



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

Stage Line/Time Line: A Musical Adventure

Curriculum Unit 85.02.07

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The American Musical Theatre Unit presented here is an interdisciplinary approach to learning, combining Literature, History, Music, and Dance. Too often as educators, we either fail to see the value of collaboration between subject areas and teachers or find that there is too little time to plan such activities. Hopefully, our unit will help by providing an opportunity to combine English, History, and the Arts.

The unit is designed for middle school students, but could easily be adapted for children of any age. Activities presented would last for one semester and culminate in the production of a musical. The choice of materials presented may vary according to the subject area and interest, and teachers should feel free to add or subtract as necessary.

The basic premise of the unit can best be described by the musical *1776*. This highly acclaimed production, which opened in February of 1969, was written by Sherman Edwards, a former History teacher. His intent was simply to show what men and events of the time were like. Edwards, who also had a love of music, decided to combine the two areas, History and Music. The result of Edwards' experiment and the hope of this unit is to provide stimulating lessons in History by incorporating literature, song, and dance.

1776 is somewhat different from most other musicals on one key point. In *1776*, the plot deals with the actual history and events of that period. The songs and dances each assist in that task. Other musicals, such as *Oklahoma!* or *West Side Story*, have a plot apart from the history. Studying the history of each period while concurrently learning about the musical will help students to focus on a particular time in history and hopefully enhance their interest in musical theatre.

The unit explores history through the study of five American musicals— *1776*, *Music Man*, *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *West Side Story*. Children are told where the idea for each musical arose. An example would be James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* from which the musical *South Pacific* was adapted. If the idea is from a literary source, as in this case, students will be given selections from the literature to read in class. At the same time, the History class is exploring events of that period. A time line is developed showing the history of that era—major events, people, and changes in society.

From this introduction to the literature and history of a particular period, the class then explores each of the musicals. Having a good frame of reference, this study is much more meaningful. Key parts of a musical are defined in this section and the transfer from the literary source to the actual musical is made. Music, costuming, stage design, dialogue, and the history of each period are all explored. This is an introductory

exploration and not in great detail. The stress is on developing student awareness and stimulating interest.

In the final section of the unit, the classes involved in the study work together on the production of a musical. The one chosen for this unit is *The Ransom of Red Chief*, based on the comic short story of O'Henry's of the same name. After reading the story, the classes will work through the various phases of production including costuming, stage design, and publicity. Four activities are provided to help in the study of this selection. These activities can be adapted and used in the study of the five plays presented in this unit. *The Ransom of Red Chief*, like *Music Man* and *Oklahoma!*, is set at the turn of the century. The play is appropriate for middle school students and allows for a wide scope of participation. And now—"On with the show!"

1776 (History and Musical)

For *1776*, the first musical to be introduced, the history and musical information in the unit have been combined. They each tell the same story. For the other four musicals to be studied, a brief history of each period will be provided for the teacher to share with the class as well as a separate synopsis of the musical. *1776* is based on the Continental Congress of 1776. The play deals with arguments pro and con regarding revolution. The suspense is built upon whether or not America will gain its independence from England. The climax of the play is the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The format for studying *1776* and its related history will be basically the same as the format for studying each succeeding play. For *1776*, the teacher begins by reviewing orally the brief history of the period provided in this unit. A class time line beginning with 1776 is proposed by the teacher. It includes the major events of this period, the music, dress, famous people, and changes in society. Exactly what will be included in the time line is the result of class research discussed later in this section.

For *1776*, and all other plays, activities are planned to help students better understand both the period and the musical. We begin by visiting the Mitchell Library in 1976. The teacher will then provide a brief explanation of the Bicentennial. Questions regarding what items might be buried in this capsule are then asked.

Many of the sixth grade students in the 1985-86 school year were born during the Bicentennial. They will want to know more. Who buried the capsule? Why? Answers to these questions will be sought. We enjoy learning about others and want others to know more about us.

The teacher then relates the 1976 capsule to today. If we were to bury a capsule to let others know what it is like in 1985, what would we bury? What is our music like? Who are our leaders? What type of dress is popular today? What is happening in the world? What do we do in our spare time? What's the latest fad? As children discuss these questions regarding today's world, the teacher will point out that in this unit we will be learning about other periods of history by asking the same questions. For each period of history, research is done to learn more about changes in society. Categories to be studied include—1) Music 2) Dress 3) Fads or Games 4) World Events 5) Inventions and 6) People.

The librarian and the classroom teacher are both responsible for conducting planned lessons for students on how to do a research project. Much of the unit will depend on the ability to locate information. Research groups for each musical and its related period of history are then formed. These groups are divided into the six basic categories described above. The information gained by each group is added to the time line.

The following brief form should be completed by each group for information obtained by their group. Copies of this form are provided by the teacher.

RESEARCH FORM

Question to be answered?

Source:

Author:

Publisher:

Date of Publication:

Information found:

Questions on music, dress, fads, and games for the period of 1776 will be difficult to answer. Three suggestions are offered in this unit. First is a trip to the British Art Museum. With advance planning, a special lesson can be prepared by the museum staff dealing with project questions. Second, children need to be encouraged to speak with other teachers and adults. Art, Music, History, Sewing, English, Science, and Physical Education teachers can offer important advice on the events related to a particular subject. Third, the brief history of both the musical and the period provided in this unit is to be shared by the teacher with each group. Support is essential.

The teacher then points out to the class that there are several interesting features regarding the musical *1776*. First, unlike most musicals, there are no spectacular scenes. Second, there is no chorus. Finally, there is no real dancing, except for a spontaneous dance by Ben Franklin and John Adams with Martha Jefferson.

Despite these apparent drawbacks, the play was very successful and was in fact the first play ever produced in its entirety at the White House. This took place on February 22, 1970 exactly one year after the show opened in New York.

The songs in *1776* each play a basic role in telling the story of America's birth. None of the songs were written to be popular on their own. They each serve a purpose. An example is "Sit Down, John" in which John Adams complains about the lackadaisical way the Congress conducts its business.

