



Yale-New Haven
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1985 Volume II: American Musical Theater

Roll Up Your Sleeves: Making the American Musical Theater Work in the Classroom

Curriculum Unit 85.02.02

by Janet Melillo

This unit is an introduction to the American musical theater via *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. The focus of my unit is on how to direct interpersonal family relationships in the American musical format. I have chosen a sampling from the dramatic musical canon of those musicals that have recorded critical appraisal for their artistic quality and that have as their subject matter interpersonal relationships. Using the literary sources these musicals were based on and the musical dramatic literature in these pieces, students will explore the “big” issues of family relationships such as love, respect, and self-image. We will explore the extensions of these relationships in society and how they effect the family unit. The unit is designed as a beginning rehearsal process from which one can introduce and explore the American musical theater in any classroom situation, but with the time, energy, and desire, could easily lead to production work. I also attempt to illustrate how dance and music enhance the fundamental dramatic structure to create what we know as the American musical theater. Although this unit is intended for eighth grade students, it can easily be adjusted for both younger and older grade levels.

I am presently teaching fifth through eighth grade theater classes at Conte School. The courses I teach are identified as core curricula and choice classes. The first class consists of core groups that take theater as a requirement once a week. In these classes students are exposed to an overview of the theater arts. This study encompasses theater history, theater crafts, dramatic literature, and theater techniques such as improvisation, playmaking, theater games, and acting. Students also explore different dramatic forms for presentational work. In their course of theater study, students are able to make academic connections with Language Arts and Social Studies in theatrical projects dealing with other cultures, social and political events, and literature such as mythology, folklore, poetry, and stories. The second class is an arts choice group that meets twice a week in addition to their once a week core experience. This class consists of a smaller group of students who are eager to explore the theater arts discipline with more concentration on acting technique and performance skills. These students both create pieces and work on scripted material for classroom and stage presentation.

The educational program at Conte school is unique in that students are able to experience the visual and performing arts as part of their curriculum. It is also a unique teaching situation for me because I am able to create the theater curriculum with my theater colleague. This artistic freedom and flexibility allows me to make connections to other artistic mediums and academic resources. In this way too, the needs and interests of the students are better met. The entire staff, both artistic and academic teachers, try to introduce and

reinforce similar basic learning skills into their curriculum to help students realize and advance their knowledge. The teaching of the American musical theater unit as part of the theater curriculum will introduce and reinforce many of these skills.

My purpose in this unit is to make the American musical theater an understandable reality to urban children. If you accept the fact that the American musical is an indigenous art form of America, these children have a birthright to be exposed to that art form. It is part of our American culture and heritage. In fact, if we look at the history of drama in the western world, we could say the musical, like all drama, got its roots in the theater of Dionysus of Athens Greece. Drama developed from rites performed in honor of Dionysus, God of the harvest and wine. These rites were performed on primitive dancing floors where our first actors danced and sang hymns which told of Dionysus's adventures and life. This primitive ritual was performed as part of the ancient Greek festivals. To Athenians, these performances were always colorful and impressive spectacles. It is no wonder that in the twentieth century we would develop a popular form of drama which included dance and music as an integral part of that form. Not unlike our predecessors, we are dazzled by the spectacle of sets, costumes, music, and dances that the musical provides its audience. No matter what mode, shape, or size the musical as form has taken, it has been the most popular form of entertainment in America and still remains so.

I feel that no study of drama would be complete without the exposure to and exploration of the American musical theater. Students in my classes generally have never been exposed to this theatrical art form. This study will provide for them a full educational, artistic, and cultural experience which would be informative, insightful, and fun. I felt that the American musical theater as a course of study would be an appropriate next step in their theater development for the following reasons:

1. The American musical theater employs music and dance in its form to enhance the basic narrative or to move the action of the play. The development of character is done through song and dance also. These elements would be quite new for the eighth grade theater students.
2. It is an excellent vehicle for students to apply their basic knowledge in all the arts that they have been a part of at Conte School. Students have a basic knowledge of dance, music, theater, and visual arts. All this basic knowledge and skill can be channeled and applied to the musical theater form.
3. Part of their learning process in the arts, and in particular, theater, is to realize that creating art for the stage is a collaboration of many talents, people, and team work. Once I had theater students paint the set for a production in the art room. They couldn't understand why they were doing this; they felt that this was a job only for the art department. There has also been resistance to movement and exercise in theater class with students feeling that this kind of activity should be left to dance. The American musical theater is a form that will bring other visual and performing arts to the theater class experience. I don't feel that students have made the connection that all the arts disciplines can work together to create one artistic piece.

This unit is geared toward enhancing the eighth grade curriculum at Conte School. Most students entering the eighth grade have had a good foundation set in basic theater skills, acting techniques, and performance skills.

Having built each year on a strong foundation, these groups are ready for more challenging work. The idea is to take all the background experience and apply that knowledge to a new and more sophisticated medium of expression.

The use of theme has always been very important to my work. It is not only the thread that ties the many pieces of a show together, but a useful tool in developing units and lesson plans for the classroom. My courses have been designed for the individual to explore their potential for becoming creative, expressive, and spontaneous. The thrust or focus has been on self-awareness and self-development with emphasis on group communication and interrelationships. I begin the year with the theme of community. I emphasize to my classes the importance in building a theater community. It is the working together as a group that is the single most factor for a theater class to be successful. Through work with trust activities and various non-threatening group theater games, students soon learn the importance of this concept. To sustain this harmonious working group, reference to the community theme must be reinforced all year. Once students have grasped and understanding of how a successful community is created and sustained, we will then explore other communities outside our theater experience and environment.

