

TEACHER LITERARY AND CURRICULUM GUIDE AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'

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Audience Etiquette

Because many students have not had the opportunity to view live theatre, we are including an audience etiquette section with each literary/curriculum guide. Teachers, please spend time on this subject since it will greatly enhance your students' experience at the theatre.

1. How does one respond to a live performance of a play, as opposed to when seeing a film at a local cinema? What is the best way to approach viewing a live performance of a play? What things should you look and listen for?
2. What is the audience's role during a live performance? How do you think audience behavior can affect an actor's performance?
3. What do you know about the theatrical rehearsal process? Have you ever participated in one as an actor, singer, director, or technical person?
4. How do costumes, set, lights, sound and props enhance a theatre production?

Background & Objectives

The Huntington's production of *Ain't Misbehavin'* shares the story of five friends performing for each other at one of Harlem's famous Rent Parties. The host of a Rent Party would hire great jazz stride pianists, such as James P. Johnson, Duke Ellington and, of course, Thomas "Fats" Waller. By charging admission to this event, the host would earn enough money to pay the rent. At a time when the increasing cost of living burdened many Harlem residents, families alleviated their debt by inviting the community to their rent parties. Inspired by the music of Fats Waller, *Ain't Misbehavin'* pays tribute to Harlem's extraordinary renaissance period, an eruption of black art and culture, through the celebration of its artists and community.

Objectives

1. Students will:

Identify themes in *Ain't Misbehavin'*, including:
Harlem's rebirth of black art and culture
The Harlem Community of the 1920s

2. Relate themes and issues of *Ain't Misbehavin'* to their own lives.
3. Analyze the production's themes within the cultural, social and historical context.
4. Identify elements of a musical revue and consider the musical as a larger genre.
5. Participate in hands-on activities to enhance understanding of the production.
6. Evaluate the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*.

Preparation for *Ain't Misbehavin'*

Fats Waller

Have students read *Never Boreome: The Life of Fats Waller* (page x). In groups, instruct students to research Fats Waller's biographical information. Students should then present their findings to the class. Suggested categories for research include, but are not limited to:

- 6 His education and development as a musician
- 7 His career as a jazz pianist
- 8 His relationship with James P. Johnson
- 9 His work with lyricist Andy Razaf
- 10 His work in Hollywood and in Europe
- 11 His untimely death and legacy of music

The Harlem Renaissance

Inspired by the Harlem Renaissance, *Ain't Misbehavin'* reflects the excitement and artistic significance of this historical period. Have students explore the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture's web site (www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/) in an effort to learn more about the Harlem Renaissance. Students should spend time looking at the Harlem exhibit, which contains information about multiple artists including musical legend Duke Ellington.

As the web site explains, "Harlem has long symbolized the culture of the African-American experience in 20th-century America. Its history has been well documented in photographs, literature and other media ... The scope of this portfolio is Harlem from the years 1900-1940. Various elements of the history of the urban experience in

Harlem's early days as the Cultural Capital of African Americans are represented here by graphic and photographic images ... Some of the subjects include the Schomburg Center itself, political movements, education, sports, social organizations, religion, the Harlem Hospital, theater, business and music."

The web site suggests a variety of activities related to the music industry for students to explore. You may want to try the following:

12 African Americans have been involved in the music industry for over 150 years. Have students research a musician in that time period and present their findings to the class.

13 Play a series of selections by Duke Ellington, and see how many students recognize his work. What seems to be the overall focus of these selections? Have you heard any of these pieces before?

KEY ISSUES

Harlem's rebirth of black art and culture

Have students read, *The Harlem Renaissance - Rich Beyond Dream* (page x) and have them discuss the following questions:

14 In what ways has the music of the Harlem Renaissance brought the movement its "greatest visibility?"

15 What are some of the reasons scholars believe that the Harlem Renaissance was primarily a literary and intellectual movement as opposed to a fine arts movement?

