

BROADWAY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

In the 1890s, immigrants from all over the world came to the great ports of America like New York City to seek their fortune and freedom. As they developed their own neighborhoods and ethnic enclaves, some of the new arrivals took advantage of the stage to offer ethnic comedy, dance and song to their fellow group members as a much-needed escape from the hardships of daily life. Gradually, the immigrants adopted the characteristics and values of their new country instead, and their performances reflected this assimilation.

“Irving Berlin has no place in American music — he *is* American music.”

—composer Jerome Kern



CULVER

Irving Berlin was born Israel Baline in a small Russian village in 1888; in 1893 he emigrated to this country and settled in the Lower East Side of New York City. He began his career as a street singer and later turned to songwriting. In 1912, he wrote the words and music to “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” the biggest hit of its day. Among other hits, he wrote “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning,” “What’ll I Do?,” “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” “Easter Parade,” and the patriotic “God Bless America,” in addition to shows like *Annie Get Your Gun*. He died at the age of 101.

My New York (excerpt)

Every nation, it seems,
 Sailed across with their dreams
 To my New York.
 Every color and race
 Found a comfortable place
 In my New York.
 The Dutchmen bought Manhattan
 Island for a flask of booze,
 Then sold controlling interest to
 the Irish and the Jews –
 And what chance has a Jones
 With the Cohens and Malones
 In my New York?

—Irving Berlin, 1927

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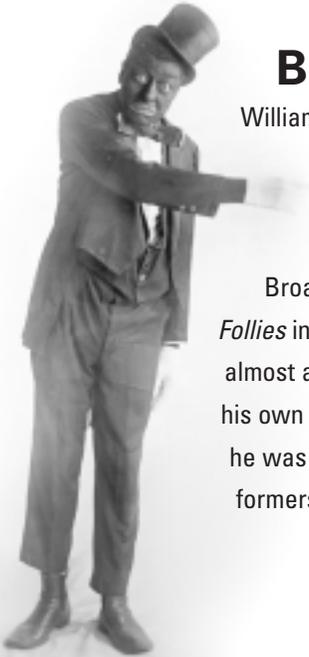
Questions

1. What is Irving Berlin’s song “My New York” trying to express? What’s the point of view about the city and, by extension, America?
2. What made New York City a likely place for the emergence of new American art forms like the Broadway musical?
3. In what ways were Berlin’s songs expressions of continuity in American culture? In what ways did they signify change in American culture?

Activities

1. Write your own version of the lyrics for “My New York” by plugging in the name of your city or community, adding personal observations about where you live.
2. Pair off with a classmate who has a different ethnic background than yours. Tell him/her your family history and vice versa. Write and perform a poem, song or sketch that celebrates your classmate’s ethnic identity.

BROADWAY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM



CORBIS

Bert Williams

was born Egbert Williams in the West Indies in 1874. He performed in a “double-act” singing, dancing and clowning with George Walker. In 1903 they were in the first all-black musical on Broadway. Williams joined the annual *Ziegfeld Follies* in 1910 and became its primary comedian for almost a decade. Although he was forced to cover his own light-skinned complexion with “blackface,” he was one of the most popular performers in America. He died trying out a solo show in 1922.



CORBIS

Fanny Brice

was born Fannie Borach in New York City in 1891. While in her teens, she was a dancer and singer on the variety stages of Coney Island and Newark. She also made her *Follies* debut in 1910 and became a star in nine editions of the series. Her ability to parody famous people in a fake Yiddish accent, as well as her compelling singing, made her the greatest comedienne of her generation. She played an overgrown child called “Baby Snooks” on the radio for decades and was immortalized in the Broadway musical *Funny Girl*. She died in 1951.

In the early 1900s in New York City, the theaters moved uptown from the peddlers’ markets to the newly coined Times Square. Success on the Broadway stage required only talent and drive – “pluck and luck” – rather than education, wealth or family prestige. A new generation “crossed over” and became some of the most successful and patriotic Americans by way of Broadway.

Just like today, there were many different ways to showcase a performer, but from 1900 to 1927, most of them were live.

- **Vaudeville** was the most popular performance form of this era; thousands of theaters across the country hosted “bills” of “acts” – comedians, singers, magicians – that changed every week.
- **Variety stages** were local music halls that catered to the ethnic identity of their neighborhoods.
- **Minstrelsy** was a declining but persistent 19th-century performance style in which both white and black performers sang, danced and joked in “blackface”; it was extremely derogatory to the image of African Americans.
- **Revues**, like *Ziegfeld’s Follies*, were produced on Broadway, and were plotless shows that provided first-class performance and design.

It was every performer’s dream to work his or her way up the ladder of show business to appear in a Broadway show. Appearing on Broadway meant the ultimate acceptance as an artist and as an American.

Questions

1. What talents made performers like Bert Williams and Fanny Brice popular with mainstream audiences? Why was success in New York so important for their careers?
2. What does the term “cross over” mean? Can you name any cross-over artists working today? What qualities might make it possible for an artist to cross over?
3. What are some examples of “highbrow” culture and “lowbrow” culture from the early 1900s? What are some examples today? Do you think one is better than the other? Why or why not?

Activity

Research a performer, writer or composer who immigrated to the United States as a child or a young adult. (Some examples: Bert Williams, Irving Berlin, Celia Cruz, Wyclef Jean, Joan Chen, and Arnold Schwarzenegger.) Focus on the difficulties he or she may have had in reaching a mainstream audience. What was the key to his or her success? Offer examples.