Sherman Edwards, a former history teacher, conceived the idea of *1776* to show that the signers of the Declaration of Independence were both a diverse and honest group. They argued and fought with each other. They understood commitment; and although they fought, they fought in a positive manner.

The teacher will then describe the setting for the action. The play takes place in Philadelphia during a three month period ending on July 4, 1776. Discouraging words are sent by Washington about the progress of the war and the Congress is making little progress. At last, Richard Henry Lee, a Southern gentleman, speaks for independence. Most favor independence, but are hesitant. An agreement that any vote be unanimous is passed.

Thomas Jefferson, although he insists he doesn't possess the literary qualities for the job, is chosen to draw up the Declaration of Independence. After arguments about the content, the Declaration is, of course, passed. One notable compromise in the final Declaration is the deletion of the anti-slavery clause written by Jefferson.

Reluctantly, Benjamin Franklin insists the anti-slavery provision be deleted in order to save the Declaration from defeat. The victory of the Declaration of Independence brings hope for the future. The colonies have voted for freedom. A class discussion and written essay on the anti-slavery compromise are activities suggested at this time. Was this compromise necessary for freedom?

Transitional History

The period of time between 1776 and 1900 has not been covered by any specific musicals in this unit. Events of this period, however, should be included on the time line. The advent of the railroad, the Industrial Revolution, and the Civil War are areas too important to be overlooked. Students in small groups will research this period in the categories previously established. These reports will be added to the time line.

The class may wish at this time to create an original musical number or even an entire musical based on the Civil War similar to what was done with *1776*. While this is beyond the scope of this unit, it is entirely possible that after studying about the costuming, history, fads, music, people, and inventions of this period, the class will wish to pursue this idea. It is an alternative to the production of the *Ransom of Red Chief* which is a suggested activity in the final section of this unit.

MUSIC MAN and OKLAHOMA! (History)

The second and third plays covered by this unit both deal with America as it entered the 20th century. The two are *Music Man* and *Oklahoma!* *The Ransom of Red Chief*, discussed later in this unit as a class production, also focuses on the years between 1900 and 1915. For this reason, particular attention will be paid to the history of this period.

As a way of introduction, the teacher will share with students the following brief history of this period. This will illustrate for children some of what they will discover through research and place on the time line. America at the turn of the century was very optimistic. Eggs were 12 cents a dozen and sirloin steak was 24 cents a pound. The President from 1901-1909 was Teddy Roosevelt. He was loved by the people and encouraged everyone with his strong personal leadership. America was growing quickly.

Women at this time were still far behind. They could not vote and were not even allowed to join clubs or smoke tobacco. Other states had strict laws forbidding unescorted females dinner at a restaurant or a room at a hotel for the night.

The discovery of oil in Oklahoma in 1900 changed Tulsey Town (a small cowtown with a population of 1,340 in 1900) to Tulsa with a population of 18,182 by 1902. By 1924, Tulsa would have 110,000. Changes like this were not uncommon. New states were being admitted and others grew rapidly.

Helping in this growth were the discovery of flying machines and automobiles, as well as the growth of the railroad. The first transcontinental auto trip took place in 1904; and in December of 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright made their historical 59 second flight covering 852 feet. These two changes along with the growth of the railroad were to change the face of America forever.

Most important in changing America during the first decade of the twentieth century, however, were the immigrants. Between 1900 and 1910, nine million immigrants, mostly European, came knocking at America's door. Most came through Ellis Island under the watchful eye of the Statue of Liberty, currently being renovated. These newcomers faced hard times and prejudice, but most were able to find a better life in America.

Other things were changing too. The Gibson Girls, drawn by the artist Charles Dana Gibson, became the ideal. We will share with students photographs of this period from the series edited by Maitland Edey and published by Time Life Books titled *This Fabulous Century 1900-1910*. She was both chic and graceful. In music, Tin Pan Alley in New York sold two billion copies of sheet music in 1910 alone. Movies were just beginning in 1902. They would, of course, have a profound effect on changing societies' attitudes in the coming years. Finally, in sports, Jim Thorpe was making himself well-known; and the American League began to rival the older, more established National League in baseball. America was truly growing rapidly and would never be the same.

After sharing these events with the class, the two plays chosen to represent this period are introduced by the English teacher. The preceding historical information will make the study of both *Music Man* and *Oklahoma!* much more meaningful.

MUSIC MAN (Musical)

In *Music Man*, as with *1776*, there is no transfer from literature to the musical; therefore, stress will be on development of writing skills. Students will already be familiar with the history of the period. They will be given a brief character sketch of Harold Hill and Marian Paroo and a short synopsis of plot. (That information is provided in the following paragraphs.)

Students are told about Harold Hill, a traveling salesman charlatan, who cannot read music or play an instrument. Despite these weaknesses, he is the most persistent instrument salesman traveling the mid-west in 1912.

Professor Hill arrives in River City, Iowa on the Rock Island Railroad. (Students will listen to the opening song and write a paragraph describing what they "saw" as they were listening to the music and lyrics.) During his one week stay, he convinces the townspeople that they need a big brass band. His motives are dishonest; but while fleecing his customers he transforms a dull town into a swinging and dancing one.

Marian Paroo is the town librarian. She has devoted her life to preserving the town's library. Harold has no difficulty in selling the people instruments and fancy uniforms for the band; but when Marian questions his method of teaching music, Harold is not too successful in selling what he calls the "think system" of learning music.

Harold has completely charmed all the ladies who have utter faith in him. However, this naive faith especially that of the beautiful town librarian, subtly transforms him from a scheming salesman into a reliable citizen.

Students will be asked to write a short dialogue between Marian and Harold in which she confronts him with the fact that she knows he is a schemer.

This dialogue need not be more than one page. Students may choose partners to read their dialogues to the class. We will attempt to find the similarities and differences in each dialogue; thus leading us to the conclusion that although we all start with the same information, the way we work with it can be totally different. (This will lead us into our discussions of the following plays and the topic of adaptation.)

Students will find it interesting to compare their dialogues to the actual scene as they view the video.

The following information is provided for interest and will be shared with the students at the teacher's discretion.

Meridith Wilson is said to have based the story on events that had happened in Mason City, Iowa when he was a child.