16 What reason(s) can be given for the abrupt end to the Harlem Renaissance? Did this ending change the movement's legacy or ability to inspire future generations? What other advancements might artists in Harlem have made if the movement had been able to continue?

17 Explain the meaning of the following quote from A. Schomburg's *The Negro Digs Up His Past* and how it relates the Harlem Renaissance: "The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future...History must restore what slavery took away...The Negro has been a man without a history because he has been considered a man without a worthy culture...But already the Negro sees himself against a reclaimed background, in a perspective that will give pride and self-respect ample scope, and make history yield for him the same values that the treasured past of any people affords."

The Harlem Community of the 1920s

The Harlem Renaissance remains an important period in American history, culturally, artistically and socially. Musicians, painters, writers and intellectuals not only created art, but also helped to uplift the perception of black culture. Through the daily interactions of Harlem's community members, this movement inspired a shift in thinking about black art and culture.

Have students discuss the following quote from the article, *Let the Good Times Roll: The Harlem Rent Party* (Page x), considering how Rent Parties exhibited the strength of the Harlem community. "Each ticket sold [to a Rent Party] helped alleviate a family's rent debt by spreading it across the community. Everyone benefitted – instead of spending their entertainment dollars at a bar or club, the partygoers helped families pay their bills – and had a great time, in the process. It has been said that the rent parties not only strengthened the Harlem community, but also provided an important social safety net for its residents."

MASTERY ASSESSMENT

Instruct students to read the stanza(s) from each song and answer the following questions.

ACT ONE

AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'

NO ONE TO TALK WITH
ALL BY MYSELF.
NO ONE TO WALK WITH,
BUT I'M HAPPY ON THE SHELF
AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'

I'M SAVIN' MY LOVE FOR YOU
AND YOU
AND YOU
OH, AND YOU

NO ONE TO WALK WITH
ALL BY MYSELF.
NO ONE TO WALK WITH

AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'
I'M SAVIN' MY LOVE FOR YOU

1. What is this song about? What message do the lyrics convey?
2. Do you think *Ain't Misbehavin'* is an appropriate title for this song? Why or why not?
3. What is the mood of this song based on these lyrics? Serious? Playful? Bitter? Humorous?
4. Why do you think the title of this song is used as the title of the production?

'T AIN'T NOBODY'S BIZ-NESS IF I DO

IF I GO TO CHURCH ON SUNDAY
THEN CABARET ALL DAY ON MONDAY
'T AIN'T NOBODY'S BUSINESS IF I DO.
IF MY FRIEND AIN'T GOT NO MONEY
AND I SAY TAKE ALL MINE, HONEY,
'T AIN'T NOBODY'S BUSINESS IF I DO.
THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO
NOR NOTHING I CAN SAY
THAT FOLKS DON'T CRITICIZE ME,
BUT I'M GOING TO DO JUST AS I WANT TO ANYWAY,
AND DON'T CARE IF THEY ALL DESPISE ME.

1. What is the attitude of the character singing this song? Do you think it is a good attitude to have? Why or why not?
2. What is the mood or tone of this song? In what way can you relate to its message?
3. Who might be effected by this character's actions? Should it be their *business*?

HANDFUL OF KEYS

I LIKE TO TINKLE ON AN OLD PIANA.
I LIKE TO PLAY IN A SUBTLE MANNAH.
I GET A LOT O' PLEASURE WITH A
SPAN O' KEYS UNDERNEATH MY FINGERTIPS.
I LIKE TO SING A LITTLE TUNE THAT'S MELLAH.
I LIKE TO VOCALIZE, THERE'S NOTHIN' SWELLAH.
I LOVE TO HAVE A SUPPLE MELODY
JUST TRICKLIN' OFF O' MY LIPS.
A HANDFUL O' KEYS AND A SONG TO SING,
NOW HOW COULD YOU ASK FOR MORE?

WHEN MY LEFT HAND THUMPS OUT BASS NOTES
I'M HALF-WAY TO PLAYIN' THAT STRIDE PIANO.
THEN RIGHT THERE IN BETWEEN THOSE BASS NOTES
I PLAY CHORDS FOR THAT STRIDE PIANO SOUND.

