

PITTSBURGH  
**OPERA**  
EDUCATION

Four Scenes for Classroom Presentation from  
*La bohème*

Music by Giacomo Puccini, Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica  
Page numbers refer to an alternative libretto in the EMI Classics, Black Dog edition.

1

Characters

Rodolfo      A Poet  
Marcello     A Painter  
Colline      A Philosopher  
Schaunard   A Musician

EMI pages 56-62

**Act One. In a garret.** A wide window overlooks the roofs covered in snow. To the left are a fireplace, table, bed, cabinet, a small bookcase, four chairs, a painter's easel, scattered books, many bundles of paper, and two candlesticks. Rodolfo watches meditatively out of the window. Marcello works at his painting, "The passage of the Red Sea", with his hands numb from the cold. It's Christmas Eve.

**Marcello**      My fingers are frozen, as if they were implanted in that great ice-box, known as Musetta's heart.

**Rodolfo**      Love is like a fireplace which wastes too much . . .

**Marcello**      . . . and too quickly

**Rodolfo**      . . . where Man serves as the kindling . . .

**Marcello**      . . . and Woman is the spark . . .

**Rodolfo**      . . . one is burnt in an instant . . .

**Marcello**      . . . and the other stands and watches.

**Rodolfo**      But at this moment we are freezing . . .

**Marcello**      . . . and dying from hunger!

**Rodolfo**      We need a fire.

**Marcello**      *(grabbing hold of a chair and about to break it up)* Wait . . . we'll sacrifice the chair!

**Rodolfo**      *(stopping him, and seizing a bulky manuscript)* Eureka!

**Marcello**      Have you found something?

**Rodolfo**      Yes! Sharpen your wits man. Let thought burst into flame.

**Marcello**      *(pointing to his painting)* Let's set fire to the Red Sea?

**Rodolfo**      No, painted canvas stinks, but my drama won't; its ardent passion will warm us.

**Marcello**      *(with comic fright)* You're going to read it? I'll freeze while I wait.

- Rodolfo** No, the paper will crackle and turn to ashes, then the poetry will rise to Heaven. This threatens damage to our culture! Rome is in peril!
- Marcello** Noble heart!
- Rodolfo** Act One to start with!
- Marcello** Right!
- Rodolfo** Rip it!
- Marcello** Now light it. *(Rodolfo sets fire to part of the manuscript, then they both pull up their chairs, sit down, and warm themselves in the voluptuous heat.)*
- Rodolfo** How brightly it glows!
- Marcello** How brightly it glows!  
*(The door crashes open and Colline enters; freezing cold, he stamps his numb feet to try and warm them. Angrily he throws a bundle of books on the table.)*
- Colline** The signs of the Apocalypse are upon us already! No one will accept pledges, on the day of Christmas Eve! *(sighting the fire, astonished)* A blaze!
- Rodolfo** Quiet, my play is beginning . . .
- Colline** . . . to the fire. I find it really sparkling!
- Rodolfo** Fiery!
- Colline** *(as the fire dies down)* A little brief though!
- Rodolfo** In brevity lies great esteem.
- Colline** *(carrying the chair away from Rodolfo)* Author, I'll have the chair.
- Marcello** These intervals are not at all amusing! Quick.
- Rodolfo** *(seizing another part of his notebook)* Second Act.
- Marcello** Not one whisper.
- Colline** Profound thought!  
*(Rodolfo tears part of the notebook and throws it on the fireplace; the fire rekindles. Colline advances forward with a chair and warms his hands. Rodolfo is on his feet, next to his friends, with the remains of his notebook.)*
- Marcello** Colorful too!
- Rodolfo** Within that languid blue flickering flame, an ardent tale of love fades!
- Colline** A page crackles.
- Marcello** There are kisses in there!

**Rodolfo** *(tossing the rest of the notebook on the fire)* Now let's have three acts at once.

**Colline** Thus the bold ideas of thought are united!

**Rodolfo, Marcello, Colline**

This beautiful flame vanishes in a cheerful flash.

**Marcello** Oh Lord! Already the flame is dying down.

**Colline** What a vain, fragile drama!

*(They applaud enthusiastically; one moment later the flame diminishes.)*

**Marcello** It's crackling and fading down to its death already! *(The fire goes out.)*

**Marcello and Colline**

Down with him, down with the author!