The costumes were by Raoul du Bois. They were able to capture the spirit of the times without making the ladies look ridiculous. The set itself showed Iowa scenes, and the dances choreographed by Unna White were more like two-steps or square dances. In the song "Seventy-Six Trombones", she has the children simulate musical instruments and later, gawky, ungraceful ladies rehearse for a ballet.

Stars of *Music Man* included Robert Preston as Harold Hill and Barbara Cook as Marian Paroo. The *Music Man* had a run of 1,375 performances. The motion picture version also starred Robert Preston with Shirley Jones playing Marian.

Meridith Wilson also wrote the *Unsinkable Molly Brown*. Critics felt the music and lyrics were too reminiscent of *Music Man* and the show was therefore not as popular.

Students will view the video tape of the musical. Students will be provided with 2-3 questions prior to viewing. For example, "As you watch this film notice how the director and choreographer have staged musical numbers. How do you suppose this would be different if we did one of these numbers on our stage?"

OKLAHOMA! (Musical)

Once the English teacher has completed the study of *Music Man*, he or she will continue with the second play set at the turn of the century, *Oklahoma!* The following information is given to students orally. Students will be particularly interested in knowing that the play was first staged in New Haven. There is some controversy about whether *Oklahoma!* ran for 2,208 performances or 2,248. Whatever the answer, *Oklahoma!* ranks sixth in the number of performances behind *Fiddler on the Roof* (3,242), *Hello Dolly* (2,844), *My Fair Lady* (2,717), *Man of LaMancha* (2,329), and *Chorus Line* which is still running on Broadway

The book and lyrics were written by Oscar Hammerstein II; the music by Richard Rodgers. It was the first of many successful collaborations between these two highly creative gentlemen.

Oklahoma! is based on *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs. It opened on March 31, 1943 at the St. James Theatre. From the opening song, "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" to the finale—almost every number was a hit.

The setting is in the Indian territory that later became the state of Oklahoma; the time is about 1907, the year of Oklahoma's statehood.

The play is based on the book *Green Grow the Lilacs* written by Lynn Riggs. That book was the basis for a 1930-31 play that ran only 69 performances before closing. Backers were reluctant to invest in a musical comedy version of the play because of this poor showing.

The play did open, however, in New Haven. It went by the title *Away We Go*, and it did not impress theatre-goers. Later in Boston, the title was changed to *Okla homa!* and several songs were restaged including the finale which became a rousing number for the entire ensemble.

Still there was skepticism that the play would do well on Broadway. In fact there were empty seats in the theatre opening night. Little did anyone know that *Okla homa!* would break the world's record for consecutive performances.

Although *Oklahoma!* is credited with a great many firsts and helped to change the format of musical theatre, in reality, this is not true. Supposedly, it was the first to tell a serious story. *Showboat*, however, which dealt with life on the river and the relationships of Magnolia, Ravenal, Julie, and Steve (the four main characters) had been produced 16 years earlier. Perhaps critics were impressed with Rodgers's and Hammerstein's having a man killed on stage.

Secondly, it is credited with being the first musical to introduce ballet. This too is a fallacy. Vera Zorina had impressed audiences in the 1936 Rodgers and Hart show *On Your Toes*. (Interestingly, Richard Rodgers wrote "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" specifically as a ballet. For the ballet in *Oklahoma!*, however, he used excerpts from a variety of numbers in the show to develop the ballet's sequence.— Another sidenote—George Balanchine, the noted choreographer for the New York City Ballet and at the time Vera Zorina's husband, did the choreography for "Slaughter.")

Oklahoma! is also credited with being the first musical to be awarded literary recognition. The Critics' Circle voted it best drama of the year, and the Pulitzer Committee gave it a special award for a musical. *Of Thee I Sing* in 1931, however, had won the Pulitzer as a drama.

It is interesting to note that if one takes a look at *Porgy and Bess*, *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and other great musical innovations, there is a group that is at the helm in getting these productions off the ground. The Theatre Guild had been instrumental in getting *Porgy and Bess* produced. Theresa Helburn was the first to suggest that Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs* be developed into a musical. She was instrumental in bringing Rodgers and Hammerstein together.

After discussing the information provided in the foregoing paragraphs, students will be given an excerpt from Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs*. They will be asked to focus on the opening scenes from both plays— *Oklahoma!* and *Green Grow the Lilacs*. Particular emphasis will be on the development of setting and the way both authors give their audiences a feeling of the time and the period.

The teacher will draw the students' attention to Rodgers and Hammerstein's use of quotes in the opening scene and ask them why they think the quotes are there.

Students will read with the teacher the opening description in the Riggs play and will be asked to discuss how Rodgers and Hammerstein adapted the material. The teacher will try to get students to see that the use of staging, set, lighting, music, and costuming all help the audience to develop a sense of time and period.

Using the song "Kansas City" from *Oklahoma!*, students will 1) see how dialect is shown on the printed page and 2) see how the lyrics of the song depict the developments of society.

The class will be given copies of the song "Kansas City." The following words will be underlined in the song: Sattidy, I'arned, idy, whut, comin', goin', theirsel's, ev'ry, tuck, Nen, Ev'rythin's, fur, c'n, buildin', orta, y'c'n, o', an', yer, theayter. Students will be asked to list words and then give the standard English spelling—i.e. idy=idea. Students will then be asked to pronounce both forms.

Attention will also be given to the liberties in standard English that songwriters take in the writing of lyrics. For example—"When she begun to peel." Ask students what is wrong with this. For homework, students might be asked to find lyrics of contemporary songs and notice grammatical liberties.

Following the discussion of the song, students will listen to the cast recording of "Kansas City" to see if it

sounds like they had envisioned it would.

Once the foregoing activities are completed, the teacher will present the following information orally. Stress will be placed on the development of plot. The teacher will place on the board the plot outline of *Green Grow the Lilacs* and *Oklahoma!* As a class the two are compared.