I will begin this unit after our work on the theater community theme. This way, students will be able to view and experience how other people in other communities deal with their lives and interact with each other. The first community we will focus on will be from the musical *West Side Story*. In this musical there are two rival teenage gangs, the Jets and the Sharks. They are fighting for the ownership of the same territory, an economically depressed section of the West Side in New York City. The Jets are the American children struggling to keep what they feel is their home, the street. The Sharks are Puerto Rican children displaced from their roots, their home Puerto Rico. They are struggling to find their place in this community. Although many of the hardships in this community are self imposed, these people too are victims of a society filled with prejudice, mistrust, and anxieties for rapidly changing times. The second community we will view and experience will be from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. In this story a community of Jews are living by their traditions and are eventually destroyed as a community because of these traditions. They too are victims of a society plagued by prejudices and misunderstandings. This community becomes displaced and looks to an unknowing future in America. Both musicals leave you with the idea that life will go on and one must live on with and because of their beliefs.

Not only will this unit successfully connect and further extend the theme of community into my eighth grade curriculum, but it will also serve as a means of continuing the theme of family that I had introduced to their curriculum last year. Eighth grade students had been working successfully on the theme of family choosing to perform monologues and scenes from plays that had as their subject matter interpersonal family relationships. I chose to continue to work with this theme because I believe this age group is very concerned about their relationships with family members and peers. It is a time when children begin to question authority, create sibling rivalry, and are obsessed with what their peers will think of them. Learning to cope with these universal concerns and those imposed by society whether racial, economic, or religious prejudice, is a difficult process for all of us, but even more so for children. They still lack many of the tools to cope and survive. Children learn very quickly to hide or deny their emotions, their true feelings. It is a way of protecting themselves. Theater is a vehicle whereby children in search of their own identity and integrity can experiment with different roles, try on "new" hats as well as some familiar to their own experiences. By role-playing and role reversal activities, using the family theme, students will have an opportunity to learn to become more sensitive to each other's needs and the world they are involved with. Many times it is difficult for students to identify or perceive a problem emotionally. What better way to draw out their perceptions but by dealing with subject matter which are close to "home", close to the individual? Also by identifying with characters who have similar problems,

students might be stimulated to new insights into themselves and the characters they are portraying. Why choose material or an idea that is completely foreign to their own life experiences? It is much more exciting to choose material that will stimulate and provoke individual thoughts and emotions. The adolescent experience is about learning how to develop relationships, maintain or sustain them, cope with change, or deal with problems. All of these concerns begin to surface during these adolescent years. These will be our educational and cultural concerns in the unit as we begin to explore the two musicals. Theater unlike visual arts demand that the participant be communicative and be able to work with other people. Theater allows for social, interpersonal, and spontaneous expression. So to focus on family and extensions of those relationships is not such an unusual concept for students to attach themselves to, and identify with .

I have talked about how I will extend the community theme into the two musicals I will be working with and touched on why the idea of family and extended relationships is the focus and will better help my students recreate character, but there are other reasons for choosing a theme that might be helpful to you as a teacher in working toward performance pieces. The actor and the director need a theme to help keep themselves focussed on the objective in a scene. It is sometimes difficult for young actors to make a commitment to an objective in a scene. "Who am I in the scene"? "What is taking place here"? "What do I want to accomplish"? are some of the objectives they have to be aware of, some of the questions that have to be answered. Having a theme helps the actor focus more clearly on these objectives. The director can more easily coach the actor with a theme in mind, constantly making reference to this major focus. Keeping a theme in mind the director might ask, "Does this really look like a family eating dinner together"? or "Is this really a brother and sister arguing"?

This unit culminates in a theatrical presentation within the revue format. A revue is a musical show in which various scenes from different musicals are presented. The revue will be presented for parents and students of Conte School. The revue will be a collaborative effort with my colleagues Mattie Long from the Music department and Donna Lombardi from the Dance department. It is my hope that through this collaborative effort and culminating piece, students will learn first hand the validity of artistic connections and will leave Conte school with a real working knowledge of not only theater but other arts disciplines as well as a life experience that reflects the essence of teamwork and cooperation.

I have listed my objectives and skill builders below:

1. To provide a new creative experience which fosters well-rounded growth in encouraging creativity, and strong emotional and physical release.
2. To understand the story of the musical.
3. To gain a knowledge of how literature is transformed into drama.
4. To understand what it takes to create a dramatic situation.
5. To assume the role of the character using descriptions from the literary sources the two musicals were based on and the musical dramatic literature in these musicals.
6. To understand the conflict between characters, and the various events that bring about the resolution of that conflict.
7. To become skilled in both verbal and non-verbal communication.
8. To become familiar with the process of oral interpretation.
9. To become familiar with some of the musical selections, the meaning of their lyrics, and how they add to the dramatic and emotional dynamics of the musical.
10. To become familiar with the dramatic function of dance in the musical.

11. To learn to master the concept of spatial relationships and understand them in both abstract and practical terms.
12. To realize that a production is a collaborative effort of many art forms.

I believe that the most difficult and challenging section of a unit is how to get started.

The idea in the beginning is to capture the interest of the students, to draw them into the material being presented. There is always a resistance to new material if it is unfamiliar. I have decided for this reason students will begin with movement activities and theater games. These activities may be valuable to the academic teacher as a way of introducing not only the musical but drama into their curriculum and classroom situation.

Students will first be introduced to movement activities that connect to the different actions and emotions that are presented as a major focus in the story. For example. In the beginning of *West Side Story* during the "Prologue" there is a quick building in action to the fight between the Jets and the Sharks. I will begin the class by having student walk freely around the room. With the use of a tambourine and the phrase "Freeze", students under my direction will move in different directions with variety in attitude, shape, size, speed, and emotion. This exercise might later be repeated to take the shape of the characters and actions during the "Prologue" which begins act one, scene one of our story.

