

Lesson A: Jobs in the Musical Theatre

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LESSON A: Jobs in the Musical Theatre

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|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Duration | 50 minutes |
| Grade Levels | 9-12 |
| Subjects | Drama, Literature, English, Music |

Classroom Study Materials

1. WORKSHEET A – Jobs In The Musical Theatre
2. Reference – “Behind the Scenes at a Musical Production”
3. Computer Lab with access to the Internet

Goals and Objectives

1. Introduce students to the jobs available in musical theatre.
2. Introduce students to the talents needed in producing *The Mikado*.
3. Allow students to participate in a group to explore how each job relates to a musical production.

Lesson Description

1. Students will be given the Reference for study in advance of class.
2. Students fill out Worksheet A.
3. In an entire class discussion, students should talk about the answers.
4. EXTRA CREDIT: Students choose a profession in which they are interested and write a paper discussing the chosen topic.

Assessment

1. Students should be able to research independently and fill out Worksheet A.
2. Students should be able to discuss their findings with the class.

WORKSHEET A: JOBS IN THE MUSICAL THEATRE

| Job Title | Functions: What would I do if I were the ____? | The ____ is responsible for: |
|--------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Conductor | | |
| Stage Director | | |
| Assistant Director | | |
| Set Designer | | |
| Costume Designer | | |
| Lighting Designer | | |
| Technical Director | | |
| Costume Director | | |
| Production Manager | | |



| Job Title | Functions: What would I do if I were the ____? | The ____ is responsible for: |
|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Stage Manager | | |
| Make-up and Wig Master | | |
| Prompter | | |
| Performers: Singers/ Actors | | |
| Instrumentalists | | |

Imagine that you are a composer or lyricist, and think of an idea for a song which might be featured in a musical.

Reference

Behind the Scenes at a Musical Production

Introduction

All forms of musical theater, from Opera to Musical Comedy, are popular forms of art in the world, and have a strong following in the United States – even among young people. The combination of spectacle, music, and drama continues to thrill audiences even now. Musical theater is truly an international art form. While each company has its own orchestra and chorus, or group of singers, the lead singers often travel worldwide to sing the roles that made them famous. But there is more to opera or musicals than famous singers, orchestra and spectacle. Many people work hard to make each performance happen. Theater companies employ administrators and production personnel who are responsible for the productions you see. Students might wish to explore careers in the arts. Here are some professions at an opera or musical theater company that might interest you or your students.

Conductor

Many opera companies have their own resident conductor and invite guest conductors to conduct specific operas. Musicals generally hire a conductor for each performance. Conductors are accomplished, highly trained musicians who play several instruments and read music with the same fluency that they read their native language. Not every conductor wants to conduct opera or musicals; conducting for the voice is a highly specialized skill. Conductors also specialize in different kinds of music; some are known for early music, some specialize in a particular composer. Musical comedy conductors seldom conduct operas and vice versa. The conductor usually has an assistant who accompanies in rehearsals. A chorus master works with the chorus, conducting them in rehearsals and supervising them while they learn the music. Orchestras for operas often specify 30 or more instruments, operettas somewhat less, and the high cost of modern musicals often forces them to rely on keyboards, synthesizers, and rock band instruments to reduce the requirements for orchestral musicians, at some expense to the richness of the sound.

Stage Director

The director is responsible for the overall concept of the production, for the performers' interpretations of their roles, and for moving the action on the stage. Directors are usually hired for a specific production, and again, they specialize in different styles. Opera directors often work internationally. The director of an opera or musical often works with an assistant who, among other duties, takes staging notes during rehearsals, or stages particular scenes.

Choreographer

The choreographer designs the dances found in a musical or operetta and trains the cast in their performance, with the help of a dance captain, who is often a member of the cast. Operas do not often employ a choreographer unless they have extended dance sequences.

Set Designer

The set designer works closely with the director to create the look of the opera or musical. The director determines where and when the opera will take place (many directors choose to update operas to a more recent time), and the designer will sketch the locations. S/he might do this after extensive research. A set designer must know a great deal about construction and materials, so that it may be created to be lightweight, sturdy, and practical. S/he must also know about light, so that the colors of the set will work with the lights that illuminate the stage.

Costume Designer

The costume designer works closely with both the director and the set designer to create the costumes for every character in the production. The costume designer will draw his ideas for each character. Costume constructors build (or sew) the costumes. Some characters change their costumes many times – a young girl in Act One may be portrayed as an old woman in Act Three – and the designer must develop specific details – down to the kind of fabric to be used – for each costume.

Lighting Designer

The lighting designer must be knowledgeable about electricity, color, and theater techniques to create a design that will work for that production. A lighting designer must be a good draftsman, for he or she will draw the “light plot,” or a rendering of every light to be used and its placement in the theater. The lighting designer creates mood, atmosphere, and locale through the clever use of light and color.

Technical Director

The technical director oversees all the technical aspects of the company’s production. S/he works with the designers and with the stage crew to make sure the sets, props, and lights are effective and work together.

Costume Director

The costume director supervises all aspects of costumes. S/he works with the costume designer to make sure all his requests are met; s/he supervises construction of costumes or arranges to buy or rent costumes that the company doesn’t make. S/he makes sure all the costumes fit the singers and supervises the wardrobe staff, which makes sure the costumes are clean and in good repair.

Production Manager

The production manager supervises all other aspects of the production, including the stage management staff (see below), wig, make-up, rehearsal schedules, and more.

Stage Manager

Stage managers are responsible for “calling” the show: during the rehearsals and performances, s/he tells the person who controls the lights when to change them; s/he tells the person who opens and closes the curtains when to do his job; she tells the performers when to enter and exit stage. S/he is the boss of the production during performances.

Make-Up and Wig Master

Just like in the movies, opera and musical actors and singers wear make-up on stage. Sometimes the make-up is elaborate, (A young singer must be made up to look old, for example.) and sometimes it is simple. However, in order for the faces to be seen under bright lights and in a large auditorium, all must wear make-up. Wigs are often used, even when the singer’s own hair will look fine, because it is easier for the wig master to set the wig than work with the singer’s natural hair.

Lyricist/Book Writer

Before a theatrical production comes to life, someone must construct the plot, write the dialog that each character must recite, and lay out the lyrics of the songs for the soloists and chorus. Sometimes one person performs all of these functions, especially in operas or operettas, but in musicals it is more common for one person to be responsible for the book while another concentrates on the lyrics. A few exceptional individuals (Cole Porter, Noel Coward) could both write the lyrics and compose the music for their songs. It is common for the basic idea for the musical production to be borrowed from a previous book or play, but there are plenty of original musicals as well. Classical lyricists were often well-known authors, but twentieth century musicals often relied on self-taught lyricists and composers famed as “tin-pan alley.”

Composer

A musical production is often most identified with the person who composes its music, especially in opera; however, many of the famous operettas or musicals were the result of a synergistic collaboration between composer and lyricist (think of Gilbert and Sullivan, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, or Kander and Ebb). Opera composers are generally classically trained musicians who also write the complete orchestral scores and the arias and choruses of their works; the time constraint of modern musicals often means that some composers now just sketch out the melodies and chordal structures of the songs, and hire an arranger (or orchestrator) to write the orchestral accompaniment. All musical productions hire a piano accompanist for early rehearsals to provide the necessary musical backing, and this specialist often works closely with the composer to modify the songs and dances to fit the needs of the show