1. What do you think is meant by *piana?* *mannah?* *mellah?* What is being conveyed through the use of this dialect?
2. What does it mean to play the stride piano? How does one learn to do this? (See page x of the literary guide for *That Stride Piano Sound*.)
3. Do you think that most professional musicians feel this way about their music and instruments?
4. What does this song tell you about the stride style of jazz piano, a staple at Harlem rent parties?

WHEN THE NYLONS BLOOM AGAIN

GONE ARE THE DAYS WHEN I'D ANSWER THE BELL,
FIND THERE A SALESMAN WITH STOCKINGS TO SELL,
GLEAM IN HIS EYE, AND MEASURING TAPE IN HIS HAND.
I'D GET THE URGE TO GO SPLURGING ON HOSE -
NYLONS! A DOZEN OF THOSE!
NOW, POOR OR RICH, WE'RE ENDURING INSTEAD
WOOLENS WHICH ITCH, RAYONS THAT SPREAD.
I'LL BE HAPPY WHEN THE NYLONS BLOOM AGAIN.
COTTON IS MONOTONOUS TO MEN.
ONLY WAY TO KEEP AFFECTION FRESH:
GET SOME MESH FO' YO' FLESH.
I'LL BE HAPPY WHEN THE NYLONS BLOOM AGAIN.

1. What is the plight of the woman in this song? What does she mean by the expression, "when the nylons bloom again?"
2. What do you think was happening in America at the time this song was written? Why was nylon unavailable?
3. Would a salesman come to your house to sell nylons? How and why has this practice changed?

CASH FOR YOUR TRASH

TODAY'S THE DAY THAT ALL US CATS MUST SURELY DO OUR BIT.
WE'VE GOT TO DO OUR SHARE, SO UNCLE SAM CAN HIT.
SAVE UP ALL YOUR POTS AND PANS,
SAVE UP EVERY LITTLE THING YOU CAN.
DON'T GIVE IT AWAY, NO, NO,
GET SOME CASH FOR YOUR TRASH.
SAVE UP ALL YOUR OLD NEWSPAPERS,

SAVE AND PILE 'EM LIKE A HIGH SKYSCRAPER.
DON'T GIVE IT AWAY, NO, NO.
GET SOME CASH FOR YOUR TRASH.

1. What does this song suggest people do with their trash as part of *giving their all for the war effort*? In what war do you think America was fighting?
2. What is meant by *we've got to do our share, so Uncle Sam can hit*?
3. Who are the *cats*? Who is going to pay *cash for your trash*?

ACT TWO

YOUR FEET'S TOO BIG

UP IN HARLEM AT A TABLE FOR TWO,
THERE WERE THE FOUR OF US, BABY
ME, YOUR BIG FEET AND YOU.
FROM YOUR ANKLE UP, I'LL SAY YOU SURE ARE SWEET.
BUT FROM THERE DOWN, BABY THERE'S JUST TOO MUCH FEET.

1. What is this song about? Do you think this song is unkind? funny? in bad or good taste?
2. Can you think of contemporary songs similar to this one?
3. What is the mood of this song? What might the atmosphere be like at a Harlem Rent Party if this song was being played?

BLACK AND BLUE

COLD EMPTY BED
SPRINGS HARD AS LEAD
PAINS IN MY HEAD
FEEL LIKE OLD NED
WHAT DID I DO, TO BE SO
BLACK AND BLUE.
NO JOYS FOR ME,
NO COMPANY,
EVEN THE MOUSE
RAN FROM MY HOUSE
ALL MY LIFE THROUGH
I'VE BEEN SO BLACK AND BLUE

JUST FEELING BLACK AND BLUE.
I'M WHITE, I'M WHITE INSIDE, INSIDE
BUT THAT DON'T HELP MY CASE
'CAUSE I, 'CAUSE I CAN'T HIDE, CAN'T HIDE
WHAT IS ON MY FACE

1. What is the message of this song? What is the mood or tone of this piece?
2. What is the plight of the singer? What is meant by the lyric *just feeling black and blue*?
3. What purpose does the use of specific colors play in this song? What might feeling "white" symbolize?