Another movement activity will be in the form of a tag game where a student is chosen as leader to initiate a movement and sound. Every one must imitate the sound and movement until the leader tags another student who then changes the sound and movement. The rest of the group must then follow this leader until another person is chosen to lead.

They will also play two pantomime theater games such as the imaginary "Tug a War" and "Mirrors", two Viola Spolin games from *Theater Games For Rehearsal: A Director's Handbook* . I will be using many of Spolin's games during the rehearsal process. An evaluation session after these movement activities and theater games have been played will lead to discussion centering around such questions as: How did you feel sharing space with other students? Was it easy or difficult to physicalize how you felt? When doing an activity that required a give and take was your first response to take over or did you allow the other person to take the lead? How did it feel to be a leader? It is hoped that through these activities and discussions that students will begin to understand basic relationships to space and other people and an awareness of how movement and

group interaction creates mood and evokes emotion.

After a series of activities are played and important elements have been discussed I will then play the “Prologue” music to *West Side Story*. Students will be asked if they have ever heard this music before or are familiar with the story. We will share any knowledge of the musical. I will then play the “Prologue” again asking students to write down what they think might be happening during this musical scene. A copy of the script will be given to the students. We will read the description of the “Prologue” scene and see how it compares with our own interpretation. Through this process students will begin to gain an understanding of how the music and movement (dance) can initiate, reinforce, and heighten the dramatic action of the play in much shorter time than if dialogue were spoken. These are the unique elements that set the musical apart from the play form.

In a play the dialogue and action carry the plot. In a musical the dance and music forward the action. *West Side Story* is a musical filled with action. The drama in this story is realized more through the music and dance than through talking. In the “Prologue” we are introduced to the Jets and the Sharks through pantomime gestures, minimal dialogue, and movement. The music and dance in this opening scene create a mood of tension, hostility, and violence. The Jets enter and establish a part of the stage as their home, their turf. The music and movements imply a sense of smoothness and slowness. Their leader Riff is expressing through his movements a sense of self satisfaction, pride, and relaxation in being part of this community. The Sharks enter, first with their leader Bernardo, as more Sharks enter the mood of the music and action changes to abruptness, sharpness, and rigidity. In the “Prologue” alone, Leonard Bernstein sets the tone of the entire play, makes a strong statement about what is happening in the scene, and provides the momentum for the dance. Choreographer Jerome Robbins’ dance immediately establishes the conflict between the Jets and the Sharks in this opening scene. Through the three mediums working together: dance, drama, and music, the performers in this scene are able to convey their inner states of feeling such as love and hate and their emotional tension such as war and peace.

I will then show students the video-tape of the “Prologue” in *West Side Story* as it was dealt with in the movie version. This will give students an opportunity to see as well as hear how dance, drama, and music worked together to create this theatrical piece.

The next step is to read the first act of *West Side Story*. To try to encourage everyone’s interest I will assign parts at random and ask for as much emotion when speaking lines as they can give me. We will take each scene and discuss what feelings are appropriate to the scene. We know that acting brings a scene to life. The idea of having them read with feeling and begin to identify the emotions that are taking place will help the students get inside the drama so that their understanding will be greater and they will really be able to express with that understanding.

It is at the end of act one that I will stop and go over the beginning of the musical examining each scene with the musical selections that accompany the scene. I will attempt to illustrate how song and lyric reflect the characters, giving us insight into who these people are what their concerns are, and the emotional impact their interaction with other characters has been reflected in the music and what is sung. We will read the lyrics first to illustrate how flat and somewhat one dimensional the lyric is without the melody to enhance and deepen the emotional experience. The first example will be from act one, scene one, “The Jet Song”, which tells us quite a bit about this teenage gang. We find out that to be a member of this group you have to be loyal until you die. This community gang is supportive to one another, protective toward one another. To be a member of this group is a privilege something to be proud of. We also find out about their hostility and

prejudice toward other groups, especially the Sharks. There is a warning to these groups to keep away from their street, their home. We will discuss how a lyric not only reveals something about the character but also moves the plot, foreshadowing events to come. For instance in act one, scene two, Tony and Riff, two members of the Jets, discuss the potential rumble that is to take place. Riff convinces Tony to come to the dance in the gym that evening. Tony sings "Something's Coming". This song reveals to us Tony's need to find something meaningful in his life but we now anticipate that something is going to happen. This song serves to forward the dramatic action to the next scene in the bridal shop, where Maria's dialogue reflects the same anticipation of something happening that night. This is a good example of how song and dialogue function to forward the plot.

Certainly there are other examples in act one that we will consider in our discussion of music that will help students to identify the importance of music, song, and lyric, and what they are contributing to the scene. In act two we will examine the script and music. I will ask students to identify for me the music's contribution to the script.

The way that theater will deal with dance and dance's contribution to the enhancement of the entire musical will be through the use of video. I will choose two scenes aside from the "Prologue" mentioned earlier that will illustrate further how dance carries plot, establishes mood and conflict, and extends a dramatic moment, and replaces dialogue. I had mentioned earlier that dance is used to initiate the conflict between the Jets and the Sharks in the "Prologue". In act one, scene four, this same conflict is advanced in "The Dance at the Gym" and completed in act one, scene nine with "The Rumble". Also in act one, scene four, the gym, Tony and Maria see each other during the dance and fall in love. This dance not only forwards the plot but saves pages of dialogue in establishing this love relationship. The dramatic moment in this scene is extended by this dance sequence. Tony and Maria move across opposite sides of the gym, meet, dance, fall in love, and then separate, moving back to their original places. This sequence tells us that there is a connection these two people make, but then become estranged. Tony is a Jet, Maria is the sister of a Shark. "The Rumble" dance is not only the completion of one major conflict, but a good example of how actors and dancers deal with conflict through a choreographed fight. It is my hope that the theater department in collaboration with the dance department, could hire professionally trained actors to give a small workshop and demonstration to students on how techniques are used to fake a fight scene on stage.