BROADWAY AND THE JAZZ AGE

The 1920s brought a whole new musical language to Broadway. Previously, popular songs, especially love songs, could be artificial and pretentious. Writers like Irving Berlin, Ira Gershwin, Lorenz Hart, and Cole Porter transformed songwriting by bringing the language of everyday people – slang, jargon, phrases from advertisements, radio, and the newspaper – into their lyrics. Likewise, the composers of the period borrowed from the world around them. George Gershwin was famous for visiting Harlem and bringing jazz – considered “cutting edge” in the ‘20s – to a wider audience. Richard Rodgers uses the musical idiom of the Charleston, a famous dance tune of the ‘20s, for “Thou Swell,” even though the song is set in the Middle Ages. These artists made the songs of the period catchy, lively and timeless.

**Words make you think thoughts.
Music makes you feel a feeling.
But a song makes you feel a thought.**

—E.Y. “Yip” Harburg, lyricist

Thou Swell (excerpt)

Babe, we are well met,
As in a spell met—
I lift my helmet.
Sandy,
You’re just dandy
For this here lad.
You’re such a fistful,
My eyes are mistful
Are you too wistful
To care?
Do say you care
To say “Come here, lad.”
You are so graceful—
Have you wings?
You have a face full
Of nice things.
You have no speaking
voice, dear.
With ev’ry word it sings.

Thou swell!
Thou witty!
Thou sweet!
Thou grand!
Wouldst kiss me pretty?
Wouldst hold my hand?
Both thine eyes are cute, too—
What they do to me.
Hear me holler
I choose a
Sweet lolla
Palooza
In thee.
I’d feel so rich in
A hut for two.
Two rooms and kitchen
I’m sure would do.
Give me just a plot of
Not a lot of land,
And,
Thou swell!
Thou witty!
Thou grand!

—Lorenz Hart

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RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN ORGANIZATION

Rodgers (right) and **Hart** wrote a successful musical version of Mark Twain’s time-travel story, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. “We wanted to write shows that had different settings,” recalled Rodgers. “*The Girl Friend* was about a big thing at the time, a six-day bicycle race, and so the fellow meets the girl there. In *A Connecticut Yankee*, it was a fantasy in the days of King Arthur and the fellow [from 1927] goes back in time and what do you think happened? He fell in love with a girl.”

Question

The lyrics for “Thou Swell” combine medieval words with contemporary words. Which words are medieval-sounding? What happens when these words are put together with modern words?

Activity

Listen to Rodgers’ tune for “Thou Swell.” Imagine that you are Larry Hart and your assignment is to write a song based on “Thou Swell” that’s set in 2004. What kind of language will you use?

BROADWAY AND THE JAZZ AGE

Lorenz Hart (b. 1895) was born in New York and educated at Columbia University where he wrote the school Varsity Shows. When he was 24, he met the 17-year-old

Richard Rodgers (b. 1902), who wanted to be a composer.

They had their first song on Broadway in 1919, but it wasn't until 1925 that they broke through with a hit called "Manhattan."

Over the next six years, they wrote songs for 18 productions, went to Hollywood in 1931, and returned to Broadway in 1935 to write eleven groundbreaking shows, including *On Your Toes* and *Pal Joey*.

Songs they wrote together include such classics as "My Heart Stood Still," "My Funny Valentine," "Where or When?" and

"Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered." Hart died in 1943, as Rodgers was beginning his partnership with Oscar Hammerstein.

Songs are the most important element of a musical. They may seem simple, catchy, or corny, but they are always the product of hard work. Different collaborators work different ways. When Rodgers worked with Hart, the melody came first; with Hammerstein, Rodgers wrote the music after the words. Usually a team will look at the situation in the story and decide what kind of song is called for. Perhaps they will agree on a title and go their separate ways, or they may work in the same room together around a piano until the song is created. However it happens, a song is the product of constant collaboration, discussions and alterations.

Ira Gershwin (b.1896) was a bookish lad,

growing up, among other addresses, on New York City's Lower East Side. A piano was provided for him by his parents, but it was his younger brother, **George Gershwin** (b.1898) who took to it; as time went on, Ira provided lyrics for his brother's melodies. George was a piano prodigy who quit school to work in a music publisher's company. By 1924, the Gershwins wrote a musical comedy, *Lady, Be Good!* starring Fred Astaire. That year, George wrote the famous piano concerto "Rhapsody in Blue." Together the brothers wrote many successful shows (*Of Thee I Sing*, *Porgy and Bess*) and songs "Nice Work if You Can Get It," "I Got Rhythm," "Fascinating Rhythm," and "It Ain't Necessarily So" – phrases which have entered the English language. George died of a brain tumor in 1937; Ira lived until 1983.



PHOTOFEST

George Gershwin

Activity

Look at some other song lyrics from the 1920s or 1930s such as "Fascinating Rhythm" by Ira Gershwin or "You Took Advantage of Me" by Lorenz Hart. How did the lyricists use slang of the period? Are there any phrases you don't understand? Use the Web or other resources to find out more about the slang of the 1920s or 1930s and list the words you particularly like. Write a poem or song lyrics, using slang to write something funny about love.

BROADWAY AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

While the Broadway fare of the 1920s supplied a seemingly endless stream of fun, the social concerns of the 1930s created two distinct responses: there were still effervescent musical comedies that took the audiences' minds off their troubles for three hours at a time, but there was also a strong vein of social criticism and political satire in the American musical. Escapism and engagement were the dueling stars of the Broadway stage.



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The Cradle Will Rock

"I grew up when America had a dream. . . In 1930, the dream collapsed. The system fell apart. This was a good country, on its way to greatness. It had given our immigrants more freedom, more education, more opportunity than it had ever known. What happened?"

—E. Y. "Yip" Harburg

Question

The lyrics for the music in *The Wizard of Oz*, a favorite childhood movie of many Americans, were written by the man who wrote "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" What significance might songs like "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" have for an average American during the Depression?

