

Rachel Solomon

Musical Theatre 6-Week Unit

Target Student Group:

- High School (9th-12th Grade), Introduction to Theatre class
- Class meets 5 times a week for 50 minutes per session

Enduring Understandings:

- Students will understand that musicals are influenced by our culture and current events.
- Students will understand that the “best” musical can be subjective - your likes are not “good” or “bad”
- Students will understand that, although the outward appearance of musicals may be different, there are often similar components to a musical’s structure and songs.

Essential Questions

- Why use a musical to tell your story?
- What makes a musical a musical?
- What makes a musical “good”? What makes a musical “popular”?
- Can a bad musical still succeed? Can a good musical still fail?

State Standards

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 1999, Theatre

- 1.17 - Students will demonstrate an increased ability to work effectively alone and cooperatively with a partner or in an ensemble.
- 5.5 - Students will give and accept constructive and supportive feedback.
- 5.13 - Students will use group-generated criteria to assess their own work and the work of others.

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 1999, Music

- 5.10 - Students will interpret more complex music through movement.
- 5.12 - Students will demonstrate an understanding of how musical elements interact to create expressiveness in music.
- 5.16 - Students will demonstrate the ability to perceive, remember, and describe in detail significant occurrences in a given aural example.

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 2017, English Language Arts and Literacy

- RI.9-10.5 - Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).
- SL.9-10.5 - Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., audio, visual, interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence to add interest.

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 2013, History

- USII.22 - Analyze the causes and consequences of important domestic Cold War trends (economic growth and declining poverty, the baby boom, the growth of suburbs and home-ownership, the increase in education levels, the development of mass media and consumerism).
- USII.28.E - Analyze the important domestic policies and events that took place during the presidencies of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon (specifically, the anti-war and counter-cultural movements).

Wednesday, Week 4 - Detailed Lesson Plan (Flops and Cult Favorites)

Subject/Course: Introduction to Theatre

Topic: Musical Theatre - Flops and Cult Favorites

STAGE 1 - DESIRED RESULTS

Content Standards:

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 1999, Theatre

- 1.17 - Students will demonstrate an increased ability to work effectively alone and cooperatively with a partner or in an ensemble.
- 5.13 - Students will use group-generated criteria to assess their own work and the work of others.
- 5.14 - Students will demonstrate objectivity in assessing their personal abilities and creative endeavors.

Understandings:

- Students will understand that the “best” musical is subjective - your likes are not “good” or “bad”

Essential Questions:

- What makes a musical good? What makes a musical popular?
- Why use a musical to tell your story?
- Can a bad musical still succeed? Can a good musical still fail?

Students Will Be Able To:

- Examine musicals, and other types of art, from an objective standpoint as well as a subjective standpoint.
- Identify famous flops and cult favorite musicals.
- Assess the key components of creating a musical.

STAGE 2 - ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

Performance Task(s):

Students create synopses of various musicals based on their knowledge of the shows. They will then discuss what makes a musical a flop or a hit, sharing why they think a show would or would not succeed.

Key Criteria:

- Students are engaged in the activities.
- All students are involved in creating and performing GIFs.
- All students are contributing to the conversation in the group activities.

STAGE 3 - LEARNING PLAN

1. The “GIF” Game
 - a. Students will begin by listing the names of musicals we have studied so far. Students will get into small groups and create a “GIF” based on the names of some of the musicals they mentioned. (How would you condense *Hamilton* into a GIF?) The other groups will guess what the musical was.
 - a. After two rounds with musicals with which the students are familiar, we will continue this activity, but this time with flop musicals. (We will be using *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Sideshow*, and *Dance of the Vampires*.) Without knowing the subject, students will create a “GIF”, based solely on the names of the musicals. These will be presented to the rest of the class.
2. The teacher will give brief summaries of each of these three flops, and mention some key components of each (for example, *Merrily We Roll Along* begins with the characters middle-aged, and then moves backwards in time, it was based on a previously written story, etc.). These, as well as the total number of performances for each show, will be listed for the students to reference.
3. Students will come up with some suggestions for why these shows were flops. Was it the subject matter? Was there another show performing that was more popular?
4. Give the title of one more flop show (*Spiderman: Turn Off The Dark*), and provide the same list of basic information, plot summary, etc.
 - a. Students will split up into two groups, one “for” and one “against”.
 - b. The “for” group will provide reasons that the creative team and producers thought it would have succeeded.
 - c. The “against” group will provide reasons that the show may have been a flop.
 - d. Both groups will present their arguments for or against the show.
5. The teacher discusses cult favorites - shows that have a small, devoted following (ex - *Carrie*, *Bat Boy*, *Zanna*, *Don’t!*). Why do some shows become cult favorites? What do they have that other shows that fade into obscurity don’t have?
6. The teacher will provide index cards listing components and things to think about when creating a musical (ex - music, execution, subject matter, casting, etc.) to the students, who will be in small groups. In groups, the students will rank how important they think each item is in creating a musical. If you had to ignore one, what would be your bottom priority? The groups present their decisions and discuss.

Wednesday, Week 5 - Detailed Lesson Plan (Types of Songs)

Subject/Course: Introduction to Theatre
Songs

Topic: Musical Theatre - Types of

STAGE 1 - DESIRED RESULTS

Content Standards:

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 1999, Theatre

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- 5.14 - Students will demonstrate objectivity in assessing their personal abilities and creative endeavors.

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 1999, Music

- 5.10 - Students will interpret more complex music through movement.
- 5.12 - Students will demonstrate an understanding of how musical elements interact to create expressiveness in music.
- 5.16 - Students will demonstrate the ability to perceive, remember, and describe in detail significant occurrences in a given aural example.