It is important that students understand that the story is what generates the drama in a musical. Our major focus in theater will be on the elements of the book that create the play. These elements are character, plot, situation, dialogue, and theme. There are three dramatic situations that will primarily be dealt with. These situations arise out of three relationships: The Jets and the Sharks, Tony and Maria, and Anita and Maria. I will discuss with students how *West Side Story* was based on the Shakespeare play *Romeo and Juliet*. I will illustrate how this play was transformed into a musical by comparing scenes from the play to the musical literature. These comparisons will be dealt with more thoroughly in the eighth grade Humanities classes. For sake of time I will only choose one or two scenes for this comparison. These scenes will concern themselves with the dramatic situation between Tony and Maria and Maria and Anita. An example would be act one, scene five, of *West Side Story* and act two, scene two, of *Romeo and Juliet*. In the musical the setting is a back alley, on a fire escape to the bedroom of Maria. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the setting is the Capulet's garden and a balcony to Juliet's bedroom. In both scenes these young lovers profess their love for one another. We will discuss the similarities of these scenes and situations. Students will act out the scenes.

Students will then improvise their own dialogue and dramatic scenes that deal with the same themes and conflicts discussed during the reading of the musical and the comparison play scenes. For example, in act one,

scene two, mentioned earlier, Riff is trying to convince his friend Tony to come to the dance at the gym that evening and join the Jet gang for support against the Sharks, the rival gang. Riff tells Tony that to be without a gang is like being an orphan. He also makes Tony aware that their friendship is at stake if he doesn't go back to the gang. Tony finally concedes to Riff's wishes. Students will improvise their own scenes focussing on the topic of peer-group problems dealing with loyalty and friendship that this scene illustrates. The improvisations will aid students in realizing what creates a dramatic situation. Improvisation is a technique that is spontaneous and can evoke expressions of gut feelings. Through role-playing improvisations students will develop a strong sense of how conflict is created and resolved, and how character is identified more deeply. I have outlined a role-playing activity in lesson plan number one. This activity is loosely structured so that it is possible for any number of variations on theme and situation to be substituted. The idea is to get students involved with thinking and self-expression.

Students will then choose a character from the musical. We will develop this character in several ways. Students will have to write a character sketch of this person in outline form. The sketch will include answers to the following questions.

1. What is the age, weight, and height of the character?
2. What was the extent of this characters education and favorite or hated subjects studied?
3. What are your characters favorite foods, restaurants?
4. What kind of music does you character listen to?
5. What are your characters grooming habits?
6. What are your characters most frequently used expressions?
7. What are the gestures your character uses when talking or moving?
8. How do you get along with your friends?
9. How do you get along with your immediate family?
10. What is your family like?

Students will be asked to use their imaginations and any clues from the musical (director's notes, lyrics, monologues, dialogues) that provides any information on the character to answer these questions. This activity will help students set the ground work for creating a role for performance.

Based on the information accumulated about the character from the character sketch, students will then be asked to write an autobiography for this character in monologue (first person) form to read and perform in class. The autobiography will have a particular focus for the character to talk about. I may ask the students to

have their character describe a typical day in their lives, or describe a crucial moment that changed their lives in some way. Another idea might be to have them describe their relationships with their family and or friends. They may even talk about their neighborhood, how they feel about living there, what happens there that they like or dislike. This creative writing and performance exercise is an exciting way for students to get personally involved in the character they are exploring.

Another approach to helping students personalize and develop their character and character autobiography is through a series of theater activities that can be played before or during the writing exercise. The first activity is a sense-memory exercise: Students are asked to find their own space on the floor. They are to lie down on their backs with their eyes shut. The room should be very quiet. It is helpful to shut the lights off and create a peaceful mood and environment. The only talking done is by the leader (teacher). Students are asked to reflect on the very first toy they ever received. What did it look like? What did it smell like? What size, shape, texture, did it possess? What color was the toy? and so on. The leader ask these questions in a soft voice but students are asked not to answer, verbally but to visualize and create the image in their mind. Then the leader tells the group that at the sound of his or her hand clap students will rise and in their own space play with this imaginary toy.

After a series of object sense-memory activities have been played I then ask students to reflect on a special moment in their lives, remembering where they were, who they were with, what the day was like, the colors, smells, etc. This activity is done in the same way as the toy activity except instead of having students act out the moment, they write about it quietly in their own space trying to recall every detail. I then divide them into groups of five or six and ask each student to share their moment with the group. The group then picks one or more of the stories to act out. The person whose story it is becomes the director of the scene and cannot play himself. He may play a minor character in the scene. If there are less characters and more students than the scene calls for extra students might become an object in the scene such as a tree, door, rock, etc. After the scenes are performed the audience is asked to pick the person they think the moment belonged to. This activity can be done with either the students own experience or with one they create for the character they are working with. I have found these activities to be really successful when trying to get students to write about themselves as well as their characters.

For students who are having difficulty writing or understanding their character I will give them the option of performing a lyric as monologue or poetry that reveals something important about their character. The song is also good reference material for the autobiography.

