Musical Theatre
Curriculum for the
High School Theatre
Department

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Directed Study
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Over the last one hundred years, American Musical Theatre has developed into an extremely diverse and popular form of entertainment. Every year in New York City, thousands of tourists flock to Broadway theatres to relax for two and a half hours in the dark while the performers onstage work hard to give the audience a fulfilling experience. More recently, the popularity of the medium has grown exponentially with the introduction of television shows that showcase the medium, such as “Glee” and “Smash”. Given this popularity, it should be no surprise that every year more and more college and conservatory programs are turning out young performers, eager to make it to the Great White Way. These programs have been developed only in the past thirty years, as Musical Theatre began to be acknowledged for what it is: a distinct medium requiring a very specific skill set. As these programs continue to grow and become more streamlined, American high schools have been developing Theatre departments to give students the opportunity to experience theatrical training as an elective option. Performing Arts high schools have also been created in an effort to give young students with the right amount of talent and passion a place to focus on honing their skills.

It is only fitting that early theatrical training has slowly evolved to now include Musical Theatre. In many cases, Musical Theatre exists only as a once or twice a year after-school production, but many schools with successful young Theatre departments have begun to acknowledge the medium as its own entity and have found ways to introduce it within the context of the Theatre classroom. In some cases, this may even include a separate class.

As a Musical Theatre actress who fumbled her way through scattered training and after-school productions in high school to successfully complete a conservatory BFA program, my experience has compelled me to look into the development of these programs and determine exactly what type of training would best benefit aspiring high school performers. As college and conservatory programs have developed to the point where many are extremely successful, the challenge is now to the high school Theatre educator to determine what the best way is to prepare their students for entrance into these programs. This will be explored throughout this paper, as examples of existing programs are examined along with my own program designs.
In order to fully understand my approach to Musical Theatre curriculum development, one must first understand my personal values with regard to the Theatre classroom as a whole.

The Theatre classroom should first and foremost be considered a safe space for students. Many students who actively participate in the arts, whether performing or visual, come to regard those classrooms as a sanctuary – a reprieve from the rigorous nature of their standard academic courses. Particularly in public high schools, arts education teachers have an obligation to their students to make sure their space is welcoming and especially non-competitive.

Competition is directly related to results, and a Theatre classroom should not be a result-oriented space. Final performance is important, but a “perfect performance” is impossible. At the college level, the Theatre classroom becomes more about the process and not the performance. In my experience observing undergraduate Musical Theatre students, I have noticed that they have a tendency to seek approval – to know that they are on track to that “perfect performance”. They fail to understand that in all Theatre, there is no “perfect” – only a specific take on the material. For many, it takes them months to firmly grasp this concept and to subsequently shift their focus to the amount of effort they are putting into the work and not on how well they interpret it. Based on my observations, I have come to determine that students must learn early that any arts classroom should be a space to work. The Theatre classroom in particular is a laboratory. The earlier students are able to make this distinction, the better it will serve them down the road. They will be able to enter a college/university or conservatory acting studio with the proper mindset that they are there to work and not perform.

LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE MUSICAL THEATRE CLASSROOM

The question now turns to what new information or insight high school students should walk out of a Musical Theatre classroom with. Is there anything practical the budding young performer can learn at this level that will assist them with their future training? The answer is: absolutely.
Below are the learning outcomes I would expect for a high school student taking a Musical Theatre class that I have designed. Note that there are statements that apply to the history of the medium and others that apply to performance. A further breakdown of this will be discussed later in this paper.

### HISTORY OF MUSICAL THEATRE/CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL THEATRE

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<td>Students will understand that acting, singing, and dancing exist at heightened levels in Musical Theatre.</td>
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<td>Students will understand that the circumstances in which composers and lyricists wrote contribute to the content and structure of their shows.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will understand that traditional Musical Theatre forms have evolved and fragmented into a variety of different styles.</td>
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<td>Students will understand that contemporary Musical Theatre performance is a different aesthetic from contemporary pop music styles.</td>
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<td>Students will understand that the development of the contemporary Musical Theatre movement resulted from the introduction of electric instruments to the orchestra pit.</td>
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### MUSICAL THEATRE PERFORMANCE

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<td>Students will understand that an individual and disciplined approach to rehearsal leads to improved performance.</td>
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<td>Students will understand that analyzing the music, lyrics, structure and style of a Musical Theatre song guides performers to make more effective choices.</td>
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It is also important to note that I am an advocate of the text-based approach, having inadvertently taught it to myself. Recently, I have had the opportunity to see this approach actually being taught at the college level. As far as my own training goes, I had been given enough tools within the separate music and acting components that I was able to deduce the best way to make them work for me. I also understand now that certain habits I had developed contributed to my own skill set, therefore making it second nature for me to break-down the structure of a song. I realize though, that I may be an exception, and that while there are many smart performers out there, some may not be so quick to pick up on these things without sufficient guidance.

### EXAMINING MUSICAL THEATRE CURRICULUM

**Performing Arts High Schools**

The current trend among many Performing Arts high is to offer a separate Musical Theatre track to students that have a particular interest in the field. Most program outlines show a concentration in courses specifically geared toward these students, including a dance requirement, private voice lessons, and performance classes focused specifically on Musical Theatre material. Many of these programs appear to be
modeled after a conservatory approach, and this seems quite appropriate given that Performing Arts high schools are, essentially, conservatories.

There are a large number of Performing Arts high schools in this country, each with its own approach and philosophy with regard to teaching Musical Theatre. These programs are often quite successful, but after reviewing many of these programs, it is my opinion that they are perhaps not as successful as they could be. In order to get a better sense of the current program structures, we must look at an example.