The initial information provided here can be used orally by the teacher to get students to see how people work together to complete a project. The Theatre Guild, mentioned earlier, was in desperate straits financially. Backers (called Angels) would have to be found if the show was to get off the ground at all. Yet, if one were to take a look at the people involved, only one, Rodgers, had a truly successful track record. Hammerstein's last hit was back in the 1930's, Agnes De Mille, the choreographer, had never done a Broadway show, and Raouben Mamoulian had directed *Porgy and Bess* which had not been a financial success. In addition, Richard Rodgers was working for the first time without Hart. Despite these obstacles, Theresa Helburn and the Guild were able to "keep the faith" and eventually the show went into rehearsals.

Oklahoma! is the story of romance. Curly comes looking for Laurie to take her to the box social. "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top" is sung to break down Laurie's resistance. Curly admits, however, that he has made up the whole thing.

When Gertie, another girl going to the social, makes a fuss over Curly, Laurie agrees to go to the social with Jud Fry, a disreputable farmhand who works for Aunt Eller.

Jud warns Curly to stay away from Laurie. Laurie is afraid what he might do. The sub-plot, which offers comic relief, allows for the development of setting, time, and place. It is provided by the characters Ado Annie, Will Parker, and the peddler. Rodgers and Hammerstein took great liberty in embellishing the roles of these characters. Songs such as "I'm Just a Girl Who Can't Say No", "Kansas City", and "All er' Nothin'" provided just the right release from the otherwise dramatic triangle of Laurie, Jud, and Curly.

Jud is given human characteristics in the song "Poor Jud." This enables the audience to at least understand his actions even if we cannot condone them. Another song which helps to explain Jud and make him more sympathetic to the audience is "The Lonely Room".

Laurie and Curly do get together at the box social and make plans for a wedding. It is on the wedding day that Jud makes his move to kill Curly. In self defense, Curly stabs Jud. Curly is held on charges of murder but is exonerated and all ends happily in the rousing finale of *Oklahoma!* .

After having read Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs* , one can readily see how Rodgers and Hammerstein could visualize the adaptation from drama to musical. The basic plot structure was left intact. Much of the dialogue remained the same. That which was cut or rewritten was done to move the action forward (pacing). The addition of the comic sub-plot was necessary for tension release.

Agnes DeMille in her book, *And Promenade Home* talks in some depth about working with Rodgers and Hammerstein. She reflects on their attention to detail. How either one or the other would be present at all rehearsals. They would have the final word on every set, prop, hat, light, inflection, or musical key.

At this point in the unit, it might be possible to explain to students what the word choreographer means. John Gassner, in his book *Producing the Play* , devotes a section to the use of dance in plays. Please refer to pages 453-465 for additional background information for teachers. Page 461 is devoted solely to musical comedy

and show dance.

Miss DeMille, prior to *Oklahoma!*, had done the dances for Aaron Copeland's *Rodeo*. Rodgers and Hammerstein liked her work and hired her immediately. Rodgers in his first meeting with DeMille told her the following, "I want you at the end of the dance to get a big hand—not a cheap hand. I want you in your own way, in your own style, to stop the show—without, of course, sacrificing any of the delicacy or tenderness you value. I know you can do this without compromise; you have that kind of technique." ¹

DeMille's dances for *Oklahoma!*, particularly the ballet sequence are still talked about by dancers today. The acting—stylized hand gestures and dynamic stage movement made this ballet exciting to view. Using dance counterparts of the real Laurie and Curly and foreshadowing the events yet to come, DeMille created with Rodgers' music a masterpiece in the choreographic world.

Other songs from this show include, "It's a Scandal! It's an Outrage!", "Many a New Day", "People Will Say We're in Love", "Poor Jud is Dead", "Out of My Dreams", and "The Farmer and the Cowman".

As with the musical 1776, the period of time for both *Oklahoma!* and *Music Man* was one of great change in America. Research groups should be encouraged to share their findings with the rest of the class under the direction of the teacher.

To culminate this section, *Oklahoma!* and *Music Man* will be viewed. Both are available on VCR. A reminder that students will be provided with a set of questions. This will help to focus attention on specific details while viewing these film adaptations.

TRANSITIONAL HISTORY

The period of time from *Oklahoma!* until World War II is not covered by any specific musical. It will, however, be included in the time line.

World War I, Women's Rights, Prohibition, and the Depression only a few of the important areas in need of research. Other areas suggested from individual textbooks or from class research should be included. Once again the areas of music, dress, games, fads, new inventions, people, and world events should be covered. The teacher will plan to share with the class highlights of each decade to culminate this section.

SOUTH PACIFIC (History)

(History teachers are reminded to use the research form shown earlier in this unit to help students organize information they find about this period in history.)

The fourth musical covered in the unit is *South Pacific*. Set in the late 1930's and early 1940's, it found the world in turmoil. The United States under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt was just recovering from the Depression of 1929.

The situation in Europe was growing steadily worse. As a result of treaties signed at the end of World War I—specifically the Treaty of Versailles—Germany was faced with harsh repayments. The terrible economic and political conditions (scarcity of money and goods, inability to get jobs, and increased prices) of the times hit Germany as well. The government leadership that had developed in Germany after World War I was unable to cope with the economic conditions and the country was in a disastrous state. It was into this situation that Adolph Hitler, head of the Nazi, (National Socialist Party), stepped. Hitler, who was appointed Chancellor of

Germany in 1933, believed that most of Germany's problems could be blamed on the Jews and the Blacks. With these unfounded charges, he proposed to solve the problem by persecuting these two segments of the population. He promised to make Germany the strongest nation on earth and began to produce and develop Germany's military capabilities.

Hitler was gaining power, but few nations believed he would actually go to war. That fact and the economic problems in the rest of Europe, found Europeans totally unprepared for war. The invasion of Poland in 1939 showed without doubt that a new World War had begun.

The opposing armies of World War II were made up of two groups of nations. The Axis Powers included Germany, Italy, and Japan. The Allied Powers included Great Britain and other members of the Commonwealth of Nations, the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and China.

The United States, though not officially a combatant in the early years, was supplying the allies with war materials and choking Japan off from needed supplies. Its Pacific fleet was based at Pearl Harbor. The Japanese sneak attack on December 7, 1941 caused great damage to this fleet and resulted in the U.S. entry into the war.