Students will then choose a scene from the musical that either focuses on this particular character or is a dramatic situation that involves the character or interests the student. These scenes will be prepared in class for performance. Students will have an opportunity to rehearse with their fellow classmates. My role will be to coach students on many levels from the side lines. We will begin by analyzing the scene, identifying the objectives of each character and making decisions as to where we are and what we are doing. Lesson plan two outlines this analysis. Students will repeat role-playing improvisations on the theme and situation identified in the scene and their character. Students will work with blocking out their scenes with the aid of a "stage playing space" diagram which is included in this unit. This diagram will be helpful in learning stage directions also. Through the "stage playing space" vocabulary students will be able to interpret the script directions which are usually abbreviated. It will also make it easier for me to direct movement of the student from one area of the stage to another. Students will also work with imaginary and real floor plans to help them realize where they are on stage. The imaginary floor plan is one students will have to illustrate through pantomime (all the furniture placement). The real floor plan will simply be a sketch they draw of what they

feel the set should look like.

Through the reading, interpreting, and performing of these scenes, students will become familiar with the process of oral interpretation. In fact many of the skills I have listed in my objectives are reinforced in the process of presentational work. To be skilled in verbal and non-verbal communication for me is in how well a student projects their voice, how clear they speak the lines, and how well they physicalize their emotions and thoughts. Only through class participation and performance can I measure the success of their work.

The second section of my unit is devoted to the study of the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. I will present this musical in a similar format to what I have outlined for *West Side Story*, but less time will be spent on illustrating how the music and dance contribute to the musical form. After working extensively on music and dance in *West Side Story*, I feel that students will have developed their own skills of identifying and comprehending their importance to the musical.

In contrast to a community of city kids in the twentieth century in *West Side Story* our focus now shifts to a small Jewish community in Russia at the turn of the century. *Fiddler on the Roof* and *West Side Story* are two completely different settings, times, and racial communities but there are a lot of similarities that should be noted. I had already mentioned in my discussion of theme how both musicals focus on a concern for a particular community and how the prejudices, traditions, and changing times help create the destruction of these communities. There is also a similarity in love themes. In *West Side Story* Maria is expected to date and marry a Puerto Rican boy. In *Fiddler on the Roof*, all three of Tevye's oldest daughters, Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava are expected to marry Jewish men of Tevye's choice. Because of tradition and strong loyalties, and a refusal to change with the times, there is a breakdown of the family structure in both stories.

In *Fiddler on the Roof* there is much more of an emphasis on the family as a nuclear unit than in *West Side Story*. For this reason I will focus our energies more on exploring the family unit. We will begin an improvisational activity I call "Family Portrait". I will divide the class into groups of five or six people. I will tell them that they are a family. Students may decide for themselves what role they will enact: mother, brother, grandmother, uncle and son on. They will have fifteen minutes to create a dramatic situation for this family. There must be a reason why they are all together at this time—for example, grandmother's eightieth birthday party. There must be a conflict in this situation. I will then be a news reporter sent to do a story on this family. I will interview each family and will try to figure out who they are, where they are, and what the problem is by their responses to me and the dialogue spoken between them. This activity will give students a chance to reflect on family relationships and problems. A discussion period will follow this activity.

The next activity will concern the concept of tradition. We will discuss what tradition means to us. The discussion will center on sharing our own values and beliefs and how these came to be part of our individual make up.

Students will then listen to the "Prologue" to *Fiddler on the Roof*. We will share any knowledge we might already have of this musical. Also the song "Tradition" will be discussed in terms of what we think the characters in the story are telling us about tradition and themselves. Students will then be given a script of the musical and we will read it in its entirety. As in *West Side Story* there will be a need to go back to the beginning of the musical and play musical selections that accompany scenes. I will play a musical selection that they will have to identify; for example, "Match Maker" sung by Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava foreshadows the course of events that will carry the action for the entire play.

Students will then view two dance numbers from *Fiddler on the Roof*. The first being the opening number in

the “Prologue”. It is an excellent example of a production number but also a clever way to introduce each character, what his/her concerns are, where they are, and how they interact with one another, setting the stage for the entire story. Lesson plan number three deals with the “Prologue” as drama but is a direct crossover to music and dance in its attempt to join the other art forms to create one musical theatrical moment.

The second dance number viewed will be “Tevye’s Dream”. This is an example of how dance deals with comedy but it also reveals something about Tevye’s relationship with his wife.

We will briefly discuss the stories of Sholom Aleichem from which this musical was based on. Students will be reading selections of his stories in Humanities classes so I felt for the sake of brevity that I would not repeat the process. I will expect students, however, to use the stories as resource material for their character sketches and autobiographies.

Students will then create their characters, choose scenes, and perform. The first two lesson plan activities can be adjusted for this section of the unit.

Students at the end of this phase in the unit will have gained a real working knowledge of the American musical theater. They will have developed an understanding of all the dramatic elements; character, dialogue, plot, situation, and theme, that help shape the musical into an exciting and stimulating form. Students will have developed an awareness and appreciation the significant contribution dance and music make to the form. Finally, students will have made the realization that it takes the collaborative effort of all three art forms, music, dance, and drama, to create this very unique and entertaining form known as the American musical theater.

Students will then be ready for more advanced theater work in the two musicals. For the theater department this means the final casting of roles and selection of scenes for performance. I have outlined in lesson plan three one selection that will be prepared for the musical revue (the “Prologue” from *Fiddler on the Roof* —“Tradition”). Once casting and scene selection is done, a rehearsal schedule will be prepared that will focus only on the scenes for the show. These advanced rehearsals will include theater, dance, and music warm-ups. In this way the elements of dance and music can be introduced gradually to the scene. Later, the actual songs and dances will be included in this rehearsal process.

This unit will begin in October and will continue until the end of the second marking period in January. This will give me ten weeks to collaborate, plan, rehearse, and prepare for the musical revue to be produced in April.

