project never came to fruition. For his last few works, Puccini turned to other librettists.

# WHAT IS *verismo*?



*Verismo* is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century style of opera which depicts ordinary characters and emotions of its time. Subject matter began to stray away from mythical characters and creatures and instead was centered around life in lower classes, local customs, and regional dialect and idioms. The heroes of *verismo* operas were rural folk, poor city dwellers, and representatives of bohemianism. Although many scholars have argued that not all of Puccini's operas belong to the scope of *verismo*, *La Bohème* has long been recognized as one of the most successful examples of this style. It is "perfectly realistic" in depicting the lives of several impoverished artists living and working in Paris.

The main element of Puccini's musicodramatic writing has to do with his treatment of the subject matter. Puccini understood that great drama is not necessarily all action, movement, and conflict – it should also include moments of repose, contemplation, and lyricism. This kind of writing highlights the aim of *verismo*: to explain that life is more than a constant stream of events and to advocate for time for emotional reflection.



# the bohemians

**Webster's Dictionary** defines "bohemian" as "a person with artistic or literary interests who disregards conventional standards of behavior."

If you've never seen Puccini's *La Bohème*, you're likely to think that "bohemian" holds the modern-day definition of the word describing the bands of gypsies who appeared in Central Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, as you get to know each character (Rodolfo the writer, Marcello the painter, Schaunard the musician, Mimì the seamstress, and Musetta the courtesan), you may come to realize that the Puccinian *bohème* has basically nothing to do with gypsies! The characters in this opera are based on a novel by French writer Henri Murger titled *Scenes in the Life of a Bohemian*. Murger considered himself a Bohemian, and it is speculated that many of the characters in his story were inspired by his own friends.

The story takes place in Paris in 1830 at the height of Romanticism. Romanticism was a rejection of the rules and structure put in place during the Classical period and was based upon an individual's point of view, regardless of how antirational it may have seemed. In other words, why *think* when one can *feel*?

During this artistic revolution in the 1830s, artists could earn a legitimate living through their creative ventures. In *La Bohème*, Rodolfo is trying to sell his novel, Marcello is working on his masterpiece painting, and Schaunard returns from a gig with food and money. Women, however, had a much more difficult time prospering as part of the middle class, and often their only "outs" were marriage or prostitution.

As the period of Romanticism came to an end within the decade and society was driven more towards the Industrial Revolution, this artistic class of society was no longer able to make ends meet and would be the first ones to hold what we now consider to be "day jobs" in order to support their art.

*adapted from Portland Opera*

Oil on canvas by  
Octave Tassaert  
(1845)



# JOURNALING

## activity

Writers, artists, musicians, and dancers all participated in the bohemian lifestyle of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. If you were living during this time, which career path would you choose? Document your character's arrival in Paris and write a journal entry about your first month living as a bohemian.



# LISTENING

activity

Listen to some of the excerpts from *La Bohème* listed on the next page. See if you can guess what they're about before you read the descriptions provided. Did you guess any of them correctly? What tools did you use to understand even though the words are sung in Italian?



>> “Quando m’en vo” (“When I walk out”)

Musetta, Marcello’s ex-lover, walks into Café Momus on the arm her new, elderly boyfriend named Alcindoro. Once she realizes that Marcello is also at Momus, she strikes up a performance of this aria in order to grab his attention.



>>”Mimi! – Speravo di trovarvi qui” (“Mimi! – I was hoping to find you here”)

Mimi and Marcello chat about her crumbling relationship with Rodolfo due to his increasing jealousy. Marcello advises Mimi to leave him.



>>”Donde lieta uscì al tuo grido d’amore” (“From where she came at your call of love”)

Mimi overhears Marcello’s conversation with Rodolfo shortly after she leaves Marcello. Rodolfo claims to be upset with her constant mood swings, but ultimately admits that he must leave her because he feels that their poverty is worsening her illness. Mimi approaches Rodolfo to tell him that she is going to leave him. She asks him to gather her things but offers her pink bonnet to him as a memento of their time together.



>>”Che avvien? Nulla – Sto bene” (“What’s happening? – Nothing – I’m all right”)

As Mimi’s condition continues to worsen, Musetta gives her a muff to keep her hands warm. Mimi tries to reassure her friends that she is all right. Musetta prays for her, but in the end, Mimi succumbs to her illness.