*(From the door two boys appear—one carrying food supplies, bottles of wine, and cigars, the other a firewood bundle. In all the clatter, the three friends go to the front of the fireplace; they turn and shout with amazement at the supplies provided by the boy, who places the provisions on the table. Colline takes the firewood and goes to the door near the fireplace: evening has started.)*

**Rodolfo** Firewood!

**Marcello** Cigars!

**Colline** Bordeaux!

**Rodolfo** Firewood!

**Marcello** Cigars!

**Rodolfo, Marcello, Colline**

Fate has happily given us all the abundance of the fair.

**Schaunard** *(He enters by the door with an air of triumph, throwing to the ground some coins.)*

For you the Bank of France has gone into deficit yet again.

## 2

**Characters** Rodolfo      A Poet  
 Marcello      A Painter  
 Colline      A Philosopher  
 Schaunard    A Musician  
 Mimì      A seamstress, their neighbor

EMI pages 81-85

**Act One. In a garret.** Mimì has come to ask a favor; when the candles blow out, Mimì and Rodolfo search in the dark for her key. Pretending to search, and guided by the voice and footsteps of Mimì, Rodolfo moves towards her, head bowed, hoping to touch her. Suddenly he finds himself close to Mimì, and their hands meet.

**Rodolfo**      *(as Mimì tries to withdraw her hand)* One moment, mademoiselle. Let me tell you in just two words who I am, what I do, and how I live. Shall I?  
*(Mimì says nothing; Rodolfo lets go of Mimì's hand. Full of emotion, she reaches back for a chair upon which to drop.)*

**Rodolfo**      Who am I? I am a poet. What do I do here? I write. And how do I live? I live in my contented poverty as if a grand lord. I squander odes and hymns of love. In my dreams and reveries, I build castles in the air, where in spirit I am a millionaire.  
 Yet sometimes from my safe, all my gems are stolen by two thieves—a pair of lovely eyes! They entered with you just now! Now all past dreams have disappeared.  
 Beautiful dreams I'd cherished, immediately vanished without a trace! But the theft does not wound me deeply, because in their room they have been replaced by sweet hope! Now you know all about me. Will you tell me who you are? Will you say? Please do tell!  
*(She is a little hesitant, then decides to speak. She sits throughout.)*

**Mimì**      Yes, they always call me Mimì, but my real name is Lucia. This story of mine is brief; to linen and silk I embroider, at my home or away. I have a quiet, but happy life, and my pastime is making lilies and roses. I delight in these pleasures. These things have such sweet charm. They speak of love, of spring, of dreams and visions, and the things that have poetic names. Do you understand me?

**Rodolfo**      Yes.

**Mimì**      They always call me Mimì, I know not why! All alone I make myself dinner. I don't attend mass often, but I pray to the Lord frequently. I live by myself, all alone, in my little white room. I look upon the roofs and the sky. But when the thaw comes, the first warmth of the sun is mine; the first kiss of April is mine! In a vase a rosebud blooms; I watch as petal by petal unfolds, with its delicate fragrance of a flower! But the flowers that I sew, alas, have no fragrance. There's nothing more I can tell you about myself.

I am your neighbor, who knocks at your door so late disturbing you at an inopportune moment.

**Schaunard** *(from the courtyard)* Hey! Rodolfo!

**Colline** *(from the courtyard)* Rodolfo!

**Marcello** *(from the courtyard)* Hello! Don't you hear us?  
*(At the calling of his friends, Rodolfo starts to show impatience.)* Slowcoach!