Lesson Plan I: Role Playing Theater Improvisation

Suggested Warm-Up Activities:

1. Students should have an opportunity to discuss and share at least two or three roles they have played in their life time so far, whether it be brother, baby-sitter, or softball player. Then each student should pantomime two or three roles he or she would like to play such as movie star, dancer, singer.
2. Standing in a circle the leader passes a face to a student who is standing to their right. This player can now either transform the face into a new face, or imitate the face just passed. The faces should be passed full circle back to the leader. The leader then initiates an expression of an

emotion to be passed—for example: “I’m happy”. This expression can be verbal or non-verbal. You may wish to pass a series of emotions. It is important to note that in this section of the activity everyone should pass the same emotion along and not change it. This gives each student a chance to express the same emotion in their own particular way.

Activity:

Half the class is paired off, the other half of the group is audience. Students and their partners will be asked to create a five minute scene. The scene must have a beginning, middle, and end. I will give them the role and dramatic situation starter. Example:

Role —girlfriend and boyfriend

Situation —“Please go out with me”

“Not on your life”.

Role —father and daughter

Situation—“You are staying home!”

“But this is important”

First: The scenes are played using the one line of dialogue to help the students get started.

Second: The roles are reversed

Third: After discussion on the scenes the audience now has a chance to perform the same characters and situations.

There are other variations to this activity. You may want to add a third, fourth, or fifth character to the scene adding a line of dialogue and a role to help them. The topics I will choose for this role playing activity will come directly from the two musicals. I have discussed; for example, peer-group problems (loyalty and friendship) parent-child relationships, sibling-sibling relationships, and problems of dating (racial and religious prejudices).

American Musical Theater Playing Space Diagram and Vocabulary

Stage

(figure available in print form)

Audience

D—Down

U—Up

USR—Up stage right

USC—Up stage center

L—Left
R—Right
S—Stage
C—Center

USL—Up stage left
CSR—Center stage right
CSL—Center stage left
DSR—Down stage right

X—Cross, movement from one area to another.
DSC—Down stage center

OSL—Down stage left

The playing space above is an area to perform, whether if be in the classroom or on the Broadway stage. The performing artist uses these terms when given verbal or written directions. The abbreviations make it easier to establish these areas quickly. Right and Left are established by the performer on stage as he looks out at the audience.

Lesson Plan 11: Scene Analysis

Suggested Ground Work:

Before the student actor begins to analyze a scene, a full understanding of the musical must be made. Students should read the entire musical to learn the theme, main conflict, dramatic situation, and plot. Then the student actor should go through the musical again to learn about their character. I have already outlined in my unit the character sketch and autobiography exercises that will assist the young actor in developing an understanding of character. All this must be done first before a scene can be worked with, understood, and performed.

Guidelines:

When a student actor reads a scene he or she must approach it with some kind of understanding of what they are going to work on in the scene. Actors must be given a focus that they can build on and around the scene. After attempting to answer “who am I”? through a character sketch and autobiography, the next step is to ask: “Where am I in the scene’ ,? “What is taking place here”? and “What do I want to accomplish in this scene”? When the who, what and where of a scene are answered by the actor and established the major factors for a successful scene performance are realized. There is an entire list of questions the actor must answer about the dramatic situation of the scene that will help the actor understand their scene and effectively play their character. Some of these questions are as follows:

1. Where were you (the character) and what were you doing before the scene began?
2. When is this scene taking place? (time of day, year, etc.) Does this time element affect how you behave in the scene?
3. How do you feel physically at the beginning of the scene? (hot, tired in pain, etc.)

The most important question the young actor should focus on in a scene is the “What do I want to accomplish in this scene”? question. Through this question the actor can identity the conflict of the scene and his or her relationship to other characters. This what question is referred to as the main objective. The main objective for an actor is the one major desire the character expresses throughout the scene. The actor must ask “What is my major objective as the character in this scene”? “Why do I want what ever it is”? “What is keeping me

from getting what I want”? “Do I want to get my want right away or can it wait”?

After the young actor has identified the main objective of their character in the scene, close attention should be paid to the relationship this character has with each of the other characters in the scene. The actor should be able to describe in detail this relationship. This information should come from the entire script and the lines other characters say about your character in the scene.

After a scene has been analyzed the actor should then go over the scene once again with the new knowledge acquired.

Suggested Warm-Ups:

There are many activities found in Viola Spolin’s two books *Theater Games For Rehearsal: A Director’s Handbook*, and *improvisation for the Theater*, both listed in my bibliography for teachers, that clearly help the actor define the who, what, and where concept for performance. It is my suggestion that some of these activities be played first before scene work is begun.

One activity that I enjoy playing with my students to illustrate what a main objective is was given to me in a workshop sponsored by the *Center For Theater Techniques in Education* two years ago. I do not know the original source of this activity:

The game is called “Ask and Reject”. Students are paired and asked to work in their own space. One student is “A” the other is “B”. “A” is asked to play the role of a person who rejects anything that “B” asks of them, wants of them. The game can begin where the only dialogue spoken could be “yes” and “no”. Another possibility is to give “A” an object that “B” wants such as a ruler, pen, etc. A third variation is to set up the situation so that “A” has money, an apartment, a boyfriend and so on that “B” wants. The fourth idea is to not tell “B” what it is that “A” has. “B” then has to assume that they know what it is that “A” has that they want. There is no end point to this activity. It is an improvisation that requires students to use their imaginations and create dialogue. The activity should end when you feel students are really involved and are responding well to the situation.

Activity: Suggested improvisations for Scene Work.

Premise:

I have found that the best way to analyze a scene is through doing improvisations with the scene. Using this technique, an actor can explore the problems of characterization and plot development and will hopefully be inspired to find solutions to these problems. Theater is doing! What the author writes has to come to life. The character has to become three-dimensional. It is necessary for the actor to use the whole body for expression not just intellectualize the dramatic situation. Through improvised movement and dialogue the actor might make discoveries that were not possible by just thought processes.