St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists (Fig. 1) is a Performing Arts charter school with approximately 550 students. They state in their handbook that their Musical Theatre program is “modeled on college-level BFA theatre programs, and as such, graduates of the … Musical Theatre department transition easily into arts programs at post-secondary institutions.”

The most glaring issue with this curriculum is the establishment of the idea that Musical Theatre takes precedence over acting. Acting work should precede Musical Theatre work – not the other way around. By introducing their freshman to Musical Theatre work in the fall and postponing Acting work until the spring, SPCPA is informing its students that Acting is secondary. The course description for Scene into Song, the course that precedes Acting, is as follows: “This class studies the seamless connections between scenes as they move into and out of songs and musical moments in the musical theatre. This course culminates in a performance.” How can students even begin to adequately understand the “seamless connection between scenes” within Musical Theatre, let alone give a sufficient performance, if they don’t already have an understanding of how scenes connect within non-musical Theatre?? They are not giving their students a proper frame of reference for their work, and this opens the door to bad habits and a neglect of acting skills.

The solution to this would be some rearrangement of their curriculum. In order for their students to build a solid acting foundation, SPCPA would be wise to have their freshmen taking two full semesters of Acting, as opposed to one semester. This work should continue throughout their sophomore year, with the Scene into Song course being introduced their junior year.

The Cabaret class that takes place during the sophomore and junior years is described this way: “Students learn about the basics of building a cabaret act by studying songs and monologues.” I believe a class
Music Theatre Department Statement of Philosophy
Our mission is to provide authentic training in fundamental performing arts skills. Real training happens in classes, regular attendance is critical to individual and collective success. We believe in the importance of performance as the greatest teacher. During the school year students participate in showcases, workshops, concerts, a J Term project and in the spring, Juries. Students are granted equivalent credit for genuine outside arts involvements. Classes require commitment and full participation from each student. The fully engaged student will graduate with the skills necessary to pursue post-secondary or conservatory training, or any valid program of study beyond high school.

Music Theatre Curriculum
The Music Theatre Department spends equal time addressing the student’s development as a dancer, actor and singer. In dance, Semester 1 is devoted primarily to dance technique. Second semester is devoted to applying learned technique to actual music theatre choreography and the combining of dance and song. The acting portion of the music theatre curriculum involves spending each year working within a traditional actor training system, studying under an acting teacher from the theatre department, grounding in the fundamentals of theatre acting. And also, much time is devoted to combing scene-work with song, and applying learned skills to the unique demands of a music theatre production. All music theatre students will take singing for both semesters, all four years.

SPCPA Musical Theater Department

Freshman Year

Dance Technique (full year)
Dance Technique is an exploration of “styles of dance” designed to create confidence and originality in the dancer and non-dancer. This course will focus on creating a foundation of movement in space, time and energy in a way that will apply to any dance technique. Students will gain an understanding of basic dance vocabulary, and work on alignment and posture. To get fundamentally grounded, all freshman take a full year of dance technique.

Singing (full year)
Through the practice of singing warm-ups, exercises and musical theater repertoire, students develop a healthy vocal foundation for the study of singing techniques for the theater.

Acting (spring semester)
In the first year of acting, students are introduced to the fundamentals of the craft through simple games and exercises. Focus is on self-awareness and immersion in a set of given circumstances.

Scene into Song (fall semester)
This class studies the seamless connections between scenes as they move into and out of songs and musical moments in the musical theater. This course culminates in a performance.

Tap Dance (fall semester)
This course offers students an opportunity to delve into tap dance as a physical and musical art form. The class will focus on technique, form and musicality, as well as the historical and cultural aspects of the Rhythm Tap Dance form. Additionally, students will be encouraged to develop their own personal style and voice through improvisation and composition exercises.

Music Theater Repertoire (spring semester)
An introduction to and exploration of the rich traditions of music and movement in the American musical theater. Guest dancer-choreographers from the Twin Cities professional theatre community are brought in to stage musical numbers. Students will put song and dance together.

**Sophomore Year**

Acting (full year)
Students are encouraged to build on the skills developed during their first year as they begin to work on characterization, honesty and listening skills. Exercises become increasingly complex in this year as students are challenged to work on personal challenges in the acting process.

Singing (full year)
Further development of vocal skills for the musical theater performer

Dance Technique (fall semester)
Skill building in styles and fundamentals of dance used in musical theater

Cabaret (fall semester)
Students learn about the basics of building a cabaret act by studying songs and monologues. The class culminates in a cabaret performance.

Tap (spring semester)
A continuation of the study of tap begun in the freshman year

Music Theater Repertoire (spring semester)
Apply learned dance technique to actual music theatre choreography. Classes focus on developing personal and ensemble repertoire appropriate to the young performer through the study of important contributions to the music of Broadway.

**Junior Year**

Singing (full year)
The practice of solo, small group and ensemble vocal techniques for the emerging stage singer

Acting (fall semester)
In their third year, music theatre acting students are encouraged to build on the skills developed during their first two years and focus on the principle of commitment. Students are challenged to make bold choices and take risks in their work in a safe environment where these choices can be examined and learned from.

Scene Into Song (spring semester)
This course revisits the importance of the connections between scenes and songs in musical theater. Students share their work at the end of the semester for the public.

Dance Technique (fall semester)
A further exploration of musical theater dance and the building of basic dance technique.