Activities

1. In "Brother Can You Spare a Dime?" the song is sung in the first person. Who is singing the song? Could you construct a biography for the singer? Can you find another poem or song that has the same point of view? Or that uses an iconic figure to narrate the piece?
2. Stage a breadline from the 1930s with members of your class. What kind of conversations would be going on among grown men waiting in line for hours for handouts of food? Create a poem or song that includes these conversations.

Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?

They used to tell me
I was building a dream
And so I followed the mob.
When there was earth to plough
Or guns to bear
I was always there
Right on the job.

They used to tell me
I was building a dream
With peace and glory ahead.
Why should I be standing in line
Just waiting for bread?

Once I built a railroad,
Made it run
Made it race against time.
Once I built a railroad
Now it's done
Brother, can you spare a dime?

Once I built a tower
To the sun
Brick and rivet and lime.
Once I built a tower
Now it's done
Brother, can you spare a dime?

Once in khaki suits
Gee, we looked swell
Full of that Yankee Doodle-de-dum
Half a million boots went
sloggin' thru hell
I was the kid with the drum.

Say, don't you remember?
They called me "Al"
It was "Al" all the time.
Say, don't you remember
I'm your pal
Buddy, can you spare a dime?

— E.Y. "Yip" Harburg

BROADWAY AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

CULVER



Ethel Waters was born circa 1900 and raised in a poor and violent Philadelphia neighborhood. She connected emotionally with the songs “her people” sang and the stories they carried with them. For a decade, she sang in black nightclubs and the segregated vaudeville grind known as the “Chitlin Circuit” and was frequently courted by white producers for Broadway. “I ain’t changin’ my style for nobody or nothing,” she once vowed. But, in 1933, she starred in Irving Berlin’s *As Thousands Cheer*, a major achievement for an African American woman. In it she sang “Supper Time” – a serious song about lynching. “In singing it, I was telling my comfortable, well-fed, well-dressed listeners about my people,” she wrote.

Following the Stock Market Crash in October of 1929, the Depression struck New York City with a hardship that bordered on cruelty. By 1932, the depths of the Depression, one-third of the city’s factories were forced to close. Out of a population of seven million, 1.6 million people were on relief – an early and inadequate form of welfare – and nearly a third of all New Yorkers were unemployed or accepted some form of job cut or partial pay.

Theaters closed down or were turned into the far more financially successful movie theaters. It was harder to raise money for a new production; in 1927-28, there were a record 267 productions on Broadway, by 1932, there were 181. During the Depression on Broadway, there were 5,000 Equity actors looking for employment and an additional 20,000 theater artists desperate for work. Out of this adversity came an extraordinary decade for the American musical, which, next to the daily newspaper, became the most vibrant and topical indicator of what was going on in America. The Depression, union solidarity, the policies of the New Deal – these were all topics central to successful Broadway musicals.

After a landslide re-election victory in 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt seemed to have only partial success with the New Deal and all over the nation, struggles between labor and management were exploding into dangerous and often fatal altercations. In Pittsburgh, Michigan and Chicago, strikes ended in violence as workers were beaten and fired upon in the spring of 1937. Passionate arguments about the future direction of the country were commonplace until 1941 when America entered the Second World War.

Questions

1. During a major historical event, like the Depression, we often turn to historians to try and understand the period. What do we learn when we turn to poets, songwriters, comedians, or filmmakers? What do they have to tell us? What do you think inspires these artists? Why might their perspectives be important?
2. Why do you think some producers, directors, writers, and performers used musicals in the 1930s as vehicles for criticizing the government? Do you think it is as common today? Why/why not? What different political climates exist today for art and free expression?

Activities

1. In the ‘30s, many musical theater pieces spoofed the government and its problems in songs and sketches. Create a treatment for a revue of your own for 2004. This can include a song list, a scene outline, or lyrics for some of the songs. Some topics: the presidential election, “outsourcing” jobs in the economy, the war in Iraq, same-sex marriage.
2. Look more closely at one of the political musical of the 1930s, such as *Of Thee I Sing*, *The Cradle Will Rock*, *As Thousands Cheer*, or *Pins and Needles*. Investigate the people behind the shows and the real political events they were portraying or parodying. Imagine you are the producer or director working on a revival of the show and come up with a concept of how you would design the sets and stage the musical today.

BROADWAY AND POST-WAR AMERICA

“When a show works perfectly, it’s because all the individual parts complement each other; the orchestrations sound the way the costumes look.”

—composer Richard Rodgers



RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN

South Pacific

Oscar Hammerstein II (1892-1959) was the grandson of the man who built the Olympia, the first Broadway theater north of 42nd Street. Although his show-biz family wanted young Hammerstein to become a lawyer, he became a playwright of musicals – a librettist – and a lyricist. He wrote many successful operettas in the '20s (serious romantic musicals), including the famous *Show Boat*. His career with **Richard Rodgers** from 1943 to 1960 was one of American theater’s most successful, yielding hits such as *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*.

The Broadway that emerged after World War II

was a near-mirror image of post-war American culture. The separate strands of escapism and social criticism that epitomized the musicals of the 1930s gave way to easily accessible commercial products. Shows like the groundbreaking *Oklahoma!* became so popular that they toured around the country and played around the world. Full recordings of musicals became available, allowing millions of theatergoers across the country to listen to their favorite shows at home. The new technology of television gave families the chance to see their favorite Broadway stars in their very own living rooms.

The 1940s and '50s provided audiences with an impressive series of well-crafted, beautifully scored shows, with strong narratives and memorable characters. Towering above their peers was the partnership of Rodgers and Hammerstein. They mastered the form of the American musical and dominated their field in much the same way that Shakespeare did the Elizabethan stage, or the Beatles ruled rock and roll in the 1960s.