Thousands upon thousands of young Americans rushed to join branches of the armed forces, leaving women and young children to survive on their own. America's values were changing. For the first time in its history, women were forced to enter the job market to take the place of men who had left for battle.

The recent film *Swing Shift* starring Goldie Hawn provides excellent insight into the lives and times of this period in History. Because of the rating of this film, it would be impossible to show the entire movie to sixth graders. High school teachers may find it appropriate. We will show excerpts that depict historically the times, the music, the costuming, and the mood.

This section of America's history provides us with a great opportunity to invite people who lived through World II to come and share experiences with the students. Students can interview older family members or visitors who participated with the War effort to further understand this period in our history.

SOUTH PACIFIC (Musical)

The war brought people of diverse backgrounds together. Old, young, black, and white people, as well as Asians and Europeans were united in a common cause.

It is against this setting that James Michener's Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Tales of the South Pacific*, takes place.

While the stress in *1776* was specifically on history, in *Music Man* on writing, and in *Oklahoma!* on adaptation, dialect, and plot, in *South Pacific* the focus is on the author's ability to deal with sensitive and controversial material. In Michener's story, "Our Heroine", he is quite graphic in describing Nellie's reaction to prejudice. Teachers will want to isolate certain sections from this material or adapt it to fit the age level of their students.

Students will be given a section of Michener's story beginning approximately three-quarters through with the words, "The two other girls were Polynesian", and going to, "Please take me home," she said. Students will also be provided with Act One—Scene Twelve, the corresponding scene from the musical. Students will be asked to pinpoint differences in the treatment of the same material. The teacher will help students to see the types of feelings that are evoked with Michener's more explicit use of words as contrasted by Rodgers and

Hammerstein's lighter handling of this material and their interjection of humor into a very serious and complicated situation.

The teacher will use the plot and background information provided here to help students understand the development of this musical as well as the plot. Once the sub-plot of Lt. Cable and Liat has been explained, students will be given the Act Two—Scene Four of *South Pacific*. This scene is short and it is where he sings the controversial, "Carefully Taught". Students will be asked to write a short paragraph which "paraphrases" what this song is about.

The first person to see the possibilities of dramatizing the Michener book was Kenneth MacKenna of Metro Goldwyn Mayer. Naturally, he saw it as a film. After several discussions, however, he came to the realization that it would not be right for the movies. He recommended the book to the playwright and director Joshua Logan. Together, they came to the conclusion that *Tales of the South Pacific* would be more effective as a musical.

Logan met Richard Rodgers a short time later at a cocktail party. Rodgers happened to mention that he and Oscar Hammerstein were looking for a new musical. Logan suggested he read *Tales of the South Pacific*. Rodgers marked it in his notebook but Logan never heard from him.

Logan did, however, receive a call from Oscar Hammerstein asking him if he had any ideas for a new musical. Logan was a little taken back and asked if Rodgers had told him about *Tales of the South Pacific*. When Hammerstein called Rodgers and asked him if he had read the book, Rodgers said that he had but had forgotten who owned the rights. Rodgers almost lost *South Pacific* because he could not remember who had recommended the novel.

Michener's book is a group of short stories dealing with different incidents during the war. The collaborators therefore found it difficult to decide on a particular story. Finally, they agreed on "Our Heroine", the story of Emile DeBecque and Nellie Forbush, an American nurse; and "Fo Dollah", which recounted the love affair between an American lieutenant and a native girl. The two stories were intertwined by Emile and the lieutenant's participation in a wartime mission together.

The plot of *South Pacific* centers around a middle-aged French planter, Emile DeBecque, and Nellie Forbush, an American nurse based on the island. DeBecque, as a youth, had killed a man in France and had been forced to flee to the island. Here he met and fell in love with a Polynesian girl. He is the father of two Eurasian children who live with him. Emile and Nellie find themselves falling in love; however, when Nellie learns that the two children are Emile's, she is shocked and runs away.

South Pacific blended moments of tenderness and love and joy, with the frustration of war, the desire of sex-starved Marines, and yet dared to deal with the subject of racial prejudice.

Several thought it suicidal for Rodgers and Hammerstein to deal with such material and in particular to include a song titled, "Carefully Taught." However, they were adamant in their decision to appeal for some type of racial tolerance. Therefore, they proceeded with developing the sub-plot in which Bloody Mary, a rough and rowdy old island woman who peddles her wares to the soldiers, is seeking a mate for her daughter, Liat. She chooses Lt. Cable as the likely male, and makes her appeal in the song "Bali Hai", in which she tells of the untold wonders to be found on the small island of "Bali Hai." Liat and the lieutenant do fall in love only to be thrust apart as the result of Cable's prejudices.

Nellie tries to explain her feelings to Emile by first stating that she cannot marry him. When he questions her about the children, she responds that it has nothing to do with them. However, inference is made by Emile to their Polynesian mother. Nellie knows that the feelings are emotional and deep seated in her character. She can give no good reason for her feelings.

She and Lt. Cable join in the song “Carefully Taught” in which each tries to rationalize their prejudice. (Students will be provided with the lyrics from this song, and we will try to see 1) if the students can tell what Rodgers and Hammerstein wished to achieve through this song and 2) if they indeed did achieve their goal.)

Hammerstein’s lyrics and Rodger’s music combine here to represent the true frustrations of these two characters. The song stresses the fact that prejudice is something you must be taught from birth. You must be taught to “hate and fear.” It must be “drummed” into your ear.

It goes on to state that you must be taught before you are “six or seven or eight to hate all the people your relatives hate.” Thus making the statement that children left on their own would not develop such feelings of distrust and frustration.

Emile and the lieutenant leave to participate in the war. Lt. Cable is killed; however, Emile returns and he and Nellie are able to settle their differences.

Songs from this musical play include, “Younger Than Springtime”, “I’m As Corny As Kansas In August”, “This Nearly Was Mine”, “Some Enchanted Evening”, “Honey Bun”, “Happy Talk”, and “There Is Nothing Like a Dame.”

South Pacific was a box office success. It won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in the year 1947.

