

Lesson C: Exploring Characters and Plot in *The Mikado*

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LESSON C: Exploring Characters and Plot in *The Mikado*

Duration	50 minutes. (After class field trip to see <i>The Mikado</i>)
Grade Levels	9-12
Subjects	Drama, Literature, English, Music

Classroom Study Materials

1. Worksheets C1, C2, C3 (included in this lesson)
2. Links to the Internet are provided as reference material. See the following at the end of this lesson
 - “*The Mikado* Plot Summary-Reference”
 - “*The Mikado*-References”
 - Optional: Libretto (“*The Mikado* -References”)
 - Optional: YouTube clips (“*The Mikado*-References”)
3. Computer Lab with access to the Internet

Goals and Objectives

1. Introduce students to the story of *The Mikado*.
2. Discuss the story line.
3. Guide students in character analysis and development.

Lesson Description

1. Students will have read copies of the *Mikado* Plot Summary, seen the show, and (optionally but strongly recommended) reviewed the libretto.
2. Hand out Worksheet C1 and C2.
3. Ask the students to analyze the story and complete Worksheet C1.
4. In a class discussion, identify the main characters of the story and complete Worksheet C2.
5. Assign Worksheet C3 as a homework assignment.

Assessment

1. Students will be exposed to the story of *The Mikado*.
2. Students should identify the storyline and climax (Worksheet C1).
3. Students should complete Character Development and Transformation (Worksheet C2).
4. Students should complete and discuss the Critique (Worksheet C3).
5. Students should compare elements of the story and characters to other dramatic works they have experienced or read.
6. Students should be able to discuss the importance of character development.
7. Optional: Students should write an essay discussing and critiquing the plot and character development.

WORKSHEET C1: *The Mikado* STORYLINE

Identify the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Make sure to identify the climax.

Beginning	
Middle	
End	

Identify the climax in the story. When did it happen?

Do elements in the plot or characters in *The Mikado* remind you of any other stories?

Are their recurring themes or ideas we can relate to in our society?

WORKSHEET C2: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION IN *The Mikado*

Identify in class discussion four major characters and fill in their major traits below:

Character:				
Beginning	Goal:	Goal:	Goal:	Goal:
	Obstacle:	Obstacle:	Obstacle:	Obstacle:
	Behavior:	Behavior:	Behavior:	Behavior:
	Emotional State:	Emotional State:	Emotional State:	Emotional State:
	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:
Middle	Goal:	Goal:	Goal:	Goal:
	Obstacle:	Obstacle:	Obstacle:	Obstacle:
	Behavior:	Behavior:	Behavior:	Behavior:
	Emotional State:	Emotional State:	Emotional State:	Emotional State:
	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:
End	Goal:	Goal:	Goal:	Goal:
	Obstacle:	Obstacle:	Obstacle:	Obstacle:
	Behavior:	Behavior:	Behavior:	Behavior:
	Emotional State:	Emotional State:	Emotional State:	Emotional State:
	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:	Musical Ideas:

DISCUSS: Did the characters stay the same throughout the story, or did they go through a transformation? If so, what was it?

WORKSHEET C3: CRITIQUE

Student's Name _____

Although *The Mikado* is ostensibly about an imaginary Japanese society, actually Gilbert was satirizing elements of British society that may be reflected in modern days as well. Identify three of these elements, and discuss whether they occur in modern societies. Is humor an effective way to bring these to our attention? Fill in your answers below.

EXTRA CREDIT:

Is there any part of the plot or characters you wish had been treated differently?

Which do you think best contribute to the humor of the show, the songs or the dialog?

References

The Mikado

YouTube Clips (From both professional and amateur productions)

Overture (Juneau Lyric Opera with rehearsal slides)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_OmpmiLVGg&feature=Playlist&p=CDC1CA24B006CB5E&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=1

Overture (Audio with slides from High School Production)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQ7ao_joics

If you Want to Know Who we Are

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IA1GgPrC0vk&feature=related>

A Wandering Minstrel & Our Great Mikado (non-traditional costumes)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcNtTm5XEFy>

I Am So Proud (traditional version with Martyn Green)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKLIWod7uiU&feature=player_embedded

I Am So Proud (with Eric Idle, Modern Costumes and a headless chorus!)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o957IzsqDec>

Lord High Executioner & I've Got a Little List (updated) & Comes a Train of Ladies:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A45xqLHccRo&feature=related>