FINALE

IT'S A SIN TO TELL A LIE
BE SURE IT'S TRUE WHEN YOU SAY I LOVE YOU.
IT'S A SIN TO TELL A LIE.
MILLIONS OF HEARTS HAVE BEEN BROKEN
JUST BECAUSE THESE WORDS WERE SPOKEN
BUT IF YOU BREAK MY HEART
SO BE SURE IT'S TRUE
WHEN YOU SAY I LOVE YOU.
IT'S A SIN TO TELL A LIE.

1. What is this song about? For whom is it being sung?
2. What are the consequences for telling a lie according to the song?
3. What physical comedy might be added to this scene to complement the tone of this piece?

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

1. Musical theatre is often defined as having three major components: the **book** (or libretto) which includes the dialogue, plot and major themes of piece; the **score** or the music, and **lyrics** to the songs, which the characters sing. List three current films or television shows that you believe could be categorized as a “musical.” Musical theatre stars are often called a “triple-threat” meaning that they can sing, dance and act. List three contemporary actors who could be considered a “triple-threat.”

2. Form small groups of three or four. Each group should discuss what it knows about the Harlem Renaissance, and create a list providing as much information as possible. Next, the group should discuss what life would be like in Harlem during this time period. What leisure activities might you enjoy? Would you go to a theatre or museum? Why or why not? What type of media (film, television, radio) would be most popular? What type of parties or social functions would you attend?

3. As a class, create a list of social organizations in your city or town. Who joins these organizations? What purpose do they serve? Discuss how the strength of community and social organizations contributed to the Harlem Renaissance. Debate the pros and cons of creating or joining a social organization.

4. If you were assigned to be the dramaturg for a production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, what research and visual stimulation would you provide for the director and cast at the first rehearsal? Would you play the music of Duke Ellington or bring in the writing of Zora Neale Hurston? Would you show pictures or magazine clippings of clothes, cars or buildings from 1920s Harlem?

5. What other periods of the 20th century have been shaped by the developments in African-American music? You might choose one of these areas to study considering the artistic as well as the cultural constructs of this music.

Questions for After Attending the Performance

Note to teachers: After viewing *Ain't Misbehavin'*, ask the following questions:

1. About the Play and Production

- A. What was your overall reaction? Were you moved? Shocked? Empathetic? Explain your reactions. How was the play structured? Did it build to a single climax? Was it episodic? Did this structure help or hinder your understanding of the play? Was the dialogue interesting? Appropriate? Were you aware of the imagery and symbolism during the course of the play? Would you have been aware of these devices without previous preparation?
- B. Was the pace and tempo of the production effective and appropriate?

2. About the Characters

- A. Did the characters touch you personally in some ways? Did you care about them?
- B. Were the characters three-dimensional and believable?
- C. Were the motivations of the characters clear?
- D. What qualities were revealed by the actions and speech of the characters?
- E. Did the characters change/develop/undergo transformation during the course of the play?
- F. In what ways did the characters reveal the themes of the play?

3. About the Set

- A. Was the set usable and workable?
- B. Was the set compatible with the production as a whole? Were there any features of the set that distracted from the action of the play?
- C. Did the design reflect the themes, type and style of play?
- D. Were the artistic qualities of unity, balance, line, texture, mass and color used effectively?
- E. Did the set provide appropriate environment and atmosphere?
- F. Was the set used to present any symbolic images or did it simply represent the space in which the action of the play occurred? Did it contain elements of both a "realistic" and a "symbolic" approach?

4. About Lighting and Sound

- A. Did the lighting establish mood and atmosphere? Was the illumination sufficient? Did the lighting harmonize with, and contribute toward, the unity of the production?
- B. Were the music and sound effects appropriately conceived? Were they executed effectively?