In 1943, Rodgers and Hammerstein revolutionized the American theatre with *Oklahoma!*, the first musical in which songs were truly integrated into a show’s narrative structure. Previously, musicals were more concerned with comedy and songs. Now, the powerful elements of the musical theater were used together to tell a story. Characters and their struggles with love, jealousy, destiny, hope, despair, and sometimes death were more important than the performers; musical comedy performers now had to act as well as sing and dance. Rodgers and Hammerstein were able to adapt previously written non-musical plays and add songs and dances, while keeping the integrity of the story.

Many shows from this era – *Carousel*, *Guys and Dolls*, *My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story* – are revived frequently in schools and theaters around the country because audiences can relate to the characters in these stories.

Activities

1. Look at an original play or story (*Pygmalion*, *Romeo and Juliet*) and compare it to the musical version (*My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story*). What changes were made? Why were these things changed? Think about which ones seem most successful to you. Why? When people sing in the musical version, what happens to the original dialogue?
2. Pick a novel, play or short story you like and think about how you would adapt it as a musical. What parts of the story would become songs? Or dances? Have you made the story more interesting—or have you weakened it in some way?

BROADWAY AND POST-WAR AMERICA

Carousel

Rodgers and Hammerstein took the 1924 Hungarian play *Liliom* about a carousel barker and reset it on the coast of Maine at the end of the 19th Century. Billy Bigelow is not a typical hero—he is egotistical, ill-educated and treats his wife insensitively. Yet, at the end of Act One, he learns he is about to be a father:

Soliloquy

I wonder what he'll think of me!
I guess he'll call me
"The old man."
I guess he'll think I can lick
Ev'ry other feller's father—
Well, I can!

I bet that he'll turn out to be
The spit an' image
Of his dad,
But he'll have more common sense
Than his puddin'-headed father ever
had.

I'll teach him to wrassle,
And dive through a wave,
When we go in the mornin's for our
swim.

His mother can teach him
The way to behave,
But she won't make a sissy out o'
him—
Not him!
Not my boy!
Not Bill ...
Bill!

My boy, Bill!
(I will see that he's named
After me,
I will!)
My boy, Bill—
He'll be tall
And as tough

As a tree,
Will Bill.
Like a tree he'll grow,
With his head held high
And his feet planted firm on the
ground,
And you won't see nobody dare to
try him
To boss, or toss him around!
No pot-bellied, baggy-eyed bully'll
toss him around!

I don't give a hang what he does,
As long as he does what he likes.
He can sit on his tail
Or work on a rail
With a hammer, a-hammerin' spikes.

He can ferry a boat on the river
Or peddle a pack on his back
Or work up and down
The streets of a town
With a whip and a horse and a
hack.

He can haul a scow along a canal,
Run a cow around a corral,
Or maybe bark for a carousel—
Of course it takes talent to do *that*
well.

He might be a champ of the heavy-
weights
Or a feller that sells you glue,

Or President of the United States—
That'd be all right, too.
His mother would like that. But he
wouldn't be President unless he
wanted to be!

Not Bill!
My boy, Bill—
He'll be tall
And as tough
As a tree,
Will Bill!

Like a tree he'll grow,
With his head held high,
And his feet planted firm on the
ground,
And you won't see nobody dare to
try
To boss him or toss him around!
No fat-bottomed, flabby-faced, pot-
bellied, baggy-eyed bastard'll
boss him around!

And I'm hanged if he'll marry his
boss's daughter,
A skinny-lipped virgin with blood
like water,
Who'll give him a peck and call it a
kiss
And look in his eyes through a
lorgnette ...
Say!
Why am I takin' on like this?
My kid ain't even been born yet!

I can see him—
When he's seventeen or so,
And startin' in to go
With a girl.

I can give him
Lots o' pointers, very sound,
On the way to get 'round
Any girl.

I can tell him—
Wait a minute! Could it be—?
What the hell! What if he
Is a girl!
Bill!

Oh, Bill!
What would I do with her? What
could I do *for* her?
A bum—with no money!
You can have fun with a son,
But you got to be a *father*
To a girl!

She mightn't be so bad at that—
A kid with ribbons
In her hair,
A kind o' sweet and petite
Little tintype of her mother—
What a pair!

My little girl,
Pink and white
As peaches and cream is she.
My little girl
Is half again as bright
As girls are meant to be!
Dozens of boys pursue her,
Many a likely lad
Does what he can to woo her
From her faithful dad.
She has a few
Pink and white young fellers of two
or three—
But my little girl
Gets hungry ev'ry night
And she comes home to me!

I got to get ready before she comes!
I got to make certain that she
Won't be dragged up in slums
With a lot o' bums—
Like me!
She's got to be sheltered and fed,
and dressed
In the best that money can buy!
I never knew how to get money,
But, I'll try—
By God! I'll try!
I'll go out and make it
Or steal it or take it
Or die!

— Oscar Hammerstein II

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Questions

1. What is a soliloquy? What are some famous soliloquies in literature? Rodgers and Hammerstein might have called their song "My Boy Bill" or "I'm About to Be a Father," but they didn't. Why?
2. What characterizes Billy at the beginning? What are his values? Who is he when the song is over? Are his values the same? If not, what changes them – and where can you spot the change?

Activity

Take "Soliloquy" and substitute another character for Billy. What if it were Billy's wife, Julie, singing about having a girl? How would it be different? Or have Billy sing "Soliloquy" to another person as a dialogue. What would change?