Understandings:

- Students will understand that, although the outward appearance of musicals may be different, there are often similar components to a musical's structure and songs.

Essential Questions:

- What makes a musical a musical?
- Why use a musical to tell your story?

Students Will Be Able To:

- Identify the differences and similarities between different types of musical theatre songs.
- Evaluate the most common uses of different types of musical theatre songs.
- Explore the embodiment of emotion and feeling through physicality.

STAGE 2 - ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

Performance Task(s):

Students explore different types of songs used in musical theatre through movement, gaining understanding of why these types are used in different scenarios.

Assignments for the next day will be:

- Bringing in a specific song and correctly identifying it.
- Correctly identifying other students' songs.

Key Criteria:

- Students are engaged in the activity.
- Students are participating and providing suggestions.

- Upon reflection, attempt to clearly articulate how their movement corresponds with the music that is played.

STAGE 3 - LEARNING PLAN

1. Students will suggest songs based on the below criteria:
 - a. Songs that make you feel happy
 - b. Songs that make you feel sad
 - c. Songs that are slow - what is that song about?
 - d. Songs that are really fast - what is that song about?
 - e. (Some of the songs may be played as an example as needed)
2. The teacher will lead into an explanation of the different classic types of songs found in musical theatre. Students will get up and move through the space, as the teacher plays 20-30 second clips of various musical theatre styles. Students will react to each piece by changing how they are moving through the space.
 - a. Ballads (Music of the Night, The I Love You Song, I Dreamed a Dream)
 - b. Up-Tempos (Welcome to the '60s, The Schuyler Sisters, Run Freedom Run)
 - c. "I Want" Songs (Waiting for Life to Begin, Corner of the Sky, Part of It All)
 - d. Patter Songs (Both Sides of the Coin, Modern Major General, Therapy)
3. The teacher asks the students to share some similarities and differences they found between the songs. The teacher explains the differences between the types of songs, as well as where they overlap (an "I Want" song can be a ballad or an up-tempo)
4. The teacher asks - Why use each type of song? What does it tell us about the character in that moment?
5. Students watch "Not Getting Married Today" from the 2006 Broadway revival and discuss the following questions:
 - a. What is going on in this scene?
 - b. Why is she singing so fast?
 - c. Would the scene work as well if it was slowed down?
6. The teacher gives the homework assignment for the evening - pick a song (rated PG-13 or below) to bring in that fits one (or more) of the 4 types of songs. (The next day, we will listen and try to label which type of song each piece is, and explore what changes if we change the way a song is performed.)

Monday, Week 6 - Detailed Lesson Plan (Reviews)

Subject/Course: Introduction to Theatre

Topic: Musical Theatre - Reviews

STAGE 1 - DESIRED RESULTS

Content Standards:

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 1999, Theatre

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- 5.14 - Students will demonstrate objectivity in assessing their personal abilities and creative endeavors.

Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks, 2017, English Language Arts and Literacy

- RI.9-10.5 - Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).

Understandings:

- Students will understand that the "best" musical is subjective - your likes are not "good" or "bad"
- Students will understand that musicals are influenced by our culture and current affairs.

Essential Questions:

- What makes a musical good or bad?
- Can a bad musical still succeed? Can a good musical still fail?

Students Will Be Able To:

- Form a basic critical response to a musical as a whole, and to a specific performance of that musical.
- Evaluate the components of a review, including the objective and subjective components.

STAGE 2 - ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

Performance Task(s)

Students will write their own critiques of Wassily Kandinsky's "Composition 8" painting, as well as *The Sound of Music*. They will investigate what reviewers look for when critiquing a show, and how or if their enjoyment of a show is affected by a review.

Key Criteria

- Students are engaged in the activities.
- Reviews are coherent, clear, and thoughtful.
- All students are collaborating with one another in the group review.

STAGE 3 - LEARNING PLAN

1. The teacher shows students a copy of “Composition 8”, a painting by Wassily Kandinsky. The teacher explains that she has been given an option to get a print of this for the classroom. Students will determine whether the teacher should buy the painting based on the following questions:
 - a. Can you tell what the artist’s vision is? Were they able to show that vision?
 - i. (Quote from Kandinsky: “The circle is the synthesis of the greatest oppositions. It combines the concentric and the eccentric in a single form and in equilibrium... it points most clearly to the fourth dimension”)
 - b. Is it enjoyable?
 - c. Is it memorable?
 - d. Is it done well on a technical level?
 - e. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being terrible, 10 being amazing, how would you rate this painting?)
2. After students work on answering these questions, they will stand in a line based on how they rated the painting. (Hopefully there are a range of opinions on the painting. If there are not, the teacher will share some comments from art critics and other painters regarding the painting to show the range of opinions.)
3. In small groups, students will create their own short reviews of *The Sound of Music*, based on the same criteria as above, and share them with the class.
4. Students will read reviews from the original production of *The Sound of Music* (NY Times and NY Daily News) and compare these rather mediocre reviews with the reviews that the class came up with.
 - a. <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/theater-arts/sound-music-full-sweet-songs-1959-review-article-1.2429534>
 - b. <http://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/theater/88838013.pdf>
5. Discuss:
 - a. *The Sound of Music* is considered a beloved classic in America, and yet it was not well received when it first opened. Does this mean we all love a bad musical? Does this mean we shouldn’t love it?
 - b. Ask students if they would like to look at the review for another musical, using the book *Broadway Musicals: From the Pages of the New York Times* by Ben Brantley. We will read a few more examples to compare our favorites.
6. End with “Pows and Wows” - students will go around the room and say one thing that they struggled with or want to know more about, and one thing that was a “wow” moment for them.