5. About Costumes/Makeup/Hairstyles

- A. Were all of these elements correct in terms of the period fashion? Were they suitable in terms of character and storytelling for the production?
- B. Did the costumes and make-up use of color/design serve to illuminate the themes, type and style of the play, or any particular choices of interpretations in this production?

OPEN RESPONSE AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

OPEN RESPONSE

1. Define musical revue. How is a musical revue different from a play, movie or a concert? What elements are the same?
2. In what ways does the Harlem Renaissance signify a key movement in African-American history? Many critics contest that the Harlem Renaissance was primarily a literary movement. Agree or disagree with this statement. Be sure to consider the contributions of musicians within the Harlem community.
3. Langston Hughes wrote in his autobiography, *The Big Sea*, “All of us know that the gay and sparkling life of the so-called Negro Renaissance of the 20's was not so gay and sparkling beneath the surface as it looked.” What did Hughes mean by this statement? Consider how wealthy white people visited the Cotton Club to be entertained by great jazz artists like Fats Waller, but no person of color was permitted to sit at a table inside.
4. Broadway has been called the *Great White Way* – what does this mean to you? Given the success of Harlem Renaissance artists and contemporary artists, such as August Wilson, George C. Wolfe and Ntzoke Shange, do you think the *Great White Way* is an appropriate name for Broadway? Why or why not?
5. The Huntington’s production of *Ain’t Misbehavin’* is set in Harlem during one of its famous Rent Parties. How does this artistic choice affect the production? How might it strengthen or weaken this musical revue?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Congratulations! Your idea to create a prime time entertainment show based on the musical revue, *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, has been accepted. The network will air the show for at least six episodes. Submit a framework or outline of each show to the network executives. Be sure to include who will host, artists who will be invited to perform and the type of segments included in the broadcast.
2. You are a jazz stride pianist who has been working at the Cotton Club regularly for over one year. At the risk of losing your job, write a letter to the upper management requesting that black patrons be admitted to this venue.
3. Write a scene about a family planning to throw a Rent Party. What was the situation that led to the family needing extra income? What must be prepared in order for the evening to be a success? Who is invited to the party and who is asked to perform?
4. Write an essay that traces the evolution of black theatre in America during the 20th century (include the opening of *Ain’t Misbehavin’*).
5. The Harlem Renaissance provided many opportunities for ordinary citizens to meet and have relationships with famous writers, performers or politicians. Choose a great historical figure from this time period and write a journal entry explaining how you met and came to know this person. How might this relationship influence or change your life?
6. Write a critical review of the Huntington Theatre Company’s production of *Ain’t Misbehavin’* and submit it to your school newspaper. Be sure to send the Huntington a copy!

MEDIA ASSESSMENT

These questions and hands-on exercises are interactive challenges in Drama, Music, Dance and Design that inspire further consideration or understanding of the play.

Creating Characterization

In a large group, have students discuss the process of creating a character. *Ain't Misbehavin'*, as it is a musical revue, has very little dialogue and no story from which to create a character. Yet through the performance of these songs real characters are developed. Have students answer the following questions:

- a. How do you, as an actor or director, create a three-dimensional character in a musical revue? What is a three-dimensional character? What activities or directing strategies might be used in rehearsal to give life to these characters?
- b. Do the characters change during the course of the performance? What might a character's journey in a musical revue entail?
- c. What do we learn about characters through the songs they sing? Might we learn about a character's desires, frustrations, joys and sorrows? How do these songs imply an outside world in which the characters live?

Role Playing/Improvisation

- a. In groups, have students select one stanza or part of a song from *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Have students create an improvised scene that reflects a situation based upon the lyrics of that song. The improvised scene does not have to be one in which it would be appropriate to sing.
- b. Have students improvise a scene that occurs before the revue begins, such as the day before or after the Rent Party. The host, performers and guests may be preparing for the festivities or cleaning up from them the morning after the last Rent Party at which everyone spent the night eating, drinking and being entertained.
- c. Divide the students into several groups and ask each group to create a tableaux or stage picture that represents the production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*. They should be inspired by their research of the musical revue as a genre and the Harlem Renaissance, including Fats Waller, the Cotton Club, and the Rent Party.