Culmination of this, as well as other musicals, would be the showing of the film version of *South Pacific* ; and also, the creation of a diorama using the activities suggested at the end of this unit.

WEST SIDE STORY (History)

Americans had been nervous and concerned ever since the end of World War II. The Soviet Union had disregarded its agreement with the allies and had taken control of several European nations. Its army was superior to that of America by 1950. Communism, it seemed, was out to control the world. The only thing that prevented it was America’s control of the atomic bomb. By 1949, however, the Soviet Union too had exploded an atomic bomb.

Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were shocked. Security seemed shattered now that the dangerous enemy had broken America’s control of the Abomb. Harry Truman, the President at this time, was under pressure from a variety of sources to build a new and more forceful bomb—the H-bomb. On February 1, 1950, Truman announced that production of the H-bomb would begin.

The world’s concern about Communism proved to be well-founded. On June 25, 1950, invasion troops from Communist North Korea entered South Korea and within a month occupied most of that country. Truman sent American servicemen to the battlefield. For the second time in five years, the United States was at war.

Once again young men were called to duty. Once again Congress voted funds for the military, and the public sector sought to produce needed jet planes and other war goods and supplies.

Even though no one thought the North Koreans would ever drop an A-bomb at an American city, civil defense organizations attempted to deal with the Russian threat. Air raid drills became as routine as fire drills and students were herded into basements to crouch under pipes. Individuals began building their own bomb shelters and these shelters were stocked with everything from food to books. (There are episodes from ABC's *Call to Glory* that may have been seen by students to help to set the mood of this period.)

Meanwhile, work continued on the development of the H-bomb. On November 1, 1952, on Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific, the first H-bomb was tested. Sailors on ships around the blast sent home letters describing the gruesome details, and fear once again grasped the American public.

But even in the shadow of fear, life continued. The war in Korea was beginning to taper off. Americans began to set up barbecue pits in their own backyards. Dwight Eisenhower, an old World War II general who promised peace, was elected President. The year was 1952. People were now able to sit in front of their T.V. sets to watch their favorite shows. They began to go to college in increasing numbers. They took dance lessons, and they decided to let the scientists worry about the bombs.

Yet beneath all the activity, the fears still existed “ . . . the fear of Communism, the fear of subversion, the fear of war, the fear of annihilation.” *On the Beach* , a novel by Nevil Shute became a movie in the 1950's. It showed in great detail the end of life on earth after a nuclear war.

The 50's were a fast moving period. Martin Luther King, a Baptist minister, helped organize a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. He became a major force in the Civil Rights movement. James Dean, a young actor, made a movie, *Rebel Without a Cause* . In so doing, he became a symbol for the youth of his generation. Marilyn Monroe was the sex symbol of the day. Hoola-hoops were in; so was cramming—squeezing as many people or things into some small places.

In the early part of the 1950's records were still primarily purchased by young adults, but by 1958 teenagers were purchasing about 70 percent of all records. The world heard a new sound called rock and roll, a mixture of country western music with Negro rhythm and blues. Elvis Presley helped forward the rise in popularity of this new musical form, and many imitators soon followed in his footsteps.

The American dream to own your own house and own car began to be a reality. The economy flourished and many people left the cities for suburbia.

In the beginning of the 50's, teenagers were as subdued as they had been in the 40's. By the mid 50's, however, the seeds of rebellion began to show in big city slums. Gangs wore black leather jackets and tight jeans. Police felt that one in every ten gangs in New York was actively violent.

In a study of adolescent gangs— *The Shook-Up Generation* —Harrison Salisbury drew a picture of a slum society that resembled the world of medieval knights. In gang life, as in medieval times, the most valued quality was courage and the motto was “all for one, and one for all.”

WEST SIDE STORY (Musical)

West Side Story , produced in 1957, is the sad story of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* told in terms of two street gangs.

West Side Story was originally conceived by Jerome Robbins, the choreographer, and was initially intended to depict the relationship between young Irish and Jewish lovers while using the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* .

However, Leonard Bernstein, who had been chosen to do the music, and Robbins decided that this particular story line may have been overdone on Broadway. It also was not dealing with what they felt was a contemporary issue.

After much study and investigation, they chose to center the action on the streets of New York City where the 50's had seen an influx of Puerto Ricans, and the setting itself provided the right elements for the development of Shakespeare's story into musical form. Gang wars provided the proper replacement for feuding families.

The information provided will be used following the activities which are outlined at the end of this section. It will be used once again to get students to see the value of listing plot as actions in sequence. (See plot activity in *Oklahoma!* section.)

From opening to closing the musical dances set a precedent for the musical theatre. This was a musical through and through. The characters seemed to dance even as they were walking, i.e. finger snapping down the street as in the opening "Prologue."

The focus centers initially on two street gangs—The Jets (Americans) and the Sharks (Puerto Ricans). In the opening "Prologue" we are able to see through music and dance the interaction of one group to the other. Dialogue for exposition become secondary.

The Jets, lead by Riff, attempt to get a former member Tony to aid them in organizing a "rumble" with the Sharks. Tony, who has left the gang is attempting to find a better life. He tries to persuade Riff to forget about the gang. He does, however, reluctantly agree to meet at the dance that night.

The Sharks, headed by Bernardo, are also preparing for the dance. Maria, Bernardo's sister, recently immigrated, is enthralled with all the wonders of American society. She is anxiously awaiting her first dance in America.

At the dance, the seeds are sown for the rumble and Tony meets Maria. They fall desperately in love. Maria convinces Tony to go to the rumble and make sure no one is hurt.

Tony tries to stop the fight; however, in all the confusion Riff is killed. Tony, in a moment of insanity grabs a knife and kills Bernardo. The entire rumble is danced and Bernstein's music and Jerome Robbins' choreography create a masterpiece for both music lovers and dancers.

The gangs disperse quickly to the sounds of police sirens. Tony runs to Maria to explain. Her love for him is so great that she forgives him. He is forced to leave the apartment when Anita, Bernardo's girlfriend, and a police officer are heard entering. The lovers vow to meet at Doc's drugstore in a few hours.