THE REINVENTION OF BROADWAY



MARTHA SVOPE

Hair

John Kander (b. 1927) grew up in the Midwest and was a dance arranger on Broadway. He teamed up with lyricist **Fred Ebb** (1932-2004) in the early 1960s to write musicals. In addition to *Cabaret*, they wrote *Zorba* (1969), *Chicago* (1975), and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Both *Cabaret* and *Chicago* were made into award-winning motion pictures; for the movies, they also wrote *New York, New York*.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Broadway struggled to adapt to the powerful cultural shocks of the era, ultimately breaking free from stagnant conventions to enter a period of provocative reinvention. Broadway – previously at the center of the culture – became overwhelmed by the era’s tumultuous social change and the sudden supremacy of rock and roll. Yet, the Broadway musical found that it could tackle the issues of its day by sometimes conveying them in other time settings with shows like *Cabaret*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Man of La Mancha*. The musical was also capable of putting current events on stage, and no show was as blatant as an “American Tribal Love Rock Musical” called *Hair*.

Cabaret

(1966)

A radical departure from the typical entertainments on Broadway, *Cabaret* is based on Christopher Isherwood’s *The Berlin Stories*, which documents how Hitler’s rise to power affects a small group of singers, writers, and their friends. Interspersed through the story are scenes in an actual cabaret, the Kit Kat Klub, presided over by an eerie, omniscient master of ceremonies, the Emcee. Through his musical numbers, the audience can see how citizens of Berlin are increasingly taken in by the seductive appeal of the Nazi Party – their responses to economic depression, national and racial pride and anti-Semitism are revealed in the songs.

When *Cabaret* was in rehearsal in the mid-1960s, the nation was overwhelmed with the issue of civil rights. Many sections of the American population were fighting against integration. The director, Harold Prince, brought a photograph of a group of angry young white men, taunting a crowd off-camera, to the first rehearsal. His cast assumed that it was a picture of Nazis in the 1930s harassing some Jewish shopkeepers—but, in fact, it was a picture of Chicago citizens in 1966 taunting black tenants of an integrated housing project. Prince wanted to show that such violence “could happen here.”

THE REINVENTION OF BROADWAY

Cabaret

If You Could See Her (excerpt)

In this number, the Emcee dances with an actress wearing a gorilla suit and a ballet skirt:

If you could see her
 through my eyes,
 You wouldn't wonder at all.
 If you could see her
 through my eyes,
 I guarantee you would fall
 (like I did).
 When we're in public together,
 I hear society moan,
 But if they could see her
 through my eyes,
 Maybe they'd leave us alone...

I understand your objection,
 I grant you my problem's
 not small;
 But if you could see her
 through my eyes,
 She wouldn't look Jewish at all.

—Fred Ebb



Cabaret

DON HUNSTEIN/SONY MUSIC ARCHIVES

What Would You Do? (excerpt)

In this number, Fraulein Schneider, a landlady, explains why she lacks the courage to marry a Jewish man. In the original production, it was sung by an actress named Lotte Lenya, who, in fact, escaped from Hitler's Germany in 1934.

I'll take your advice
 What would you do?
 Would you pay the price?
 What would you do?
 Suppose keeping still
 Means you manage until the end?
 What would you do,
 My brave young friend?

...Alone like me,
 Who isn't at war with anyone—
 Not anyone!
 With a storm in the wind
 What would you do?
 With the clouds drifting in,
 What would you do?

Someone tell me—
 I will listen—
 What would you do
 If you were me?

—Fred Ebb

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Questions

1. What does *Cabaret* say about Berlin in the 1930s? What does it say about America in the 1960s? How does it speak to America in 2004?
2. "If You Could See Her Through My Eyes" is a satirical song, yet it is offensive. In fact, when it was first performed, many people objected to the lyrics, saying it was anti-Semitic. Yet, the writers fought to keep it in the show. Who was right? Why? Is there any purpose to writing a song, or a play, that people might find offensive? Explain.

Activities

1. Often writers will tackle the serious issues of their own time by setting a story in a previous, but parallel, era. This device has been used by writers as diverse as Shakespeare, Toni Morrison and Arthur Miller. Examine a "period" show such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Man of La Mancha* or *Cabaret* and compare it to what was going on in our country while it was first running on Broadway. Do some research in newspapers or magazines of the time; make copies of articles that discuss issues you feel are addressed in the Broadway show.
2. Compare headlines and stories from 1968-69 with the songs and scenes from *Hair*. Using online resources or news articles on microfilm at your library, find out what current events were put into the show. How much of *Hair* relates to issues in 2004? What would the reaction be if you revived it?
3. Discuss issues of 2004 with your classmates. Where would you set a musical – other than today – that might illuminate contemporary concerns about 2004? What are some parallels from the past to today's culture?

BROADWAY AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM

“There are two basic rules in show business: One, never put your own money in a show. And, two: NEVER PUT YOUR OWN MONEY IN A SHOW!”

Mel Brooks, *The Producers*



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Florenz Ziegfeld



PHOTOFEST

David Merrick

PRODUCERS

Florenz Ziegfeld (1869-1932) Broadway's first great impresario brought glamour and sophistication to audiences in his *Follies*, presented annually from 1907 to 1927. His name is synonymous with showmanship.

David Merrick (1911-2000) was the producer of hits like *Hello, Dolly!* and *42nd Street*.

He was famous for publicity schemes like creating false advertisements and inventing feuds.

Harold Prince (b. 1928) is also renowned as a director; he produced ground-breaking hits like *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Cabaret*, and *West Side Story*.

Cameron Mackintosh (b. 1946) is the British producer of such worldwide smashes as *Cats*, *Les Miserables*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

He is the most successful stage producer of all time.

The Walt Disney Corporation is best known for animated movies, but has brought several of its films to the stage, including *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*.