# Mimi and CONSUMPTION

## WHAT IS IT?

"Consumption" – better known today as tuberculosis (TB) – is a highly contagious disease most notably affecting the lungs. It is contracted by breathing in infected sputum or drinking infected milk and was a common illness in the 1800s.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Night sweats, fever, fatigue, weight loss, and coughing up blood.

## OTHER REFERENCES TO CONSUMPTION IN OPERA

*La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi  
*Les Contes d'Hoffman* by Jacques Offenbach

## WHY CONSUMPTION?

Consumption was so common in the 1800s that it was often romanticized in arts culture. The phrase "femme fatale" came around during this time, which literally means "fatal woman." These TB-diagnosed women were considered particularly attractive, as their delicate health brought out the protective nature of men at the time. Women in the 1800s often had very few choices, and if they found themselves unmarried, they were more likely to be subject to poor health, poverty, and an untimely death. Sounds like the perfect set-up for an opera, doesn't it?

## MIMI AND CONSUMPTION

In the opera, Mimi's appearance is described as "pale cheeks red with their flush, pale skin, her consumptive cough, and her wasted frame." All of these signs point to how far her illness has already progressed. The first time she and Rodolfo meet, he immediately knows she is sick and is fearful for two reasons: 1) he knows he does not have the means to help her get well, and 2) he knows he could contract the disease from her.

## AND TODAY?

Modern-day treatment has essentially eliminated TB as a serious threat, but many poor artists in the 1800s could not afford medical care. How might the ending of *La Bohème* be different if Mimi could have received proper treatment?