Visual Art

Assign students the task of creating posters relating to their study of *Ain't Misbehavin'*.

- a. Create a poster advertising the upcoming Rent Party used as the setting in the Huntington's production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*. See page (x) of the Literary Guide for examples of advertising slogans. Students should present their work to the class.
- b. Create a poster design for the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Ain't Misbehavin'* used to advertise in and around the Boston area. What images or pictures of Harlem during the 1920s would be appropriate to use in an advertising campaign for this production?
- c. Create a poster design for the Cotton Club presenting Fats Waller and/or other significant singers.

Music/Dance

- a. Ask students to bring in pieces of jazz, blues, rap and hip-hop music that represents or relates to the major themes in *Ain't Misbehavin'*, and play a sample of each for the class. Ask students to explain what mood the music creates, why they chose this particular piece, and how it relates to *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Compare these pieces to the music in *Ain't Misbehavin'* discussing their similarities and differences. The class should then select one song from the student pieces and one from *Ain't Misbehavin'* for which to choreograph a dance. The dance and music should represent a key idea in the production. Allow time for students to talk about the process they used in creating, rehearsing, and performing their dance.

b. Look at Michael Bennett's score or soundtrack for *Dream Girls* – a musical about three African American singers in the early 60s. Consider how the lyrics to these songs document the struggles of the main characters. Contrast these selections with those from *Ain't Misbehavin'*.

The Design Process

Students should research clothing styles from 1920s Harlem and create costume designs which are appropriate for a production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Encourage students to gather magazine and newspaper clippings from the time period, and to choose colors, textures and materials which reflect Harlem's fashion and style. Students should be able to defend their choices and explain how each design reflects the social, economic and political context of the production.

LESSON PLANS

Teachers' note: Choose activities that are appropriate for your classroom period.

ONE-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the context and major themes of the production.

DAY ONE – Introducing the Play

1. Distribute **Mastery Assessment** questions (page x) for *Ain't Misbehavin'* for students to read before and to review after attending the performance.

Optional: Distribute **Vocabulary Handout** and ask students to match each word with the correct definition. A vocabulary test could be administered after viewing the play.

2. Read the synopsis of *Ain't Misbehavin'* in the Literary Guide (page x). Discuss other works the students have studied that have similar themes and issues.

Optional: Distribute the **Shopping Quiz Handout** (page x).

3. Copy and distribute the information about the Fats Waller (page x). In groups or individually, have students underline the highlights of this musician's life.

Optional: To save time, narrate highlights to students.

4. If time allows, highlight key points or distribute copies of *Keeping Fats Young: The Production History* (page x) and discuss in class.

FOUR-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the production and then, after viewing the performance, asks them to think more critically about what they have seen. Includes time for class discussion and individual assessment.

DAY ONE – Introducing the Production

Same as Day One above; completed before seeing the production.

DAY TWO – The Production

Attend the performance at the Huntington Theatre Company.

Homework: Students should answer the **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY THREE – Follow-up Discussion

Discuss **Mastery Assessment** answers in class.

DAY FOUR – Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the **Open Response Assessment** or one question from **Writing Assignments** (page x) for students to answer in one class period

Optional: Students may choose one of the **For Further Exploration** or **Media Assessment** tasks to complete for extra credit.

SEVEN-DAY LESSON PLAN completely integrates *Ain't Misbehavin'* into your schedule. Within seven school days, you can introduce the play, assign reading and vocabulary, and assess your students on both a group and individual level. Students will ideally view the play after completing all assigned work.

DAY ONE – Introducing the play

Same as Day One above

Optional: Distribute and assign questions from **Vocabulary Handout** and/or **Musical Theatre Handout** due on Day Four.