**Colline** Rhymester!

**Schaunard** Down with you, idle one!  
*(Getting more impatient, Rodolfo holds the window open a little in order to answer his friends, who are down in the courtyard. From the open window the moon shines into the room.)*

**Rodolfo** I have three more lines to write, I'll be quick.

**Mimi** *(approaches the window a little)* Who's that?

**Rodolfo** *(to Mimi)* My friends.

**Schaunard** You will hear . . .

**Marcello** What are you doing up there all alone?

**Rodolfo** No! I'm not alone. There are two of us. Continue on to Café Momus and hold a place for us, we won't be long.  
*(He remains at the window and waves to his friends to assure they go.)*

**Marcello, Schaunard and Colline** *(drifting away)*  
Momus, Momus, Momus, quietly and discreetly we'll be on our way!

**Schaunard and Colline**  
Momus, Momus!

**Marcello** He's found his poetry!

**Schaunard and Colline**  
Momus, Momus, Momus!

**Rodolfo** Oh, beautiful maiden . . .

**Marcello** He's found his poetry!

## 3

**Characters** Rodolfo      A Poet  
 Marcello      A Painter  
 Colline      A Philosopher  
 Schaunard   A Musician  
 Mimi      A seamstress, their neighbor  
 Musetta      Marcello's former girlfriend  
 Alcindoro    Musetta's elderly escort

EMI pages 100-105

A Seamstress, some students, and shop women

**Act Two. At the *Café Momus*.** From the corner of the Via Mazzarino, a beautiful and richly dressed Musetta appears. Following behind her is a large, pompous gentleman. She takes pleasure in provoking him.

**Rodolfo, Schaunard and Colline** *(with surprise, watching Musetta)* Oh!

**Marcello** Her!

**Shop women** *(watching Musetta)* Oh! It's her, yes it's her! Musetta! We're honored! What a fancy gown!

**Alcindoro** *(breathless)* I'm like a porter . . . running here, there, and everywhere. No, no! I cannot put up with it any more!

**Musetta** *(With expressive steps, she trips along, glancing here and there as if trying to get some attention while Alcindoro follows her, breathless and irritable.) (calling as if to a small dog)* Come along Lulu! Come Lulu!

**Alcindoro** I can't put up with any more!

**Schaunard** That ugly old individual appears to be sweating!  
*(Musetta sees the group of friends at their table in front of Café Momus. She indicates to Alcindoro to sit down at the vacant table to the left of the bohemians.)*

**Alcindoro** *(to Musetta)* What! Here outside? Here?

**Musetta** Sit Lulu!

**Alcindoro** *(Displeased, he sits down, raises the collar of his overcoat, and mutters.)*  
 I beg you to only use such nicknames for more intimate moments!  
*(A waiter approaches and prepares the table.)*

**Musetta** Don't be such a Bluebeard! *(She sits down at the table facing towards the Café.)*

**Colline** *(examining the old one)* Dignified and deficient . . .

**Marcello** *(with contempt.)* Together with his chaste Susanna!

- Mimi** *(to Rodolfo)* She's beautifully dressed though!
- Rodolfo** All the angels go naked.
- Mimi** *(with curiosity)* Do you know her? Who is she?
- Marcello** *(to Mimi)* Demand that of me! Her name is Musetta; her last name is temptation! Her favorite pastime is changing her lovers. She behaves like a wind vane that turns when the wind blows. And like a vulture, she loves to prey. Her bloodthirsty diet is the heart . . . she devours the heart! That's why I no longer have one! Pass me the stew!
- Musetta** *(stricken to see that the friends are not watching her)* Marcello has seen me. The beast won't look at me! *(increasingly irritated)* That Schounard is laughing! They vex me so much! If only I could hit them! If only I could scratch them! But I've got my hands full with this old pelican! Just wait! *(calling out)* Here waiter! *(The waiter runs up; Musetta picks up the plate and sniffs it.)* Waiter! This plate smells of frying! *(She throws the plate to the ground with force; the waiter hurries to collect the broken crockery.)*
- Alcindoro** No, Musetta. Quiet, quiet!
- Musetta** *(seeing that Marcello does not turn, to herself.)* He's not turning round!
- Alcindoro** *(with comic despair)* Quiet! Quiet! Quiet! Behave yourself, where are your manners?!
- Musetta** Ah, he won't turn round!
- Alcindoro** Who are you talking to?
- Colline** This chicken is like a poem!
- Musetta** *(furiously)* Now I'm going to hit him; I'll hit him!
- Alcindoro** Who are you talking to?
- Schaunard** The wine is delicious!
- Musetta** *(annoyed, to Alcindoro)* To the waiter! Don't be such a bore! I'll do as I please.
- Alcindoro** Talk softly! Talk softly! *(taking the menu from the waiter, and ordering the supper)* Ah, ah, ah, ah!
- Musetta** I'll do as I please! Don't be such a bore!
- Seamstresses** *(Crossing the scene, they stop for a moment, seeing Musetta.)*  
Look, look who it is—Musetta herself!

