

CARMEN.maquia

**Educator's Guide
(Grades 7-12)
2025**



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Overview

CARMEN.maquia is a riveting reimagining of Georges Bizet’s opera Carmen, adapted through dance by choreographer Gustavo Ramírez Sansano. This work strips away the words and vocals and tells the story entirely through physicality, musicality, and visual design. The result is both timeless and immediate—a vivid story of love, independence, power, and obsession, told through the universal language of movement.

Themes to Explore

- Autonomy vs. Authority
- Love, Jealousy, and Obsession
- Female Agency and Representation
- Symbols and Artistic Interpretation
- Dance as a Language

Discussion Questions

- What makes Carmen powerful? Is she a hero, a villain, or something in between?
- How do different characters show emotion without words?
- Why do you think Carmen chooses Escamillo over Don José?
- What do the black and white costumes symbolize?

Main Takeaways for Middle and High School

- Power can be both inspiring and dangerous.
- Passion without understanding can become destructive.
- Art gives us many ways to tell stories beyond words.

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Synopsis: Scene by Scene

Set in Andalusia, Spain, the story unfolds in a vibrant town where Carmen leads the Cigarillas, a group of strong, expressive women working in a cigar factory. Their dancing is flirtatious, proud, and full of life. Carmen’s entrance into the town square draws everyone’s attention—she’s magnetic and unapologetically herself.

When two soldiers relax their post, their playful duet shows friendship and humor. But things shift when Carmen returns. She teases Don José, who is both intrigued and unsettled by her. Later, when Carmen argues with another woman, Don José is forced to arrest her. During her arrest, Carmen dances a hypnotic solo that seduces him—he unties her, and she escapes.

Haunted by Carmen, Don José falls into a dream state, surrounded by ghostlike images of her. Meanwhile, in the town square, a debate over Carmen’s affections arises, but Escamillo, a charismatic bullfighter, silences all competition with a commanding solo. Carmen is captivated by his strength and spirit.

Later, we find Carmen alone, reading tarot cards. Her future appears dark, but she embraces it. She chooses to marry Escamillo. The ballet ends at their wedding—a complex moment filled with finality and foreboding.

Meet the Characters

- **Carmen** – A fiercely independent woman who resists control and follows her own path.
- **Don José** – A soldier caught between his duty and his emotional obsession with Carmen.
- **Escamillo** – A famous bullfighter who exudes power, confidence, and poise.
- **Micaëla** – Don José’s past love; represents safety and tradition.
- **The Cigarillas** – A chorus of strong female workers who add community and culture to the story.
- **The Soldiers & Townspeople** – Ensemble characters who help shape the world and social dynamics of the piece.

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The Choreographer: Gustavo Ramírez Sansano

Gustavo Ramírez Sansano is a Spanish choreographer known for his daring movement language and narrative depth. He is the Artistic Director of Titoyaya Dansa, a company he founded with Verónica García Moscardo in 2006. Sansano has won numerous awards, including:

- First Prize at the Ricard Moraga Competition (1997)
- Prix Dom Pérignon Choreographic Competition in Hamburg (2001)
- Premio de Las Artes Escénicas de la Comunidad Valenciana (2005)

He has choreographed for major companies around the world, including Nederlands Dans Theater, Ballet BC, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and Ballet Hispánico.

Visual Language of the Work

Movement

The choreography blends contemporary dance with paso doble and flamenco traditions. Expect a dynamic physical vocabulary—sharp footwork, swirling arms, expressive torso work—that explores themes of seduction, resistance, strength, and control.

Postures & Gestures

Students can track how gestures—reaching, resisting, mirroring—build relationships and conflict. Look for everyday body language recontextualized into theatrical movement.

Spatial Patterns

Observe how dancers arrange themselves: duets reveal intimacy and tension; group patterns suggest unity, power, or isolation. Space becomes a character in itself.

Music

The music of CARMEN.maquia draws from various recordings of Georges Bizet’s Carmen as well as Pablo de Sarasate’s Carmen Fantasy. Rhythms are rooted in flamenco and Afro-Cuban traditions. Students can compare emotional tone and pacing between selections like the “Habanera” and “Toreador Song.”

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Design, Symbolism & Theatrical Effects

Scenic Design

Luis Crespo’s minimalist set was inspired by Pablo Picasso’s black-and-white paintings, Cubist shapes, and themes of women and bullfighting. Paper accordion walls and abstract curtains create fluid transitions between scenes and moods.

Costumes

Designed by David Delfín, the costumes break from traditional flamenco attire. Everyone wears white—except Carmen, who wears black. The stark contrast immediately sets her apart, symbolizing her autonomy and otherness.

Props

A few symbolic props—rope, a handkerchief, tarot cards—carry emotional and narrative weight. Encourage students to analyze how these small objects shape the storytelling.

Symbolism

This ballet is rich with symbols:

- **Colors** – Black and white to show contrast, conflict, and clarity.
- **Tarot Cards** – Represent fate and the unknown.
- **Carmen’s black costume** – Her individuality and tragic destiny. Ask students to identify more.

Vocabulary

- **Floreo** – Flamenco-style hand flourishes that resemble blooming flowers.
- **Zapateado** – Percussive footwork central to flamenco and Spanish folk dance.
- **Paso Doble** – A Spanish dance influenced by bullfighting.
- **Roma People** – An ethnic group with deep roots in flamenco music and dance.

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Pre and Post-Performance Activities

Before the Show

- 🧠 Research Assignment: Students learn about Bizet, flamenco, or the Roma people.
- 🎧 Music Analysis: Listen to Bizet’s “Habanera.” What emotions does it evoke?
- 🦸 Movement Exercise: Create a short phrase that expresses a strong emotion using posture, gesture, and travel.

After the Show

- 🗣️ Reflection Prompt: What does Carmen represent to each male character? And how does that differ from who she really is?
- 🎨 Symbol Analysis: Choose one symbol and describe its impact on the story.
- 💬 Debate: Was Carmen a victim, a rebel, or both?

Learning Goals & Big Questions

Enduring Understandings

- Dance can express power, emotion, and narrative without spoken words.
- Control, freedom, and gender dynamics are central themes in both historical and modern contexts.
- Design and movement together create meaning.

Essential Questions

- How does Carmen assert her identity in a world that tries to control her?
- What do the visual elements (costume, color, space) reveal about character and mood?
- How do movement and music work together to tell a story?

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Themes for Further Research

1. The Roma People
2. Flamenco
3. George Bizet
4. Pablo Picasso
5. Cubism
6. The Romantic Era

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