Homework: Complete **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY TWO – Introduction to Musical Theatre

Distribute the **Musical Theatre** handout. Discuss the differences between a musical revue and the other musical theatre forms.

DAY THREE – Media Assessment

Ask students to choose one **Media Assessment** activity to begin in class.

Homework: Complete **Media Assessment** activity.

DAY FOUR – **For Further Exploration**

Ask students to choose one **For Further Exploration** activity to begin in class.

Homework: Complete a **For Further Exploration** activity .

DAY FIVE – Group Work

Ask students to bring completed work from the **Media Assessment** and **For Further Exploration** activities to share in small groups. Ask each group to create a presentation for *Ain't Misbehavin'* out of the work they have already completed, but encourage additional research if necessary; schedule library time for this period.

DAY SIX – Presentations

Group Assessment: Students present their work to the class.

Homework: Study and prepare for *Ain't Misbehavin'* Test.

DAY SEVEN – Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the **Open Response Assessment** or one question from **Writing Assignments** (page x) for students to answer in one class period

Optional: Students may choose one of the **For Further Exploration** or **Media Assessment** tasks to complete for extra credit.

MUSICAL THEATRE

ANALYZING THE ELEMENTS OF MUSICAL THEATRE

Musical theatre, like theatre itself, is frequently universal and often life-affirming; most importantly, America has embraced the form and made many of its most distinctive artistic contributions to the world of theatre through different types of musicals.

1. Ask students to work in groups to research and define each of the following musical theatre forms, citing examples of the influence of earlier forms. Students should be encouraged to present recorded examples that will allow the class to appreciate the variety of music, songs, artists and musical facts that represent their findings. Assign teams to one or more of the following categories:

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Opera | Operetta | Ballad Opera |
| Minstrelsy | Vaudeville | Burlesque |
| Revue | Follies | Oratorio |
| Musical Comedy | Concept Musical | Rock Musical/ Rock Opera |

2. Director-choreographer Bob Fosse once described an evening of musical theatre as "when everybody has a good time-- even in the crying scenes." Create student teams and assign one of the following musicals as the subject for reports.

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|------|
| <i>Show Boat</i> | Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II | 1927 |
| <i>Porgy and Bess</i> | George and Ira Gershwin | 1935 |
| <i>South Pacific</i> | Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II | 1949 |
| <i>West Side Story</i> | Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim | 1957 |
| <i>Hair</i> | MacDermott, Ragni and Rado | 1968 |
| <i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> | Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Weber | 1971 |

Questions to consider include:

- What themes are prevalent in these musicals?
- What historical relationships do these musicals have with their themes?
- What social impacts did these musicals have on their first audiences?
- Why were these musicals considered to be controversial during the decades in which they were first presented?

3. Encourage your students to become familiar with the elements of the musical: book, lyrics and score.

The Book (sometimes called the libretto) generates the "theatre" in musical theatre. It is the glue which binds the other elements of the musical together. The book encompasses the necessary components of dramatic form:

- character-- the people we remember in the story
- plot-- the sequence of actions which drives the characters, idea or situations
- situation-- any moment within the plot that generates drama, sustains audience attention, and begs for resolution
- dialogue-- speech; generally a companion in tone and style to the lyrics of the musical
- theme-- the main idea (or ideas) of the musical

In a traditional musical book the following dramatic elements are generally established within the **first five minutes** of the performance, either through action or exposition:

- time-- morning, afternoon or night
- place-- geographical setting
- characters-- social identity, status, relationships
- theme-- a hint of the message or purpose of the story is introduced
- conflict-- obstacles that the characters must endeavor to overcome
- tone-- mood of the musical (serious, comedic)

The Lyrics share stage time with dialogue, dance, scenery changes and instrumental music. Theatre lyrics must be compact, dense with word meaning and delivered with dramatic power. Song lyrics are an integral part of the story and are created to develop character and move along the plot of the musical.