Music Theater Repertoire (spring semester)
Apply learned dance technique to actual music theatre choreography. A continuation of sophomore course work in the important contributions to the development of the marriage of song and dance.

Cabaret (fall semester)
Building on the previous year’s class, performers learn the fundamentals of creating a cabaret performance, and engage with more advanced material. Students perform in a Cabaret at semester’s end.

Music Theater Survey (spring semester)
Students research and investigate the roots of American musical theater and the creators of important milestones in the development of our unique art form

Senior Year

Acting (full year)
In their final year, music theatre acting students engage with advanced topics and exercises that challenge the student actor and reinforce the learning that has taken place over the course of their time at the Conservatory.

Singing (full year)
The practice of solo, small group and ensemble vocal techniques for the emerging stage singer

Dance Technique (fall semester)
Continued study of the fundamentals of musical theater dance

Music Theater Repertoire (spring semester)
A continuation of junior course work. Song and dance class.

Cabaret (fall semester)
Students revisit the study of cabaret in their senior year. Monologues, song and dance are all explored in preparation for a cabaret performance at semester’s end.

Scene Into Song (spring semester)
A successful musical theater actor can speak and sing and understand the connection between the two. Moving from the spoken word to the song, music theatre students put it all together in this class culminating in a performance at semester’s end.

Subject to change
like this is best kept for later study, as students are still gathering material and learning fundamental tools. Cabaret performance not only requires slightly more advanced skills, but is also not necessary at this level of training.

The Music Theatre Survey class is the history class, and as I am a proponent of a strong foundation in history, my own reaction to this is that it is being introduced too far into the program. Music Theatre Survey should be introduced prior to Scene into Song, so students gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the medium has evolved before beginning any performance study. On a positive note, SPCPA should be commended for including a Musical Theatre history class at all – throughout the course of my research, I noticed many Performing Arts high schools neglect this very important part of the training process.

SPCPA should also be applauded for their Music Theatre Repertoire class, described as “An introduction to and exploration of the rich traditions of music and movement in the American Musical Theatre.” This class is meant to help students understand the relationship between song and dance – probably the most difficult connection to be made in Musical Theatre, but also perhaps the most important. Preceding this class each year is a class called Dance Technique: “…an exploration of ‘styles of dance’ designed to create confidence and originality in the dancer and non-dancer. This course will focus on creating a foundation of movement in space, time and energy in a way that will apply to any dance technique. Students will gain an understanding of basic dance vocabulary, and work on alignment and posture.” As they progress within the course throughout their sophomore, junior, and senior years, students are introduced to Musical Theatre styles and begin making the connection between technique and performance.

It is clear SPCPA’s program is very dance-oriented in that the framework and sequence of the dance component is strong. They have made it clear to their students that they have to understand one thing before they can move on to the next. What SPCPA fails to realize in their program design is that the same kind of attention must be paid to the sequencing of their acting component, and the same point must be made there as well.
I particularly agree with the conservatory model, and I fully support the creation of a separate Musical Theatre program. Throughout the course of my research, I noticed that periodically a Performing Arts high school would require all theatre majors to take at least one Musical Theatre class. This particular practice has its advantages. It embraces the idea that the best actors are well-rounded, aside from offering another tool for young actors to have, whether or not they have any intention of future work in the Musical Theatre medium.

In terms of program structure, I believe it is equally important to balance all three components: dance, acting and music/voice. The strongest type of Musical Theatre performer is the triple threat. Pre-college level training that steers young performers in this direction is the best option, as it will boost their chances of being accepted into a strong college program.

Therefore, a well-balanced Musical Theatre program in this setting would require the following coursework (this does not include required academic coursework):

- Dance classes: ballet, tap, jazz, and a dance class focused on Musical Theatre styles and choreographers (example: Bob Fosse).
- Music theory coursework, including ear training skills.
- Participation in a musical ensemble.
- Private voice lessons. (Many Performing Arts high schools provide private lessons on-campus.)
- A wide variety of acting coursework, including improvisation and basic acting technique.
- Musical Theatre history and performance study.

Upon reviewing this list, the question for some might be “Why music theory and musical ensemble?” The answer is that at least a basic knowledge and practice of musical vocabulary and structure is just as important to giving a solid Musical Theatre performance as knowing the right dance steps and being able to work a scene. Therefore, we begin the break-down of this approach to program design with the music aspect.

As a professional performer, I have had the opportunity to work on quite a few new musicals. My own background is heavily music-based; I had the privilege of attaining my own BFA in Musical Theatre through a
conservatory program. I understand the importance of musicianship skills, and I have seen how they can affect the rehearsal process -- and even the overall performance of a Musical Theatre song. As a performer, nothing is more frustrating in the rehearsal process than having a music rehearsal slow down to nearly a grinding halt because one performer is incapable of reading music and therefore needs extra time spent on learning their music. There are still many who believe that this should not be as important a factor as the mere ability to sing well, but I strongly disagree with this point of view. The actor can be enabled – and the rehearsal process helped -- by the ability to read and learn their music on their own time. With this skill, the actor is then able to spend the maximum amount of time in rehearsal focusing on the acting of the song, and time is not lost on learning the logistics. It is also important to note that musicianship is a large part of many college level programs – especially conservatory programs. The earlier these skills are incorporated and enforced, the stronger a musician the *Musical* Theatre performer will be.