A Broadway musical is both a risky and exciting proposition. It is the most costly business venture in the theater. Typically, in 2004, a musical costs at least \$10 million to produce. As hard as it is to raise that money, the rewards can be enormous. Internationally, Cameron Mackintosh's four shows (*Cats*, *Les Miserables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*) have made more money than four top movies – *Titanic*, *Spider-Man*, etc. – put together. But, the rising costs of originating a show have driven away independent individual producers and opened the field for corporations like Disney. For example, *The Lion King* may well be the most expensive show ever—rumored to have cost more than \$20 million. It took about four years to turn a profit, but a big company can afford to spend four years waiting for a return on its investment.

The Economics of Producing

The idea for a new musical can come from a writer, composer, or performer, but it can only be realized by a **producer**. He or she must raise the money for the production. The amount required is called the **capitalization**. This amount must cover not only getting the show to opening night, but also create a financial cushion for several weeks or months until the show catches on with audiences. The producer will rarely spend his own money; he raises it from **investors** – usually called backers or “angels,” for obvious reasons – and pays himself a salary. If the show is a success and pays back its initial expenditure (**recoupment**), the investors get whatever percentage of their contributed amount back in profits. For example, if you invested \$1000 in *Oklahoma!* in 1943 and it cost \$100,000 to produce, you would get 1% of the profits after recoupment (distributed weekly). If *Oklahoma!* had flopped, you would have lost all your money; luckily, the show was a big hit and anyone who did invest \$1000 received \$2.5 million! That's why there's no business like show business.

Other costs incurred by a producer are:

- sets, costumes, lights, make-up, sound
- renting a theater
- publicity (newspaper ads, posters, etc.)
- salaries (actors, musicians, stagehands, production assistants)
- royalties (percentages of the box office that pay writers and creative staff)
- options (buying up the rights to someone's property or creative work)

BROADWAY AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The Producers

The plot of the show is taken from Mel Brooks' 1968 film of the same name. Two crooked producers, the show-biz veteran Max Bialystock and his timid accountant, Leo Bloom, create a scheme where they raise 25,000% of the money for the worst show they can create – called *Springtime for Hitler*. If it flops, they don't have to return any of the investment to the backers. This song is Leo's secret dream:



PAUL KOLNICK

The Producers

I Wanna Be A Producer (excerpt)

LEO:

I have a secret desire
Hiding deep in my soul,
It sets my heart afire
To see me in this role...

I wanna be a producer
With a hit show on Broadway.
I wanna be a producer,
Lunch at Sardi's every day.
I wanna be a producer,
Sport a top hat and a cane.
I wanna be a producer
And drive those chorus girls insane!

I wanna be a producer
And sleep until half-past two.
I wanna be a producer
And say, "You, you, you—not you."
I wanna be a producer,

Wear a tux on op'ning nights!
I wanna be a producer
And see my name "Leo Bloom"
in lights!

GIRLS:

He wants to be a producer
Of a great big Broadway smash!
He wants to be a producer,
Ev'ry pocket stuffed with cash!
He wants to be a producer,
Pinch our cheeks 'til we cry "Ouch!"
He wants to be a producer
With a great big casting couch!

He wants to dine
With a duchess and a duke.

LEO:

I just gotta be a producer,
Drink champagne until I puke!

I wanna be a producer,
Show the world just what I've got.
I'm gonna put on shows
That will enthrall 'em...
Read my name in Winchell's column!
I wanna be a producer
'Cause it's everything I'm not.

I wanna be a producer
I'm gonna be a producer,
Sound the horn and beat the drum.
I'm gonna be a producer,
Look out, Broadway, here I come!!

— Mel Brooks

"I Wanna Be A Producer" from THE PRODUCERS. Music and Lyrics by Mel Brooks. Copyright (c) 2000 Mel Brooks Music (BMI). All Rights Reserved Used by Permission.

Questions

1. Leo Bloom wants to be a producer. Why would anyone want to be a producer? Would you?
2. A producer hires great artists, but can a producer be a great artist? What is a producer's greatest skill? Are there producers in theater, film or TV whose work you can recognize?

Activity

Pretend you are a producer and you want to produce a musical. What kind of property would you option? Would your production have a big budget (say, \$14 million) or a modest budget? Most importantly, how would you budget your money and how would you apportion it?

As a class, choose a musical you'd like to produce. Working in groups, create budgets and time-lines, then compare them with those prepared by your classmates. Some budget items include artists' fees, theater rental and lighting equipment. It's important to recognize what kind of musical you have and what you think the best audience would be for it. For more information, go to How Broadway Musicals Are Made on the Web at www.musicals101.com/makemusi.htm and How to Put On a Musical at www.musicals101.com/puton.htm. How will you try to make sure that your audience enjoys the show?

ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS

SONGS IN MUSICALS



PHOTOFEEST

A Chorus Line

There are several basic song forms that usually work well in a musical. A choral or **ensemble** number is often used to introduce the characters or setting (*The Mikado*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*). Romantic songs are very important, especially in shows from the early part of the 20th Century. These songs are called **ballads**; usually either the boy or the girl sings first, then the other reprises (or repeats) the tune, then they sing in “harmony”—which means they are emotionally as well as vocally in harmony. A ballad can be slow (“If I Loved You”) or, often in a comedy, faster. “Thou Swell” is what is called an **uptempo ballad**, because it is faster, livelier, sillier. A **patter song** is a catalogue of funny ideas (“You’re the Top”); because the jokes have to be heard, the words

are often more important than the melody. A **finale** sums up the show and its theme and is often sung by the whole company: “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” or “One” from *A Chorus Line*.