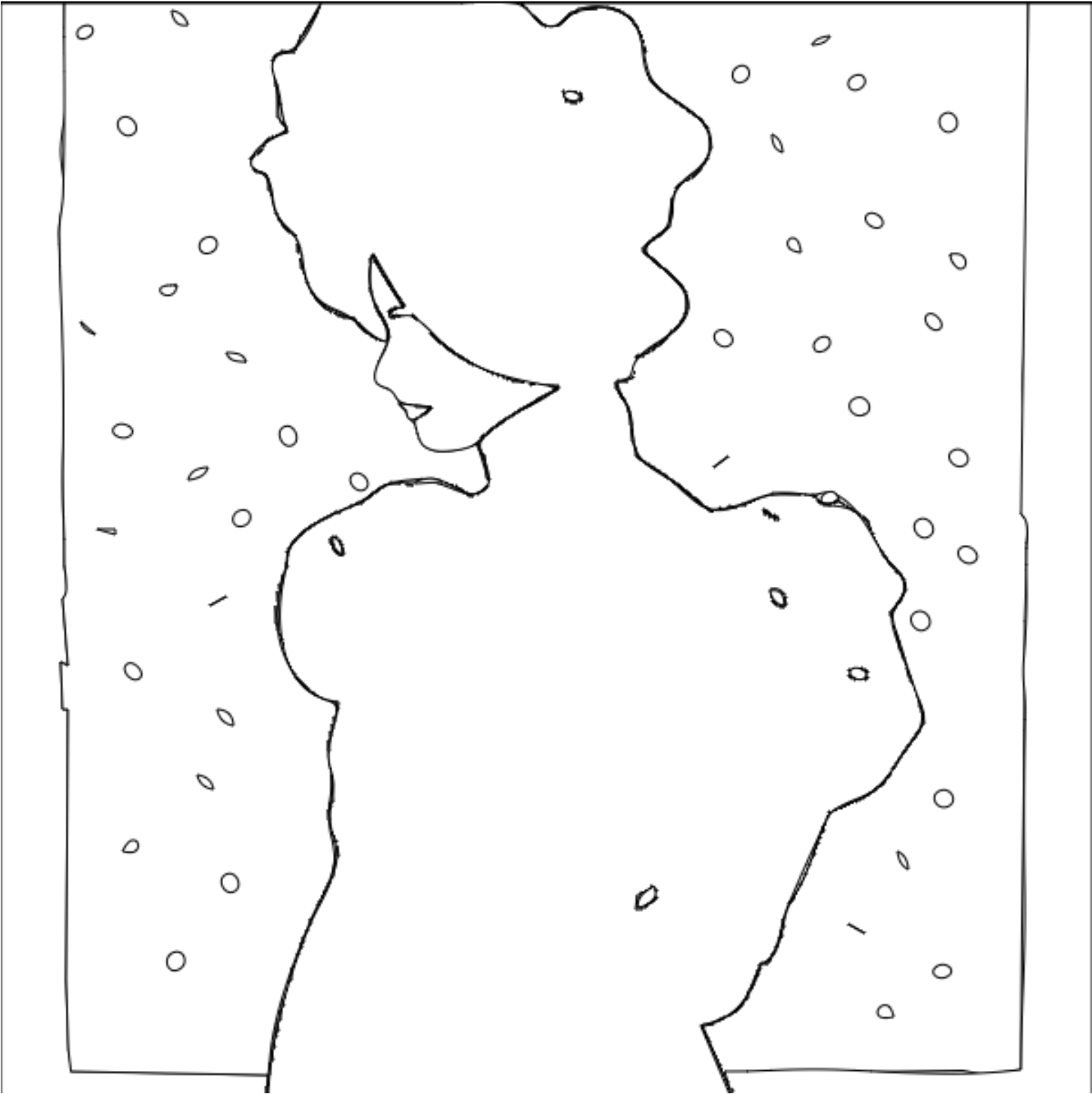
# BUDGETING

## activity

As Bohemian artists, Marcello, Rodolfo, Colline, and Schaunard all make very little money on which to live. How do you think they are able to make ends meet? Research costs of living in Paris in the 1800s and come up with a budget for the four roommates. How much money would they need to make from gigging and selling their art and manuscripts in order to still be able to enjoy a restaurant like Café Momus every once in a while?



Color your own *La Bohème* poster!



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Bohemian Word Search

D S E A M S T R E S S Z D A L  
R O D O L F O H C T Z F D L D  
E Z B H S Y G G B G V R V C V  
H A T S I T R A H T G C E I Q  
P N S I N G E R J S G S F N P  
O F E N I L L O C C F Z Y D Q  
S F M W N O I T P M U S N O C  
O H E N H N A I M E H O B R G  
L R T E O P L R P A R I S O M  
I M C A N D L E L I G H T A U  
H L I M I M D R A N U A H C S  
P T V N A I C I S U M P B W E  
C R O U V Y Z H H T B L J M T  
A W B O L L E C R A M C M I T  
B L O N G I P R A P E R D B A

MIMI	POET
MUSETTA	CANDLELIGHT
RODOLFO	CONSUMPTION
MARCELLO	
COLLINE	
SCHAUNARD	
PARPIGNOL	
ALCINDORO	
PARIS	
BOHEMIAN	
ARTIST	
MUSICIAN	
SEAMSTRESS	
SINGER	
PHILOSOPHER	

# Program Evaluation

Opera Colorado strives to provide quality programs that meet the needs of students and teachers across the state. Please take a few minutes to complete this evaluation and give us feedback on your experience. **Opera Colorado is also interested in your students’ response to the programs. We would be happy to receive any letters or artwork from them!**

Program:

☐ **La Boheme** (dress rehearsal)

☐ **Falstaff** Please circle one: (dress rehearsal / matinee)

☐ **Backstage Workshops** (Please circle one: Nov. 7 | Nov. 9 | Nov. 10 | May 7 | May 8 | May 11)

☐ **Touring Opera Performance** (Please circle one: *Cinderella* / *Elixir of Love*)

☐ **Opera in a Trunk** (Please name which trunk: \_\_\_\_\_)

☐ **In-School Workshop** (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

☐ **Other** (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

Is this your first time participating in Opera Colorado’s Education programs? YES / NO

If YES, what made you participate this year?

If NO, how many years have you been a participant?

Were you able to incorporate opera into your curriculum? YES / NO

If YES, please share how.

If NO, do you have suggestions?

Please estimate the percentage of your students who had never been exposed to Opera prior to this event: \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your students’ initial attitude toward exposure to Opera?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

*negative/unwilling**neutral**positive/excited*

Did their attitude change after learning more about opera and attending the event? If so, please show on the scale:

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

*negative/unwilling**neutral**positive/excited*

Was the Opera Colorado Teacher Guidebook helpful in preparing your students to attend the event?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

*not helpful**very helpful*

On a scale of 1 to 7, how would you rate the priority of Arts Education in your school?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7

*not important**very important*

Please share with us any additional comments you have. We especially love stories of how Opera impacted your students. Please use space on back if needed.

Thank you for your time and comments!

Name \_\_\_\_\_ School/Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Administrator \_\_\_\_\_ Paraprofessional \_\_\_\_\_ Parent / Chaperone \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

My students are: K-2 3-5 6-8 9-12 College