Private voice lessons are also an essential piece to the music portion of the program. In order to be the best any Musical Theatre performer can be, they need to learn to develop strong vocal stamina, as well as good vocal health habits and technique. Personally, I am a proponent of a classical approach, as it can only strengthen the voice by lending range and flexibility. A versatile voice is better in today’s industry, as there are a myriad of different styles present, from traditional Musical Theatre such as “Oklahoma!” to rock operas like “Rent”. Again, the earlier this training begins, the stronger the voice can become.

Dance is the component that can be easily neglected at these early levels. I would advise any parent with a child showing an interest in Musical Theatre to enroll that child in dance classes as soon as possible. Not everyone comes naturally to dance, but an earlier start can encourage better self-confidence as a dancer and help avoid the self-consciousness that develops later in adolescence. If dance training is not started until the 9th grade level, then I believe that continuous work at it can help a student gain self-confidence better than just working at it for two hours once a week. Performing Arts high schools typically offer this opportunity to their students. Like classical repertoire in voice work, ballet is the foundation of good dance technique and discipline, and therefore a necessity. Tap and jazz are the two forms of dance most closely associated with
Musical Theatre. It can also help students to have a working knowledge of styles of dance such as rhythm tap and Fosse. The more practice a student can get, the better it will serve them in the long run.

Acting is probably the component that is most neglected by Musical Theatre performers. If handed a “straight” theatre scene, most have enough basic skills to get by. Understanding basic acting technique is of the utmost importance. The earlier students of Musical Theatre understand that the acting component remains alive within the songs and is not simply exclusive to non-musical scene work, the better; however, a basic understanding of technique (typically Stanislavski) is not only beneficial, but a must. Certain theatrical styles, such as Shakespeare and his contemporaries, can also help to strengthen an actor and increase his skills.

With this in mind, it is then important to understand that a Musical Theatre student in this kind of program would not be to participate in Musical Theatre coursework – especially performance study – without having gone through an acting curriculum first. Ideally, the required Musical Theatre study would be separated into a sequence of three courses, with the necessary acting coursework a prerequisite. In most cases, this would mean that the first opportunity to partake in a Musical Theatre class would not present itself until the 11th grade year, with any remaining classes taking place during the 12th grade year. The sequence of courses in my program design would be as follows:

- History of Musical Theatre (operetta to the 1960s)
- Contemporary Musical Theatre (1960s to the present)
- Introduction to Musical Theatre Performance

We begin with the origins of Musical Theatre, as opposed to heading straight into the performance aspect, because knowledge and understanding of the major contributors to the medium, as well as types and structures, are necessary in order to adequately perform many of their works. In the Performing Arts high school structure, it would be possible to devote more time to this, so students would matriculate into a higher level of education with a more comprehensive background than many of their peers. The reason that Musical Theatre history would be split into two separate levels is a simple one: the opportunity to cover as much ground
as possible should be taken. The industry has changed so much in the last one hundred years that it is vital for students to be aware of how it has changed in order to have a firm grasp on it.

The first level of Musical Theatre history would include the very basics of the medium, such as the introduction of operetta in America with discussion of such composers as Friml and Romberg, to Berlin, Porter, Gershwin; etc. Also folded into the course would be the different classifications of Musical Theatre (Musical Play vs. Concept Musical, for example), as well as different types of song structure that appear within the medium. A general outline of the course would be as follows:

- Composers & Lyricists
  - Friml
  - Romberg
  - Kern
  - Gershwin
  - Berlin
  - Porter
  - Rodgers & Hart
  - Rodgers & Hammerstein
  - Lerner & Loewe
  - Loesser
  - Kander & Ebb
  - Bock & Harnick

- Musical Theatre Forms and Structure
  - Types of Musical Theatre
  - Components of Musical Theatre and how they function within the medium
  - Song types and structures
    - Analysis of AABA Structure

The second level of Musical Theatre history, or Contemporary Musical Theatre, would begin to discuss aspects of the medium that include the emergence of the Rock Opera and its effect on the industry, the large spectacle musicals of the 1980s, and even a focus on the great modern master of American Musical Theatre, Stephen Sondheim. The modern Musical Theatre canon encompasses a variety of styles, and this is where students would begin to understand how important it is to be flexible in this industry. A Musical Theatre performer is limiting themselves if they believe they can be good at two things and get by – that is simply not the case. It is important to be able to switch gears between the legit ingénue and the belting punk vixen. It is
my belief that many students of Musical Theatre do not understand the importance of versatility unless they fully understand the current state of the industry. Below is an overview of what this course might look like:

- **Composers & Lyricists**
  - Stephen Sondheim
  - Stephen Schwartz
  - Andrew Lloyd Webber
  - Boublil & Schonberg
  - Jason Robert Brown
  - Andrew Lippa
  - Adam Guettel
  - David Yazbek
  - Michael John LaChiusa

- **Styles and Structure in Contemporary Musical Theatre**
  - Impact of Electronic Music on Musical Theatre
  - Types of Contemporary Musical Theatre
  - Song styles in Contemporary Musical Theatre

Only once they have to come to acknowledge this can students really begin to undertake the process of combining the different components and really exercising their skills fully. This is also why I would actually discourage beginning performance study until the 12th grade level. It is to be noted that performance in a full-scale production is perfectly acceptable as it is exposure to the medium, and it gives students a base to reflect on as they really begin to apply their skills. Being able to look back, acknowledge, and begin to assess why something in the past didn’t quite work opens understanding and self-awareness. Students can then begin to understand why tools are important. At this level of work and in this type of educational environment, it might be possible to begin to give students a very sturdy toolbox from which they can pull. This is why this approach can be highly beneficial and can help students move into a conservatory or college program with a foundation under them, allowing them to continue to hone their craft and quickly work into more advanced levels of training.

