



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

American Musical Theater: Making it Work in the Music Classroom

Guide for Curriculum Unit 85.02.03
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This curriculum unit focuses on the development of the American Musical Theater, and can be taught separately or as a connection with dance, theater, or the humanities. A brief historical overview of some musical theater forms preceding the production of "Show Boat" is included in the first section of the unit. Emphasis is placed on the developing musical styles of this era. This is followed by a study of varying musical styles within the American musical format. Students will be able to examine the usage of melodies, lyrics, rhythms, and instrumentation in terms of their relationship to the story.

The second section of the unit concentrates on two selected musicals that are based on personal and interpersonal relationships within families. Students will explore interactions based on traditions, respect, love, fear, and communication, and the effect such elements have, or can have, on the family structure and on the community. Musical techniques devised by composers to portray the above mentioned elements and other emotions (anger, happiness, sadness, etc.) are examined. The musicals chosen are "West Side Story" and "Fiddler on the Roof."

The third section focuses on making connections with theater and dance classes, and culminates with a collaborative revue, featuring scenes, dialogue, and dance and music from the above musicals.

(Recommended for Music classes, grade 8)

Key Words

Drama Musical Performances Theater History American

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