Songs work on the idea of repetition. An introduction, or verse, leads into the song. Then the refrain follows, usually the most memorable melody. This repeats twice, with altered lyrics; then there is the bridge, in which a slightly different melody is introduced for variety’s sake. Then there is a return to the refrain one last time, with the main line perhaps reproduced once more at the end for emphasis sake. This is traditionally called an “A-A-B-A-A1” structure and many famous theater songs – but not all, by any means – follow this format. “Thou Swell” is a prime example.

Verse:

A: refrain

A: refrain

(same rhyme scheme, altered lyrics)

B: bridge

A: refrain

A1: refrain

(tag line of title repeated for emphasis)

(Please note that this is for song structure only.

Rhyme schemes are also diagramed with A’s and B’s.)

Activity

YOU ARE A LYRICIST

Imagine a character – a young man or woman; a hero or a villain. Then, think of a situation you’d like the character to sing about – it can be happy, sad or confusing; funny, ironic or serious. Choose one of the song forms listed above and write lyrics for your character – with as much feeling as possible.

ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS

A number of successful (and unsuccessful!) musicals have been based on well-known books, plays and short stories. William Shakespeare's plays have provided the inspiration for some of Broadway's greatest musicals, like *West Side Story*, as well as some of its more obscure flops, like *Rockabye Hamlet*. Here is a chronological (though not complete) list:

- The Boys From Syracuse* (1938) – based on *The Comedy of Errors*
- Singin' the Dream* (1939) – A swing-era version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* featuring Louis Armstrong (not on CD)
- Kiss Me, Kate* (1948) – based on *Taming of the Shrew*
- West Side Story* (1957) – adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*
- Your Own Thing* (1968) – based on *Twelfth Night*
- Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1972) – based on the play of the same name
- Rockabye Hamlet* (1976) – a rock musical version of *Hamlet* (not on CD)
- Another Midsummer Night* (1995) – inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Other musicals have used novels, short stories, plays, and poetry as source material:

- Show Boat* (1927) – based on Edna Ferber's novel
- A Connecticut Yankee* (1927) – based on Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*
- Porgy and Bess* (1935) – inspired by DuBose Heyward's novel, *Porgy*
- Pal Joey* (1940) – based on John O'Hara's short stories
- South Pacific* (1949) – based on James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*
- Guys and Dolls* (1950) – inspired by Damon Runyon's short stories
- Peter Pan* (1950) – based on the book by James M. Barrie
- A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1951) – adapted from Betty Smith's autobiography

- Candide* (1956) – A musical adaptation of Voltaire's novel
- My Fair Lady* (1956) – based on George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*
- Oliver!* (1963) – adapted from Charles Dicken's *Oliver Twist*
- Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) – based on the stories of Sholom Aleichem
- Golden Boy* (1964) – adapted from Clifford Odets's 1937 play
- Man of La Mancha* (1965) – adapted from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*
- Cabaret* (1966) – adapted from Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories*
- The Wiz* (1975) – an all-black version of *The Wizard of Oz*
- Les Miserables* (1980) – based on Victor Hugo's novel
- Cats* (1982) – adapted from T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*
- Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1985) – based on Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*
- Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1992) – adapted from Manuel Puig's novel
- Ragtime* (1998) – based on E.L. Doctorow's novel
- Seussical: the Musical* (2001) – based on Dr. Seuss's characters
- Wicked* (2003) – based on Gregory Maguire's novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*

Activity

WHICH STORY WILL YOU CHOOSE?

Imagine that you are interested in developing a new musical, and want to base it on your favorite book, short story, play, or poetry. Which literary work will you base your play on? Will you be relatively faithful to the original, or update the time setting and characters? Write a brief description of your new musical, including the work it's based on, what your approach will be and what kinds of songs it will include.



HISTORY AND THE MUSICAL



CORBIS

Times Square

Many musicals deal with history. Some shows are based on specific historic events and personalities, while others use earlier time periods as settings for new and original stories. Here are some examples:

1500s

Rex (1976) – the history of Henry VIII and his six wives

1600s

Man of La Mancha (1965) – the Spanish Inquisition

1700s

Ben Franklin in Paris (1963) – Franklin's days as American ambassador to France

1776 (1969) – the signing of the Declaration of Independence

1800s

Paint Your Wagon (1951) – the 1850s Gold Rush in California

Bloomer Girl (1944) – explores the topics of civil rights during the Civil War

Can-Can (1953) – freedom of expression in fin de siècle Paris

Pacific Overtures (1976) American imperialism in Japan

Shenandoah (1977) – the Civil War from a Southern perspective

Sunday in the Park with George (1984) – fictionalization of the life of painter George Seurat

1900s

Fiddler on the Roof (1964) – small town Jewish Russia at the turn of the century

Show Boat (1927) – race and music in America from the 1880s to the 1920s

The Boyfriend (1954) – 1920s England and France

Thoroughly Modern Millie (2002) – the 1920s flapper era

Fiorello! (1959) – a musical biography of New York's Fiorello La Guardia

Bye Bye Birdie (1960) – satire of the 1950-60's music business

MUSICAL REVIVALS

Revivals of older musicals appeal to more than feelings of nostalgia. They give audiences a feeling for what life was like in the past. In some ways musical revivals may seem dated and campy (which is part of the fun!), but in other ways they are timeless.

Here are a few musicals that are often revived:

No, No Nanette (1925) – a flapper-era story featuring songs like "Tea for Two"

Gypsy (1959) – based on the life story of Gypsy Rose Lee, famous burlesque stripper

Hair (1968) – the American Tribal Love Rock Musical

Grease (1972) – 1950s high school car culture

Annie (1977) – based on the 1930s comic strip

Activities

HISTORIC LYRICS

Think about a time period you are studying in history. What was one of the most important events? Who were the most famous people? Write a poem or song lyrics that sum up what was important about the event; or write a poem or lyrics about a major occurrence from a famous person's life.