- Students** *(crossing the scene)* With that stammering old one! In person, Musetta herself! *(laughing)* Ha, ha, ha, ha!
- Musetta** *(to herself)* Could he be jealous of this old fogey?
- Alcindoro** The convenience . . . the degree . . . your virtue . . .
- Musetta** Let me see if I still have enough influence over him to make him yield!
- Schaunard** What a stupendous travesty!
- Musetta** *(speaking aloud while watching Marcello)* You don't look at me!
- Alcindoro** *(Believing that Musetta's words were for him, he tries to please her and answers them seriously.)* You see how well I order!
- Schaunard** What a stupendous travesty!
- Colline** Stupendous!

## 4

<b>Characters</b>	Rodolfo	A Poet
	Marcello	A Painter
	Schaunard	A Musician
	Mimi	A seamstress, their neighbor
	Musetta	Marcello's former girlfriend

EMI pages 150-154

**Act Four. In a garret.** Mimi leans her head towards Rodolfo, so he can lay the bonnet on her head. She then sits up close to Rodolfo and remains there with her head resting on his chest.

- Mimi** Do you remember when I came here the first time?
- Rodolfo** Do I remember!
- Mimi** My candle had gone out . . .
- Rodolfo** You were frightened and nervous! Then you lost your key . . .
- Mimi** So to try and find it, you had to grope your way around . . .
- Rodolfo** . . . and I hunted and hunted.
- Mimi** My fine young man, though now I can say; it was found in an instant.
- Rodolfo** I helped destiny . . .



- Mimi** *(remembering the encounter with Rodolfo on Christmas Eve)* It was dark; and so you didn't see my blushes. *(She whispers the words of Rodolfo.)* "This little hand is frozen . . . let me warm it here in mine." In the darkness you held my hand to warm it . . .  
*(Mimi has a sudden spasm of coughing, she falls back with exhaustion.)*
- Rodolfo** *(Alarmed, he gently supports her.)* Oh God! Mimi!  
*(At this moment, Schaunard returns. Hearing the cry of Rodolfo, he hurries up to Mimi.)*
- Schaunard** What's happened?  
*(She opens her eyes and smiles to reassure Rodolfo and Schaunard.)*
- Mimi** Nothing, I'm fine.
- Rodolfo** *(He carefully lays Mimi down on the pillow.)* Quiet, for goodness sake.
- Mimi** Yes, yes, I'm sorry, now I will be good.  
*(Musetta and Marcello enter cautiously. Musetta carries a muff and Marcello a small bottle.)*
- Musetta** *(to Rodolfo)* Is she sleeping?
- Rodolfo** *(approaching Marcello)* Yes, she's resting.
- Marcello** I have seen the doctor! He'll come; I told him to make haste. Here's the cordial. *(He fetches a spirit lamp, puts it on the table, and lights it.)*
- Mimi** Who's speaking?
- Musetta** *(Approaches Mimi and hands her the muff.)* It's me, Musetta.
- Mimi** *(Helped by Musetta, Mimi sits up in bed, and with childish joy, she takes the muff.)* Oh, how lovely and soft it is! No longer will my hands be frozen. The warmth will make them beautiful. *(to Rodolfo)* Was it you who gave me this?
- Musetta** *(quickly)* Yes.
- Mimi** *(reaching her hand towards Rodolfo)* My carefree Rodolfo! Thank you, but it must have cost a lot. *(Rodolfo bursts into tears.)* You're crying? I'm fine. Why are you crying like this? *(She puts her hands in the muff and gracefully tilts her head on the muff as she drifts off to sleep.)* I'm here . . . my love . . . always with you! My hands . . . in the warm . . . and . . . to sleep . . . *(Silence.)*
- Rodolfo** *(Reassured in seeing that Mimi is sleeping, he cautiously moves away from her, and motions to the others not to make a noise. He approaches Marcello.)* What did the doctor say?
- Marcello** He'll come.