Three Little Maids from School

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXWkizUPmDY>

Were You Not to Ko-Ko Plighted (several traditional and non-traditional interpolations)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJO7tdK5aBI&feature=related>

or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n28PTd0TLBI>

or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jd8P3YfLmuM&feature=related>

Young Man Go To

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBLhQrBkrY4>

Act I Finale (high school production in two parts)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBmDIA60_44&feature=related

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2fYrMoZj30&feature=related>

The Sun Whose Rays

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcNtTm5XEFy>

Madrigal

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4uZK80DwqM&feature=related>

Entrance & A More Humane Mikado

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0xamGC458g>

The Criminal Cried

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yflwnehelT8&feature=related>

See How the Fates Their Gifts Allot

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drtpOVU6WPU>

Here's a Howdy Do (+ dialog with Groucho Marx-audio)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lujYCLTeZWg>

The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring(plus dialog)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNF3DHDRDGO>

Tit Willow (traditional with John Reed)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sou331FNeU4>

Finale Act II

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahfRrWhI2d4>

Origins, Synopsis and History

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_mikado

Discography (list of Mikado recordings and videos):

<http://gasdisc.oakapplepress.com/mik.htm>

Libretto (Book)

ASCII File

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/libretto.txt>

1911 Edition with Illustrations

<http://www.archive.org/stream/mikadoortownofti00sulliala/page/6/mode/2up>

Music

Midi Files (Playable with Quicktime or any Midi Player)

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/webopera/index.html>

Audio Sample Files (short excerpts)

http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/html/mikado_real.html

Plot Summaries

Short summary

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/html/plotsum.html>

Summary with links to songs

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/html/summary.html>

Long Summary with Illustrations

http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/html/plot_summary.html

Costumes

1926 D'Oyly Carte production with many illustrations

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/carte/1926/index.html>

Book Excerpts

The Making of the Mikado

http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/html/make_mikado.html

The Japanese Opera

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/books/walbrook/chap10.html>

Gilbert and Sullivan History

Short history with emphasis on Mikado plus a discography

<http://www.classicalnotes.net/classics/mikado.html>

"Gilbert and Sullivan Opera, A History and Comment" (Online Book)

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/books/walbrook/index.html>

The Mikado Plot Summary

THE MIKADO

Or, The Town of Titipu

The Mikado is one of the most popular of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's "Savoy Operas." The original production ran 672 performances, remarkable for that period, is still widely popular with both amateur and professional groups, has been translated into numerous languages, and has become what may be the most frequently performed musical theatre piece in history. A movie version was made in 1939 starring Kenny Baker and Martyn Green, and the story of how the opera was made is told in the recent movie "Topsy-Turvy." Lengthy excerpts also appeared in the movies "Chariots of Fire," and "Foul Play." The Japanese setting supplies a colorful background, although, of course the characters are by no means Japanese, but ourselves in a very thin disguise.

Act I

After a captivating overture, the curtain rises in the quaint town of Titipu, where a chorus of Japanese acquaint us in song: "If you want to know who we are, We are gentlemen of Japan." Nanki-Poo, disguised as an itinerant musician, enters excitedly and asks to be directed to the maiden Yum-Yum. Asked who he is, he replies with the song, "A Wandering Minstrel I," a sampling of sentimental, patriotic and nautical music.

Pish-Tush, a minor noble, asks his business with Yum-Yum. Nanki-Poo replies that a year ago he saw and immediately fell in love with her, but at that time she was betrothed to her guardian, Ko-Ko the tailor. Now, having heard that Ko-Ko is condemned to death for flirting, he has come to see Yum-Yum. Pish-Tush replies in the song "Our Great Mikado" that under a set of remarkable circumstances Ko-Ko has been pardoned and made Lord High Executioner on the theory that this would stop the spate of unwanted executions since he can't cut his own head off.

The Lord High Everything Else, Pooh-Bah, enters and, singing the song, "Young Man, Despair," tells Nanki-Poo to give up hope. It seems that very day Yum-Yum is slated to marry Ko-Ko, who promptly enters as his attendants sing the rousing chorus "Behold the Lord High Executioner!"

Although his diminutive stature belies his important office, Ko-Ko sings the amusing song, "I've got a little list" of candidates for his imposing snickersnee! Then comes a procession of Yum-Yum's school-mates singing their girlish chorus "Comes a train of little ladies," followed immediately by Yum-Yum herself with her two schoolmates, Peep-Bo and Pitti-Sing who sing the famous trio: "Three little maids from school." The girls' antics offend the haughty Pooh-Bah, so they beg his pardon, singing "So please you, sir, we much regret if we have failed in etiquette."