That said, an Introduction to Musical Theatre Performance class at this level would probably look like this:

- Mapping the Music
  - The importance of music theory markings in Musical Theatre song analysis
• Song structure
• Accompaniment/orchestration

- Mapping the Lyrics
  - The use of figurative language
  - Questions vs. statements
  - The importance of rhyme scheme

- Integration of Music & Lyrics

- Developing a Point of View
  - Lyrics as monologue
  - Using the clues
  - The song in context

- Beginning Application of Skills
  - How do you apply all this information?
  - Establishing the private rehearsal process

Large Public High Schools (1,500+ Students)

Since Musical Theatre coursework is a new concept with many public high schools, it is not surprising that throughout my research I discovered that more often than not, large public high schools were more likely to include it in their Theatre programs. The fact is that this medium, though already pre-existing as an after-school activity for many schools, is finally getting the recognition it deserves. It is very important for faculty to be knowledgeable about how the medium functions; otherwise they may be poorly preparing students who have intentions to pursue college-level training.

Due to many of these programs being new with no common set of standards to adhere to, curricular framework varies greatly between programs.

The first example is that of a more performance-based course. This particular class is an elective option at Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, IL called “Musical Theatre Workshop” (Fig. 2). The framework for this course appears to contradict its description:

Through the workshop process, students will learn all facets of musical theatre as a distinct performance genre. The course will include a historical survey of the evolution of musical theatre and an in-depth study of several different musical theatre performance styles. Students will learn and practice acting, vocal, and movement skills. They will
Course Name: Musical Theatre

National Standard: 9-12.2, 9-12.5, 9-12.7, 9-12.8

Course Objective: Through the workshop process, students will gain an understanding of the evolution of musical theatre as a distinct performance genre and develop acting, vocal, and movement skills for musical theatre performance.

Content LT:

Unit One: Musicality, Lyrics as Text, and Staging

1. Applies elements of musicality to song performance including notes, tempo, rhythm, and key. (knowledge, skill)
2. Translates the lyrics of a song into clearly motivated text/dialogue within song performance. (product, skill)
3. Understands and applies staging techniques including anchoring, action-verbs, and relationship descriptors to create specific and imaginative staging. (skill, product, knowledge)
4. Collaborates effectively with classmates during workshops and vocal rehearsals. (disposition, skill)

Unit Two: Musical Scene/Song Study

1. Translates a playwright’s images and ideas of scene and character into an observable performance (reasoning, product)
2. Provides, receives and applies critical peer and instructor feedback to the creative process (skill, disposition)
3. Collaborates with fellow actor in scene preparation (skill, disposition)
4. Performs and revises scripted scene (product)
5. Incorporates: listening, eye contact, relationship communication, triggers, anchoring, action-verbs, and relationship titles in scene performance (skill, product)

Unit Three: Introduction to Musical Theatre Choreography

1. Rehearses and performs musical theatre movement and choreography (product, skill)
2. Participates in physical and vocal warm-ups (disposition, skill)
3. Demonstrates knowledge of basic dance terminology and key choreographers in musical theatre (knowledge)

Unit Four: Musical Theatre Revue

1. Participates in rehearsals, tech, and final Musical Theatre Revue (product, skill, disposition)
2. Performs and revises an assigned scene/song from a Musical (product, skill)
3. Performs in ensemble dances/songs from Musicals (product, skill)
4. Prepares all necessary props, costumes, and furniture for performance (skill, product)
5. Demonstrates and applies knowledge of musicality, movement, and relationship communication within performance (skill, product, knowledge)

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also develop proficiency in analyzing and staging scenes and musical numbers. The course will culminate in a public performance of scenes studied in class. Students will be required to attend after-school rehearsals during the week of this performance. This class may be repeated once for credit. After successfully completing this course students may continue their studies in Musical Theatre by electing to apply for an independent study option in the Theatre Department.

Already, I can say that there are dangers in putting the emphasis on performance, as opposed to appreciation at this level.

First, it should be noted that in the course catalog, the pre-requisites for this program are Acting 1 and 2 or one year of choral music. I realize that not all students at a public high school will enroll in more than one elective department at a time, but there is already a crucial flaw here with this course because you will have some students who have had acting experience, but not necessarily music experience; and vice versa. Either way, there are students missing some steps that will prevent them from fully grasping certain elements of performance.

Unit One centers on “Musicality, Lyrics as Text, and Staging”. The very first component of this unit is an application of a skill that a student might lack unless they have taken a music class or outside music lessons. (Is there a learning component to this particular unit standard? Otherwise, how does a student who has perhaps only been enrolled in acting apply a skill they haven’t learned?) Students cannot be expected to apply this standard if they lack the skills to do so. I am particularly concerned about this unit’s emphasis on staging, as opposed to acting. Staging is a director’s concern, not a performer’s. Encouraging students to create a pretty picture as opposed to working toward the truth of a song or scene skews the focus and only creates bad habits. This will then create extra work for young performers who continue on to higher education in Musical Theatre, as they will inevitably need to break such habits.

Unit Two moves into performance study. It is very much acting-based. For those students who up until this point have only been enrolled in choir, this is foreign territory. Again, there is an issue with meeting the standard: how can they be expected to understand acting vocabulary when they do not have a previous knowledge of it? Also, given that this course is one semester, I already suspect that there is more information
being crammed into the course than students are able to properly execute. I applaud the instructor for taking the time to make sure there is an emphasis on acting; it simply deserves more time than they have allotted.