The Score is the music. Music expresses and reinforces the emotion in drama as well as serves to underscore dramatic action. It establishes the tone and sets the mood of a piece. Its component parts are *melody* which represents an aural image of the lyric, *harmony* which creates tones that color the aural image, and *rhythm* which contrasts the dramatic values of character and action.

Ask students to observe the staging and listen to the opening song in the first scene of *Ain't Misbehavin.* After watching and listening to the title song "Ain't Misbehavin," ask students to discuss which of the essential dramatic elements are introduced to the audience.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Handout #2
VOCABULARY MATCHING

Harlemese, or black slang during the Harlem Renaissance was considered a very inventive oral art form. Not all of the words or phrases originated in Harlem – many had Southern roots – but they became urbanized and more widely disseminated during the 1920s.

Please match the word(s) with the correct definition.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. RENT PARTY (n.): | A. to apply yourself diligently; break your neck |
| 2. BALL (v.): | B. a sultry dance with undulating hips |
| 3. DADDY (n.): | C. comprehend |
| 4. STRIDE (adj.): | D. to party; have a ball |
| 5. JIVE (v.): | E. nice |
| 6. BEATS ME TO MY SOCKS (v.): | F. dance |
| 7. ZAT ZOO ZAY: | G. phrase meaning, “Hello, Sir, greetings.” |
| 8. TRUCK (v.): | H. tired feet |
| 9. PECKING (n.): | I. Sutton Place, New York; posh neighborhood |
| 10. BURN YOUR LEATHER (adj.): | J. enthusiastic and vigorous dancing |
| 11. IN THE GROOVE (adj.): | K. the place is lively; the club is leaping with fun |
| 12. STATEN (n.): | L. dance in which the head bobs back and forth |
| 13. SUTTON (n.): | M. to go somewhere |
| 14. HOOF (v.): | N. phrase meaning, “wow,” “cool,” “swinging,” etc. |
| 15. DOGS (n.): | O. makes me want to dance |
| 16. GREETINGS GATE, LET’S DISSIPATE: | P. Harlem speech; the language of hepsters |
| 17. KILLER DILLER (adj.): | R. boyfriend, not a blood relative |
| 18. COLLAR (v.): | S. a party where the price of admission pays the rent |
| 19. SNAKE-HIP (n.): | T. jazz piano style |
| 20. BUST YOUR CONK (v.): | U. Staten Island, New York; working class area. |

ANSWER KEY:

1.S, 2.D, 3.R., 4.T, 5.P, 6.O, 7.N., 8.M, 9.L, 10.J, 11.K., 12.U, 13.I, 14.F, 15.H, 16.G, 17.E, 18.C, 19.B, 20.A

Name: _____

Date: _____

Handout # 3
SHOPPING DURING THE DEPRESSION

Price Quiz

Below you will find a list of items commonly found on a family shopping list during the Depression. Match the item to the price it would have cost in 1932-1934.

| <u>ITEM</u> | <u>PRICE (Letter)</u> |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1. Toothpaste (large) | _____ |
| 2. A new Pontiac coupe automobile | _____ |
| 3. Cornflakes (8oz. package) | _____ |
| 4. Bread (20oz. Loaf) | _____ |
| 5. Two-wheeled bike | _____ |
| 6. Gasoline (per gallon) | _____ |
| 7. Airline Ticket, Round trip Chicago to Los Angeles _____ | |
| 8. Milk (per qt.) | _____ |
| 9. Modern house, 6 rooms, 2-car garage, Detroit | _____ |
| 10. Reptile leather shoes | _____ |

PRICE:

| | | | |
|---|----------|---|------------|
| A | \$207.00 | F | \$10.95 |
| B | \$.25 | G | \$.08 |
| C | \$.10 | H | \$.18 |
| D | \$.05 | I | \$ 6.00 |
| E | \$585.00 | J | \$2,800.00 |

Answers: 1-B, 2-E, 3-G, 4-D, 5-F, 6-H, 7-A, 8-C, 9-J, 10-I