Scene: Fiddier on the Roof: Act II, Scene I.

Brief Background Information:

1. Two character scene: Hodel, Perchik.
2. Hodel is a young, attractive, and intelligent girl. She is the second oldest daughter in Tevye’s

family.

3. Perchik is a young, radical university student from Kiev who has been living with Hodel's family.

4. The scene takes place in the afternoon in front of Hodel's house.

5. Hodel and Perchik are continuing a conversation that had been started before the beginning of this scene.

Why this scene particularity interests me is because on the surface this does not appear to be a love scene but a political discussion initiated by Perchik. But indeed it is a love scene where Perchik proposes marriage to Hodel. The subtext (what is really being said underneath the dialogue) is what the actors in the scene have to work with as a major focus. Perchik is shy in love. Hodel knows that Perchik is trying to propose to her.

After the students have studied this musical and have a complete knowledge of the characters we will improvise this scene in two ways:

First Improvisation:

I will ask the characters to completely pantomime the scene. They will not be able to speak lines. They must communicate and relate their objectives to one another with movements and gestures. Neither one is allowed to move to a new space until one of them has sufficiently motivated the other to move. This means that one character will stay still until they are sure what it is the other character wants from them.

This warm-up improvisation eases the actor into the scene and helps both characters relate to one another and physicalize their objectives in the scene.

Second Improvisation:

I will then have the character of Perchik speak his inner thoughts before speaking each line of the written dialogue from the script to the audience and/or Hodel. The character of Hodel will read the lines as they are written in the scene. I will then have Hodel speak her inner thoughts before her next line of dialogue and have Perchik read only the lines written in the script.

This second improvisation will help the actors articulate and identify with what is really being communicated in this scene. It reinforces what feelings must be conveyed by the character although not given in the dialogue provided.

Lesson Plan III: Directing a Large Group Scene.

Premise:

This lesson plan is designed to illustrate how a large group scene can be prepared in theater class as an early rehearsal piece and serve as ground work for later, advanced rehearsals where music and dance are introduced to the scene: See lesson plan three of *Mattie Long* (music) and *Donna Lombardi* (dance) for parallel

and complementary work.

The large group scene chosen for this first rehearsal period is the “Prologue” that introduces the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. This “Prologue” is a production number that combines music, dance, and drama in an attempt to create one theatrical moment on stage. Through physical and verbal expression in song, dance, and dialogue, we learn the who, what, and where of the characters and story that is to follow.

Preparation:

1. Students will read the “Prologue” to *Fiddler on the Roof* which includes the song “Tradition”.

We will discuss the setting, characters, and lyrics.

2. The temporary cast of principle characters for this scene will be chosen: Tevye (the dairyman), Golde (Tevye’s wife), Yente (the matchmaker), Avram (the bookseller), Nahum (a beggar), Lazar (a butcher), Rabbi, Mendel (Rabbi’s son), first man, and second man.

This cast is temporary only because after the scene is rehearsed once, it is a good idea to give other students a chance to play the major roles. This way too the director can observe the student performances and make a judgement as to who might be the most appropriate actor for a role in final casting sessions. Sometimes students perform a role too that after first rehearsal realize they do not want to play that character. In the early stages of rehearsal changing roles is acceptable. It is suggested though that for sake of time the final casting process not take more than three rehearsal sessions if this piece is being prepared for audience viewing. Casting can be a difficult process. Disappointment for the student not being cast for a part they want sometimes can not be avoided. Choosing an understudy (a second person cast in the same role), and emphasizing the major contribution minor roles make to the show, will avoid most hard feelings.

The remaining students not chosen as major characters will be cast as the sons, daughters, and villagers in the scene.

3. Students will be asked to create a character sketch for their role whether anything in the script has been written about them or not. Even if students do not have a line of dialogue it is important that they create a character that is three-dimensional. This character must come alive, be believable, and be able to respond with a definite attitude toward the other characters in the scene. They will have to have a relationship with other characters. this could be in family membership (mother, father, son, etc.), or community membership (baker, hatmaker, etc.) or both. I mention in the warm-up activities that follow, that an actor must react to what is happening in the scene at all times and that he must do this as his character would.

4. It will be helpful for students to learn a little about the social conditions in Czarist Russia before the Russian revolution, and as much as they can about the life in the Jewish communities that existed then. I will give them this task as a home work assignment. They may also get assistance from the Social Studies department.

Suggested Warm-Ups:

Use a large open space free of chairs, tables, or desks. The best space to use is a stage if available.

Students are asked to move freely in the space. They may jump, spin, skip, wave their arms, use their whole body to move. They are encouraged to explore the entire space, fill in empty places. The leader then calls "Freeze". Students must stop in whatever position they are in. They then are asked to find a reason for being in their position. What does their physical attitude suggest? The student might look like he is planting corn, hanging clothes, or giving a dance lesson. After students have thought about what they might be doing, the leader claps hands or gives some kind of signal for students to begin improvising the action suggested by the students own imagination and idea for the position.

A variation of this activity is to have one half of the group be audience and the other half be performers. The performers move freely in the space repeating what I described above, only this time audience members invent a reason for the performers positions. Then each performer improvises the action that was assigned him by the group. After this is done, the performers are asked to interact with other performers in some physical way. Perhaps the dance instructor is teaching someone a new dance routine, or someone hands the clothespins to her mother hanging clothes, and so on. Dialogue may or may not be added to these small scenes. The groups then can be switched giving everyone a chance to perform.

Another warm-up would be to divide students into small groups of five or six to create a statue or tableau that expresses a single emotion, thought, relationship, or action. These tableaux are created by the leader calling out a word such as "sadness"! One member of the group creates a position and facial expression that reflects this emotion. The other members in the group attach themselves in some way using different levels (kneeling, bending, etc.), expressing this same emotion in their own way but relating to the other players in the group.