Unit Three involves choreography. Since this course is described as a college preparatory course, I would assume this component has to do with building a basic skill set and understanding how to best execute choreographed routines in an audition setting.

The last unit, Musical Theatre Revue, seems to be the focal point of the entire course. As was stated earlier, result-oriented work inevitably misleads young performers as it creates the illusion of the “perfect” performance. As one reviews the syllabus for this course, they can see this reinforced throughout by the repetition of “product” in the standard category. Although the course description mentions a “historical survey” of the medium, that does not appear to be reflected anywhere in the syllabus.

By comparison, Lincoln High School (Fig. 3) in Portland, OR, takes a slightly different approach to their Musical Theatre class. The course description reads as follows:

This course will examine musical theater in its social, historical and creative context, and introduce students to practical skills in dance, acting and singing styles appropriate to this theater form. Coursework culminates in student performances of excerpts from selected musicals. Field trips to view musical theatre productions on an availability basis. Previous experience in musical theatre is not required, but would be helpful.

Unlike Stevenson High School, Lincoln High School’s class appears to adhere more closely to its course description. While there appears to be a performance element of the course, such as auditioning and examining acting styles and movement, there is also a history component. I commend the instructor for encouraging students to see as many productions as possible, as this broadens their understanding of Musical Theatre styles, particularly with regard to Contemporary Musical Theatre.

I have an appreciation for the “Writing your own Musical Theatre piece” component. I think this is a wonderful way for students to gain perspective on the writing process, as well as a way for them to better
Musical Theatre 1-2

Course Description:
Students will explore the many facets of musical theatre through performance and research. Through viewing, analyzing and critiquing musical theatre productions, the student will have a greater understanding of what makes an effective musical theatre performance, and how to improve their own work in theatre.

Units of study will include, but not be limited to:
- Auditioning for musical theatre
- History of the American musical
- Movement
- Viewpoints/acting styles
- Writing your own musical theatre piece
- Voice and vocal health

References/Text books:
There is no textbook for this course. Students will be provided with handouts, packets, and scripts as needed.

Assessment/evaluation/grading policy:
The grading policy is as follows:

100-90% = A
89-80% = B
79-70% = C
69-60% = D
59-0% = F

Grades are not based on a curve. These percentages are based upon class work, participation, homework and incentive points.

Student opportunities to meet CJM/CAM/PASS/CRLS/CRLF requirements:
Taking Musical Theatre will meet all requirements of the above-mentioned programs (example: personal management, problem solving, communication, teamwork, employment foundations et cetera).

Additional costs/materials:
Students will need to provide a three-ring binder with paper/dividers that can be used as an actor’s journal during the course of the class. This should be separate from notebooks used in other classes, as it will be turned in each week. In addition, field trip opportunities may arise to see local performances at a discounted rate. Some financial assistance is available to those students who cannot afford to attend these performances. If such an opportunity should arise, students will be given advance notice.
understand existing pieces of Musical Theatre by gaining an appreciation for the different composers and lyricists and their process.

I believe the proper place for a strong Musical Theatre course should be within the Theatre department or, if the funding is available, the ideal situation is as both a Music and Theatre course. A team-taught course between both departments benefits students by allowing them to experience the medium from both ends of the spectrum. The Music teacher, whether that is a choral or band teacher, can enhance the students’ knowledge of musical structures and markings. The Theatre teacher brings their own set of skills to the table in the way of basic acting technique and theatrical styles. In the best scenario, one or both teachers will have a substantial knowledge, if not also a background, in Musical Theatre to ensure that the students are receiving an extremely well-rounded view of the medium.

In this type of environment, an ideal situation would consist of two Musical Theatre courses:

- History of Musical Theatre (1920s to the Present)
- Introduction to Musical Theatre Performance

A typical course overview might look something like this:

- History of Musical Theatre (1920s to the Present):
  - Composers & Lyricists:
    - Jerome Kern
    - George Gershwin
    - Irving Berlin
    - Rodgers & Hart
    - Rodgers & Hammerstein
    - Lerner & Loewe
    - Kander & Ebb
    - Bock & Harnick
    - Stephen Sondheim (including discussion on West Side Story)
  - Musical Theatre Structure
    - Components of Musical Theatre and how they function within the medium
    - Types of Musical Theatre
    - Song types commonly found in Musical Theatre
      - Analysis of AABA Song Structure
A course outline for an introductory performance study class may resemble something like the one below. Depending on program funding, the amount of material covered may be comparable to a Performing Arts high school performance study course. Once again, an optimal situation would be for the class to be team-taught between members of both the Music and Theatre departments.

- **Introduction to Musical Theatre Performance:**
  - Mapping the Music
    - Dynamic markings
    - Expression markings
    - Keys & pitches
    - Song structure
    - Accompaniment/orchestration
  - Mapping the Lyrics
    - The use of figurative language
    - Questions vs. statements
    - The importance of rhyme scheme
  - Integration of Music & Lyrics
  - Developing a Point of View
    - Lyrics as monologue
    - Using the clues
    - The song in context

Being mindful that many students may have an interest in Musical Theatre while not necessarily being driven to perform, the first course would be more of an appreciation course with the occasional performance opportunity. The second course would be a very basic introduction to the medium that would involve a text-based approach to the material.

History of Musical Theatre would capture the most important elements of the medium. The major composers and lyricists would be discussed, with some discussion of structure. Again, students who may not necessarily have a high interest in performing would be made to feel comfortable in this type of course structure. It would be an opportunity to learn more about the medium; it would also be a prerequisite for students who have an interest in the Introduction to Musical Theatre Performance course.