Maria is detained by the officer, and in her place she sends Anita with a message for Tony stating that she will be late. Anita attempts to see Tony but is tormented by members of the Jets who refuse to allow her to see him. In frustration she screams that Maria is dead.

Tony, overcome by grief, has no concern for his own safety. He takes to the street in an attempt to locate Maria, who in the meantime has made her way to the playground adjacent to the drugstore. Just as they see each other, Tony is shot by a member of the Puerto Rican gang.

When the play was first produced, there were mixed reviews. Several thought it brilliant, but there were those

who were upset by the subject matter and use of language—particularly, the song “Officer Krupke”—in which police were denigrated.

In studying the play, focus will be two-fold. First, students will read orally with the teacher pages 21-32 in *Spotlight for Literature* which contains a condensed version of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* . Students will answer comprehension questions directly following this selection which deal with plot and character. There is also a stress on the use of similes and metaphors. Next, students will be given copies of the First Scene in both *West Side Story* and the actual *Romeo and Juliet* . Students will be asked to compare the two selections as to:

- 1) Exposition— *Romeo/Juliet* —chorus
West Side —prologue—danced.
(Students will listen to prologue on tape.)
- 2) Development of Plot—How “true” have the author’s of the musical held to the original play?
- 3) Students will be asked to find the similarities in character. That is Sampson and Gregory = A-Rab and Baby John, Prince Escalus and the Verones Officers = Officers Krupke and Schrank.
- 4) What is the atmosphere established in both plays? (violence, hate, youthfulness and impetuosity).

THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF (*Format can be used with any production*)

Using O’Henry’s short story, *The Ransom of Red Chief* , we will attempt to show students how a story or book can be adapted into musical form. We will then, as a culminating activity for this unit, present the musical version of *The Ransom of Red Chief* , which is available through Pioneer Drama Service.

The history of the period would have been covered previously; therefore, students would be expected to use critical thinking skills to transfer and utilize as we approach this section of the unit.

Prior to reading the short story, it will be necessary to introduce new vocabulary. The following words would be placed on the board.

temporary	apparition	
inhabitants	undeleterious	
peasantry	fraudulent	
philogentiveness	constables	
lackadaisical	contiguous	
sturdy		yeomanry
couriers		prevading
peremptory	solitary	

surreptiously	diatribe
prominent	provisions
ferocious	indecent
humiliating	emit
incontinently	industriously
vicinity	scythes
dastardly	somnolent
ransom	treachery
renegade	external

ACTIVITY ONE : (Pronunciation) Teacher can place the words on the board and have the students copy them, or each student could be handed a list of the above words. Students will be asked to circle prefixes and suffixes and place the accent marks. Students should be prepared to decode all words. (Depending on the level of the students, the teacher may wish to have students use the dictionary to complete this activity.)

ACTIVITY TWO : (Meaning) Using the following list of context clues students will attempt to find the meaning of the unknown words. (this activity could be preceded by use of pages 1-2 of Level D, *Learn New Words* , published by Weekly Reader Company, which introduces theatre vocabulary and explains context clues at the same time.)

1. It was a temporary job; however, she hoped it would develop into a full time position.
temporary—
2. Jane saw the apparition, or ghostly figure when she opened the door.
apparition—
3. The inhabitants of the islands were upset by the arrival of the strangers.
inhabitants—
4. The men were upset with his fraudulent behavior. His cheating had cost them a lot of money.
fraudulent—
5. Farm workers in Europe and Asia are classified as members of the peasantry.
peasantry—
6. The constables arrested several of the youths for their unruly behavior.
constables—
7. John’s lackadaisical attitude confused his parents and teachers. He had always been such an excellent student.
lackadaisical—
8. It was a sturdy house and therefore, could withstand the storm.
sturdy—
9. The couriers were sent to deliver the letter to the queen.
couriers—
10. He was a prominent figure in the town and was recognized wherever he went.
prominent—
11. The boy did not enjoy being humiliated or meant to feel ashamed, in front of his friends.
humiliated—
12. They lived in the vicinity of the park and the children went there daily.
vicinity—
13. The ferocious animal stood ready to attack.

ferocious—

14. He had a ferocious appetite; he could not stop eating.

ferocious—

The remainder of the words would be handled in this way. Particular attention will be given to #'s 13&14 in which the word ferocious can be used in two different contexts.

ACTIVITY THREE : (Comprehension) Students will be asked to read the short story, and write a summary of the plot as if they were a character in the story and are retelling the events to a stranger.

ACTIVITY FOUR : (Comparison) Students will read the play “ *The Ransom of Red Chief* ”. Discussions and a worksheet which will be provided will enable students to locate the similarities and differences in these two works.

COSTUMING

This information would be given as lecture or discussion. It would be used during the exploration of the musicals as well as shared with the costume group.

Costumes are a vital part of the success of any production. Frequently, too little thought goes into the costuming in amateur productions. However, the costumes are not only an extension of the set, they through the use of color and line, also help the actor in not only projecting his role, but in some instances understanding and developing it.

A costume can draw the audiences' attention—for example a principal character should wear colors that contrast with the set and also with those of the other actors.

A costume can enhance the height and weight of the performer. We are all aware of how dramatic a line can be when accompanied by a swirling cape. Sometimes a costume will help the audience relate to a character before he utters a word.

At this point students would be asked to think of shows they might have seen where the character just entered and the audience responded wildly. How did the costume and or make-up help the performer achieve his goal? (Questions similar to this could also be used in discussions on setting and set design.)

The following procedure would be adhered to in costuming any play:

- 1) Become familiar with the play, with the characters—their ages and temperaments.
- 2) Become familiar with the history and times of the period in which the play takes place. Fashions depict the thoughts, manners and attitudes of a period or time. A silhouette is an outline, or shape; style shows itself in its silhouette. (Students may like to experiment making their own silhouette from the patterns provided of various historical periods and include these on the time line.
- 3) Become familiar with a variety of fabrics. The weight of the fabric will affect the manner in which the costume will fall or drape. Heavy fabrics such as velvet will fall in long heavy folds. Lighter fabrics such as chiffon will float away from the body with the smallest breeze.
- 4) Make sure the actor feels comfortable in the costume and that it is properly fitted.