MUSICAL ADAPTATIONS

Some history-based musicals are adapted from movies, television shows or other sources. Choose a favorite history-based movie or TV show from a few years back and explain how it might work as a musical, describing the time period it is set in, who the main characters are, and the basic elements of the plot.

MUSICAL REVIEW

Find a recent CD or video of a musical revival (see examples above), listen to or watch it, and write a review of it. What do the basic elements of the musical – its story line, music and lyrics – tell you about the time period when it was originally performed? What meaning or value does the recent production have for our own time?

Quick Program References for Teachers

SEGMENT LIST and STUDENT CARD HIGHLIGHTS

This list is intended to help you quickly find the segments you'd like to screen in class. Segment times are approximate. **Related Student Card highlights and songs on the CD are also noted in bold.**

EPISODE ONE

Give My Regards to Broadway (1893-1927)

Segments

Series Open (6 minutes)

TITLE: Give My Regards To Broadway – the *Ziegfeld Follies* (9 minutes)

TITLE: All The Gang At 42nd Street – George M. Cohan (8 minutes)

TITLE: **Nothin To Nobody** – Bert Williams (6 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD)**

TITLE: **My New York** – Irving Berlin (6 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD, CD: “My New York”)**

Fanny Brice (4 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD)**

TITLE: The Heart of New York – World War I and Broadway (3 minutes)

Labor Unrest, Broadway and Bert Williams in 1919 (2 minutes)

TITLE: *Show Boat* (10 minutes)

EPISODE TWO

Syncopated City (1919-1933)

Segments

Open (4 minutes)

Women and Broadway (3 minutes)

TITLE: Look for the Silver Lining – Marilyn Miller (4 minutes)

The Marx Brothers (1 minute)

Revue (2 minutes)

TITLE: With a Dixie Melody – Al Jolson (5 minutes)

TITLE: *Shuffle Along* – Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle (6 minutes)

Harlem and Broadway (1 minute)

George White Scandals (2 minutes)

TITLE: **Fascinating Rhythm** – George and Ira Gershwin (6 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD)**

TITLE: **The Big Apple** – Broadway, slang and Walter Winchell (4 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD)**

TITLE: **Two Promising Young Men** – Rodgers and Hart (5 minutes)

(STUDENT CARD, CD: “Thou Swell”)

Good News (2 minutes)

TITLE: You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet – Al Jolson and *The Jazz Singer* (3 minutes)

Broadway, the Depression and Hollywood (5 minutes)

EPISODE THREE

I Got Plenty O' Nuttin' (1930-1942)

Segments

Broadway and the Depression Open (3 minutes)

TITLE: **I Was Building a Dream** (3 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD, CD: “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?”)**

TITLE: Who Could Ask for Anything More – Ethel Merman (3 minutes)

TITLE: *Of Thee I Sing* (4 minutes)

TITLE: **Supper Time** – Ethel Waters (7 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD)**

Cole Porter (7 minutes)

TITLE: Nuttin's Plenty Fo' Me: Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (9 minutes)

The Cradle Will Rock (6 minutes)

TITLE: Where or When: Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* (6 minutes)

TITLE: *This Is the Army*: World War II and Irving Berlin (5 minutes)

EPISODE FOUR

Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin' (1943-1960)

Segments

Open (2 minutes)

Rodgers and Hammerstein and *Oklahoma!* (8 minutes)

TITLE: It's a Helluva Town – Comden, Green, Bernstein, Robbins (6 minutes)

Carousel (4 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD, CD: “Soliloquy”)**

TITLE: There's No Business Like Show Business – *Annie Get Your Gun* (4 minutes)

Kiss Me Kate (3 minutes)

South Pacific (4 minutes)

TITLE: Luck Be a Lady – *Guys and Dolls* (4 minutes)

TV variety shows and *The Ed Sullivan Show* (3 minutes)

TITLE: I Could Have Danced All Night – *My Fair Lady* (7 minutes)

Title: Bless My Homeland Forever – *The Sound of Music* (10 minutes)

EPISODE FIVE

Tradition (1957-1979)

Segments

Open (1 minute)

West Side Story (7 minutes)

TITLE: Before the Parade Passes By – *Gypsy, Bye Bye Birdie, Hello Dolly, Fiddler on the Roof* (6 minutes)

Cabaret (6 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD, CD: “What Would You Do?”)**

TITLE: **Let the Sunshine In** – *Hair* (6 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD)**

TITLE: A City of Strangers – *Company* (6 minutes)

TITLE: I Need this Job – *A Chorus Line*, Michael Bennett (7 minutes)

Bob Fosse: *Chicago* (6 minutes)

TITLE: He Trod a Path that Few Have Trod: Stephen Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd* (8 minutes)

I Love New York (1 minute)

EPISODE SIX

Putting It Together (1980-2004)

Segments

Open (1 minute)

The Producers (5 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD, CD: “I Wanna Be a Producer”)**

David Merrick and *42nd Street* (5 minutes)

Cats and Cameron Macintosh (4 minutes)

Les Miserables, Phantom of the Opera, etc. (3 minutes)

TITLE: Art Isn't Easy: *Sunday in the Park* with George and Stephen Sondheim (6 minutes)

La Cage Aux Folles and AIDS (5 minutes)

TITLE: The Circle of Life – Disney and Broadway musicals (6 minutes)

TITLE: One Song Glory – *Rent* and Jonathan Larson (5 minutes)

Broadway and 9/11, *Hairspray* (3 minutes)

TITLE: **Defying Gravity** – *Wicked*, art and commerce (8 minutes) **(STUDENT CARD)**