The Introduction to Musical Theatre Performance class would include lessons on music theory and song structure folded in with lessons on how to approach the text. The focus would ultimately be basic song
analysis. Feedback would stay centered on this, with the occasional acting exercise thrown in when necessary, but students would be strongly discouraged from trying to achieve a “perfect performance”. Much like the Performing Arts high school course, this would be designed to give students a foundation from which they could springboard.

As with the Performing Arts high school program, I would discourage participation in Musical Theatre coursework until students were in 11th or 12th grade. For students planning to audition for college-level programs, I would encourage them to take this coursework at the 11th grade level.

**Small Public High Schools (1,000 Students or less)**

Introducing Musical Theatre to a small public high school may seem to be a bit of a challenge, given potential funding issues, but it can be done. There are two approaches to bringing this coursework in: 1) through enough funding to have a one semester, appreciation-based Musical Theatre class, or 2) by introducing a unit within a pre-existing theatre course. In order to understand how both options can be structured effectively, we need to examine an example of each.

The first example (Fig. 4), which is a one semester class, is from Amesbury High School in Amesbury, MA. This class, American Musical Theatre, is an excellent example of how to structure a Musical Theatre class for a small public school. It is a history-based class, which is less intimidating for students who have a genuine interest in the medium but are not necessarily keen on performing. The only question I might have for the teacher who constructed this course is this: are there any performance opportunities integrated into the course for those students that have a desire to pursue Musical Theatre? There are ways to integrate performance opportunities in a history-based class without losing focus.

An interesting thing to note is that during the course of my research, I noticed many of the Musical Theatre courses that are present in Massachusetts schools are under the umbrella of the Music department. Amesbury was one of only a few where the class was (appropriately) placed in the Theatre department. While there are a great deal of music teachers out there that are, in fact, highly knowledgeable of the medium, one must remember that Musical Theatre is not simply about the music. It is also about Theatre. As I have
American Musical Theatre Syllabus

Course Description
This course is an introduction to the American musical in all its various styles and forms. We will learn about outstanding productions, composers, lyricists, librettists, directors, designers, choreographers, performers and producers. Using films, images, recordings, librettos and musical scores we will consider the musical as a reflection of American popular culture.

Course Objectives
After taking this course, students will be able to
1. identify leading practitioners of musical theatre in America, especially post 1940
2. define basic musical theatre vocabulary
3. relate the development of musical theatre to social and political history that surrounds it
4. recognize the wide variety and diversity of style encompassed in this art form
5. critically analyze the components of a well written musical
6. identify songs and themes from some of America's greatest musicals

Materials Needed
Three Ring Binder divided into three sections: 1. Notes 2. Handouts 3. Show Critiques
Pen, Pencil, Colored Pencils, Markers
Various props, costumes as needed

Expectations of Students
In class:
Attend all class sessions and be punctual
Participate fully in all activities and discussions
Have a positive and open attitude
Collaborate with peers on projects, research and activities
Support your peers
Allow for personal growth (be willing to take risks to be creative, to be self-reflective on successes and challenges)
Demonstrate ability to use terminology, skills and concepts learned during class
Written assignments:
Have clear objectives and goals, proper grammar and spelling
Be accurate in your use of reference materials
Complete all assignments on time.

Students will be required to work hard, to take their craft seriously and to do outside homework, memorization, research and study.
Students will be required to complete a major project during the quarter

Assessment
Participation and Effort 30%
Quizzes, Tests and Written Papers 40%
Projects/Performances 30%
mentioned repeatedly throughout the discussion on public school curriculum, an ideal setup for any performance-based Musical Theatre class is a team-taught class.

The second example of how to introduce Musical Theatre in the small public high school setting is that of Spearfish High School (Fig. 5) in Spearfish, SD. Specifically, this is an example of a Musical Theatre unit within a general Theatre class. In the case of Spearfish, the larger course is simply called “Drama”. For this particular course, they use a textbook entitled *The Stage and the School*. The source material for the unit on Musical Theatre is from Chapter 9 of this book. A review of the chapter shows that its positive aspects are fairly accurate Musical Theatre terminology and definitions. While the terms are clearly defined, there are no examples cited, nor any discussion of the evolution of Musical Theatre, which many of the terms are linked to. Another downside of this particular text is that the chapter is primarily about the production of musicals, including discussion of royalties and the technicalities of putting up a production. Most students have more of an interest in the actual performance. Theatrical production should be included at some point in a Theatre class, but it should not be a dominating topic.

Much like Spearfish High School, the first option to consider is the unit option. In the case of a Drama class, Musical Theatre should have a unit within the overall curriculum. The amount of material covered in this kind of situation would possibly be limited only to a discussion of style and different aspects of the medium. Any discussion of Musical Theatre history may need to be restricted to maybe the most well-known composers and lyricists, such as Rodgers and Hammerstein. Performance study may not be the best option for this type of situation. That is why any opportunity to include mini-lessons within the context of the after-school production would be ideal. After-school productions do not have to be – and should not be – strictly limited to rehearsing the show. There should be a learning component as well, particularly when there may not already be as many opportunities for students to stretch their wings theatrically.

The best option would obviously be one semester of a Musical Theatre class. Much like the first course proposed for a large public high school, emphasis should be placed on Musical Theatre appreciation. Within
Drama
Course Syllabus
Spearfish High School

THEATER IS A POWERFUL TOOL...
IT HELPS US UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AROUND US!