As the rest depart, Nanki-Poo declares his love and reveals to Yum-Yum that he is none other than the son of the Mikado. He has assumed this disguise in order to avoid marrying an elderly lady of the court, Katisha, who has claimed him. In their duet, "Were you not to Ko-Ko plighted," they demonstrate how they would be affectionate if only Yum-Yum were not engaged to Ko-Ko.

Pooh-Bah and Pish-Tush deliver a letter to Ko-Ko from the Mikado who, struck by the fact that no one has been beheaded in Titipu for a year, threatens dire consequences unless he finds someone to execute soon. Each of the three declines the honor in the amusing song "I am so Proud." Since Nanki-Poo is despondent at the loss of Yum-Yum, Ko-Ko suggests that he allow himself to be executed instead. After some argument Nanki-Poo consents, on condition that he be permitted to marry Yum-Yum at once -- the execution to be a month later. Ko-Ko reluctantly agrees. The nobles and ladies enter and all rejoice, singing merrily "The threatened cloud has passed away." Suddenly the dreaded Katisha appears, declaring melodramatically, "Your revels cease." She balefully claims Nanki-Poo her own, but Pitti-Sing laughingly replies that they are not concerned with her wishes "For he's going to marry Yum-Yum."

The wicked Katisha attempts to denounce Nanki-Poo, but as soon as she opens her mouth the chorus drowns out her voice. Repeatedly foiled, Katisha furiously vows vengeance, while all the others sing merrily, "For joy reigns everywhere."

Act II

Maidens preparing Yum-Yum for the wedding, sing the graceful chorus, "Braid the raven hair." Yum-Yum, gazing in a mirror, is thrilled by her own loveliness, comparing it to "The sun whose rays are all ablaze." Reminded that her married happiness is soon to be "cut short," Yum-Yum bursts into tears; Nanki-Poo enters and tries to console her as they, Pitti-Sing, and Pish-Tush attempt a cheerful madrigal, "Brightly dawns our wedding day," but each verse ends sadly. Ko-Ko enters with the horrifying news that when a married man is beheaded a law requires his wife to be buried alive. Yum-Yum complains that burial alive is such a stuffy death; yet if Nanki-Poo releases her she will have to marry Ko-Ko. With reason they exclaim "Here's a how-de-do!" and agree to fake the execution.

A stately Japanese procession "Miya sama," announces the arrival of the dreaded emperor, accompanied by Katisha, "His daughter-in-law elect." The Mikado introduces himself with the song, "A more humane Mikado never did in Japan exist," having the delicious Gilbertian refrain: "My object all sublime, I shall achieve in time--To let the punishment fit the crime." Pooh-Bah, Ko-Ko and Pitti-Sing, lying through their teeth, assure the Mikado that his wishes have been respected, the execution has just taken place in their song, "The criminal cried." But Katisha reads the death certificate, and finds that Nanki-Poo, who is of course the Mikado's son, is named as the victim! The Mikado tells the three plotters that he is not the least bit angry, but since the law decrees that "compassing the death of the Heir Apparent" is punishable by boiling in oil, or by some similar protracted torture, their fate is sealed, as they realize in the song: "See how the Fates their gifts allot."

Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum appear, ready to start on their honeymoon. The unlucky trio attempt to persuade Nanki-Poo to "come back to life," but the Prince, wishing to be free of Katisha, refuses unless Ko-Ko will himself marry her; then, he says, life will be as welcome as "The flowers that bloom in the spring." Ko-Ko replies with the unforgettable lines: "The flowers that bloom in the spring, Tra la, Have nothing to do with the case. I've got to take under my wing, Tra la, A most unattractive old thing, Tra la, With a caricature of a face."

Katisha enters, singing of her loneliness, and is met by Ko-Ko, who declares a passionate love for her. When she refuses him, he sings "Willow, tit-willow" of a bird driven to suicide by blighted love. Katisha is so moved that she yields, and Ko-Ko agrees to find beauty even in her bloodthirstiness, as the two sing "There is beauty in the bellow of the blast."

The Mikado enters ready for the execution of the three culprits, but Katisha implores mercy for them as she has just married Ko-Ko. The situation is saved by the appearance of Nanki-Poo whose non-execution is explained in a typical bit of Gilbertian topsy-turvy logic, and all join in the exhilarating finale, "For he's gone and married Yum-Yum!"