Examples of costume styles from a variety of time periods are included in this unit and may be used:.

. . . in developing silhouettes for the time line as mentioned

previously.

. . . in creating costumes for clay characters which can be used

in diaramas.

ACTIVITY FIVE : (Costuming) Each student is handed copies of the silhouettes provided in this unit. As each period in history is covered students will be responsible for 1) completed colored picture filling in details of the fashion of the period 2) a cut out silhouette on colored paper mounted and labeled.

ACTIVITY FIVE PLUS : (Preparation for production)

The remaining activities in this section would deal with production of this play. We will utilize several of the activities compiled by Fellows of the Yale Teachers Institute in its 1982-83 seminar on Drama.

The following information has been gathered from John Gassner's producing the play—pages 633-646 in which Gassner delves into several aspects of school production.

First and foremost are the factors that influence the choice of a school play—particularly the wide variety of people who must be included in the decision—the school principal, possibly the Superintendent, parents, faculty as well as the group doing the production and the prospective audience.

Next—the rehearsal procedures. Teachers will find this information particularly helpful. Gassner suggests three afternoons of rehearsals per week. Each rehearsal to last three hours. As one approaches the production date, rehearsal time should be increased. A rehearsal time of twelve weeks is considered sufficient and the following schedule is suggested.

FIRST WEEK : read through play, preliminary study of theme, general objectives, main actions, relationships, etc . . .

SECOND & THIRD WEEKS: Act I (block and work on)

FOURTH & FIFTH WEEKS : Acts I & II (block II work on I)

SIXTH WEEK : Act III (block if you have an Act III; if not, rehearsal schedule can be adapted)

SEVENTH & EIGHTH WEEKS : run throughs of Acts I, II, & III (separately)

NINTH WEEK : run throughs of all acts together.

TENTH WEEK : run throughs and special rehearsals.

ELEVENTH WEEK : technical and costume rehearsals

TWELFTH WEEK : dress rehearsals and performances.

Gassner continues to elaborate on specific problems of dealing with young actors and other difficulties which a director might encounter in producing plays for schools.

In producing *The Ransom of Red Chief* we will attempt to follow a twelve week schedule. However, we will adapt Gassner's suggested schedule. Needless to say, we will not have three hours of rehearsal time at each rehearsal. The most we can hope for is one and one half. Also, the age level we are working with dictates more rehearsals, but less time at each rehearsal.

Because we are working with two classes simultaneously, it will be necessary to provide a variety of different activities. Not all students will show a preference for appearing on stage. We will allow students to choose

from five different categories. Students will be asked to complete a form indicating a first and second choice. All categories will be explained to students. Assignments will be made at the discretion of the teachers.

The following will be used to explain the various choices and also as a guide to groups in meeting responsibilities:

1) *ON STAGE GROUP* : Prerequisites—

- a) ability to be present at all rehearsals
- b) ability to display appropriate behavior at all rehearsals
- c) ability to memorize lines and project voice
- *d) ability to follow directions
- *e) ability to work with others in a cooperative atmosphere

* Indicates that this applies to all groups.

2) *COSTUME GROUP* :

- a) will create miniature characters and dress them in appropriate costume for each scene
- b) will with assistance gather appropriate costumes for the actors (This group will be provided with or allowed to research the period.)

3) *PROPS & SET GROUP*:

- a) will create miniature set—either drawings or three-dimensional
- b) will compile list of needed props
- c) will gather these props and have them ready for rehearsals
- d) will help in the “building” of the actual set for production

4) *PUBLICITY*:

- a) will write P.A. announcements
- b) will draw or design posters for distribution throughout school and vicinity
- c) will design a hall display for the night of the play which might include diaramas made by various other groups or from actual unit itself

5) *PROGRAM*:

- a) will design program cover
- b) will create advertisements (possibly historical)
- c) will be responsible for gathering all information necessary
- d) will design program format by studying a variety of different programs
- e) will be responsible for printing and for distribution the night of performance.

The last four groups will meet with one teacher while the on stage group will meet with the other teacher. Supervision of all groups and strict organization is the only way each of these groups will meet their individual goals. Individual time frames will be discussed and formulated with each group in order to insure the success culmination of this project.

LESSON PLANS

#1 Objectives :

stimulate interest

develop awareness

develop vocabulary

The teacher will place on board American Musical Theatre. Teacher will ask students if they can give a definition of musical theatre. If not, try to elicit one.

A musical is different from a play in that it is composed of a variety of elements. Go over:

Book —dialogue—moves the action forward

Music —rhythms which set the mood

Lyrics —the lines to the music which must tell a story themselves

Play a selection from 1776. Ask students if they can tell from the lyrics in what historical period this musical is set. Perhaps draw a picture of what they “see” happening.

Play a second selection from *Oklahoma* !. Repeat activity.

Students are then asked to compare the two pieces as to setting, costuming, and characters. All three terms will be explained.

#2 Objectives: events of 1776

begin time line

Teacher will make reference to study of musical in literature and how artists and writers have and still do draw from historical events to create works for today’s audiences i.e. *The Big River* .

Students will be asked to read and take notes on the events leading to the signing of the Declaration.

Teacher will discuss the word “sequencing” and students will put given events in correct order.

The purpose of a time line will be explained. Begin with 1776 on time line. (This activity will continue as unit progresses.)

#3 Objectives : students see how a given source can be adapted to a musical form

Students are provided with copies of a scene from *South Pacific* and with corresponding pages of Michener's "*Tales of the South Pacific*".

As a class we will read both noting the differences and similarities. Also noting the manner in which the author's chose to incorporate music.

1st half of 18th

(figure available in print form)

2nd half of 18th

(figure available in print form)

1806

(figure available in print form)

Adapted from *Costumes for the Stage* by Sheila Jackson. New York: E.P. Dutton Co., 1978.

1840

(figure available in print form)

1880s

(figure available in print form)

1895

(figure available in print form)

Adapted from *Costumes for the Stage* by Sheila Jackson. New York: E.P. Dutton Co., 1978.

1910

(figure available in print form)

1926

(figure available in print form)

1933

(figure available in print form)

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