Both these activities are meant to familiarize students with a large playing space and ensemble work. More importantly thought it is meant to introduce them to the idea that whether an actor has dialogue and action or not, on stage he or she must always be involved in the scene. Not only must the actor be involved with doing something relating to some object or someone, there must also be a clear reason for this involvement. The actor must be able to react at all times to what is happening in the scene. I feel that these warm-up activities will clearly illustrate these concepts to the students.

Scene Work:

This scene can be acted by an entire class or large group.

I will first have students move and group themselves wherever they'd like to see if any of these grouping could be retained for final blocking decisions. This gives them an opportunity to improvise and be a part of the directing process also.

Then I will attempt to divide students into a number of small groups, such as two sisters and a brother, three or four male friends, a boy friend and girl friend, Tevye and his wife, Rabbi and his son Mendel, and so on. Some of these characters have definite dialogue, lyric (song), or dance pieces that require them to communicate to one another so specific blocking (placement) of characters needs to take place.

Students will improvise their own dialogue for their character following the action written in the scene before we attempt the actual scripted lines. This gives students a chance to understand better their character's relationship with each member of their small group.

When the focus of the scene is on one, two, or three characters in the scene, the other characters will freeze or I will ask them to continue to act soundlessly and with small movements or gestures that do not distract the audience from the focus of the major characters.

Switching focus from one group to another, or the entire group to one or two characters, is a major directing concern for this scene. The use of lighting can help this problem in that you can light one part of the stage and darken another during a switch in focus. Stage lighting is not always available so the activity of having students freeze, stay, motionless or work quietly, will be valuable for these transitions.

Bibliography for Teachers

1. Aleichem, Sholom. Tr. Francis Butwin. *Tevye's Daughters*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1949. This volume contains the three stories used to create the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*: "Modern Children", "Hodel", and "Chava".
2. Dezseran, Louis John. *The Student Actor's Handbook*. Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1975. A valuable handbook for teachers interested in introducing drama into the classroom. It is a resource for ideas and for illustrative exercises.
3. Engel, Lehman. *The Making of a Musical*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977. Chapter three gives a detailed scene-by-scene synopsis of the musical *West Side Story* and play *Romeo and Juliet* for comparison study.
4. Hodgson, John & Richards, Ernest. *Improvisation*. New York: Grove Press, 1966. This book gives the reader a detailed account of the wide applications, background, and values of drama improvisation. There is also detailed information on how to use improvisation when working with scripted material.
5. Kislán, Richard. *The Musical, A Look at the American Musical Theater*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980. Chapters ten through thirteen give a simple and informative explanation of the major elements of a musical show.
6. Laufe, Abe. *Broadway's Greatest Musicals*, New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1977. (Rev. e.d.). An informative and resourceful volume that documents the musical from the early hits of 1884 to shows of the 1970's.
7. Laurents, Arthur. *West Side Story*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1956. The complete story with lyrics included in the scenes. This volume does not include the musical score.
8. Polsky, Milton E. *Let's Improvise*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980. This book is filled with great techniques and exercises for introducing improvisation to any age level.
9. Seto, Judith Roberts. *The Young Actors' Workbook*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1979. This is a workbook-anthology designed to help the young actor create a role from scripted scenes. This anthology includes one scene from *Fiddler on the Roof*, and one scene from *West Side Story* with notes to help the actor and director. I found this volume worthwhile information and needed resource for scripted pieces for young people.
10. Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. New York: Signet Classic, 1964. This publication contains notes commentaries, an introduction, and a reference list that is all valuable information, especially for any teacher wanting to explore further the study of this Shakespeare play.

11. Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1963. This volume includes a detailed workshop program of theater games. There is also a section on children in the theater and directing the formal play. This book is my Bible in the theater classroom.
12. Spolin, Viola. *Theater Games for Rehearsal: A Director's Handbook*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1985. This handbook clearly explains the uses of games for rehearsal purposes. The sidecoaching instructions and notes are presented in a large convenient format that will make it helpful for any teacher who refers to the book in rehearsal.
13. Stein, Joseph. *Fiddler on the Roof*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1964. This is an inexpensive (\$3.95) paperback edition that includes only the lyrics, no musical score.

Suggested Student Reading List

1. Aleichem, Sholom. Tr. Francis Butwin. *Teyve's Daughters*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1949. Enjoyable short stories that give the student information on the characters in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*.
2. Cohen, Lorraine. *Scenes for Young Actors*. New York: Avon Books, 1973. This anthology contains one scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, and three scenes from *West Side Story* that give the young actor an opportunity to study and prepare scenes for performance work.
3. Houghton, Norris. *Romeo and Juliet and West Side Story*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1965. An inexpensive paperback volume that gives the student an opportunity to read both the musical and the original literary source the musical was based on.
4. Seto, Judith Roberts. *The Young Actors' Workbook*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1979. This anthology includes one scene from both *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. The notes to the actor and director after the scenes and the actor's check list in the back of the book is helpful information for the student in analyzing a character for scene work.
5. Stein, Joseph. *Fiddler on the Roof*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1964. An easily accessible

paperback version of the complete musical.

List of Materials Needed:

1. Video-taped movie version of *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. These tapes can be rented from any store that carries video-taped movies. It can also be purchased at discount stores that carry tapes.
- 2.. Record or tapes of complete musical: *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Time-Life books has an “*American Musical Theater*” series that includes three tapes and a book in each volume of three musicals. This series can be purchased through writing to:
Time-Life Records
541 North Fairbanks Court
Chicago, Illinois 60611
3. Complete script of musical: *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof* . See Bibliography for Teachers.

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