Drama is an elective class offered to all students at Spearfish High School. During your semester study of drama we will be studying many aspects of the world of theater. Our studies may include but not be limited by the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History of theater</th>
<th>Acting techniques</th>
<th>Aspects of a play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play evaluation</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of drama</td>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Lighting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>Characterisation</td>
<td>Costume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>Improvisation</td>
<td>Sound</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musical</td>
<td>Theater terms</td>
<td>Make-up</td>
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</table>

The class will meet 50 minutes every other day, on the block schedule. The course is an elective and can count as .05 credits toward the fine arts requirement needed for graduation.

Materials/Textbook Information

We will be using the text THE STAGE AND THE SCHOOL. Most of our studies will come from the main text, additional / supplementary books and materials will be added when appropriate.

Course Summary

Each day the class will begin with warm up exercises involving memory exercises, concentration exercises, listening exercises, etc. - many of the chapters in the book will be covered and tested over. The class will cover the following material:

Chapter 7 History of the Drama
Chapter 7 History of the Drama
Chapter 8 Evaluation of Drama
Watch film and write an evaluation of the presentation
Chapter 1 Improvisation
duet props group
Chapter 2 Pantomime and Mime
Prepare and present pantomime
Chapter 3 Voice and Diction
Radio Play
Write a Monologue

Readers Theater
Chapter 4 Acting
Character sketch
Present monologue
Select scene to prepare
Chapter 6 Structure of Drama
One-act project
Chapter 5 Varieties of Drama
Present scenes
Present one-act projects

The students will evaluate fellow classmates as they present and perform.
Writing assignments will include critiques of films, class presentations and self-evaluations.
the class, the curriculum would once again focus on the history and structure of the medium, with perhaps the occasional performance opportunity. A Musical Theatre course design for this type of educational environment could possibly look something like this:

- A History of Musical Theatre (1920s to the present)
  - Jerome Kern
  - Rodgers & Hart
  - Rodgers & Hammerstein
  - Lerner & Loewe
  - Kander & Ebb
  - Stephen Sondheim

- Musical Theatre Styles and Structure
  - Common Types of Musical Theatre
  - Components of Musical Theatre and how they function within the medium
  - Types of Musical Theatre Songs
    - Song Structure in Musical Theatre

GUIDING STUDENTS THROUGH THE COLLEGE SELECTION AND AUDITION PROCESS

The Performing Arts High School Student

A large part of dealing with students in this kind of school environment would be in assisting them with the college application and placement process. I would expect not only a certain amount of dedication from any student at a Performing Arts high school, but also serious consideration given toward pursuing a higher level of training. In this case, I would encourage most students to consider applying to more highly competitive programs, especially conservatory programs, as that is the type of environment to which they are already accustomed.

In order to be properly prepared for such a program, it is essential for students to be well-rounded by having a firm foundation and comprehensive understanding of the medium under them. Even for students who give consideration to pursuing more of a strict acting program, I would say they are sufficiently prepared on many levels. The added benefits of having had training in voice and dance can only strengthen them as actors and therefore make them more versatile. For those that are driven to continue their training in Musical Theatre,
they are going into college auditions with a firm foundation as a triple threat under them, having already had sufficient study in all three components of the medium.

It is important to note that academic performance should not be neglected at any point during the high school years. Many Performing Arts high schools – especially those that are public charter schools – strongly adhere to the academic requirement standards established by their state department of education. Even the most competitive college Performing Arts departments require high marks in order to gain acceptance into their programs.

When it comes to assisting students with audition preparation, the priority first becomes making sure that their performance is strong and memorable. That is the obligation that an educator must understand and always be aware of throughout the course of their curriculum. Talent is essential, of course, but it is only one item of consideration. The one thing that must be clear is that there is a solid technical foundation present in the student, that any college-level program would be able to then springboard from with their own approach.

As far as material selection is concerned, I would encourage students to select pieces they have already spent a considerable amount of time working on in the classroom, so long as they meet the required audition criteria. They should be encouraged as early as their 10th grade year to select material with their college auditions in mind. Audition material should also showcase the student’s strengths and allow them to really shine.

**Large and Small Public High School Students**

When it comes to college placement for students at a large public high school, it first depends on the student and the discipline observed by the educator, both within the classroom and throughout the school production process. For the student who is not only extremely active in the program, but also has access to training outside of school (including voice and dance), I would consider steering them toward more competitive programs. I would also encourage them to balance their list of schools with more second tier programs. For example, if a student is planning to apply to a total of six programs, I would encourage them to apply to three top tier and three second tier schools.
For the student who perhaps doesn’t have as many opportunities outside of school to increase their skills, I would encourage them to consider more second tier and below if they were determined to consider Musical Theatre as a career. I would also encourage them to apply to at least one solid theatre arts program.

With the non-Performing Arts schools is where preparation becomes the key word, because this is what many students lack as they begin to schedule their school audition dates. Students need to understand that preparation can stand between them securing a spot in one of their first choice schools and a mountain of rejection letters. It has been my experience (and I can look back and consider myself guilty of this as well) that many students do not allow for adequate preparation time. For many, the songs they choose to work on with a private voice or school music teacher is the most preparation they have. The song is memorized, they know all the notes, and that, as far as they are aware, is the most that they need to consider. Even for those students who have access to a Theatre department, monologue selection becomes a last-minute decision. Preparation, therefore, needs to be stressed to students during their 11th grade year when they begin to consider different college programs. This responsibility may fall to the educator, as even most parents tend to neglect this very important part of the process.

Since the limited amount of time in the Theatre classroom may leave the student with a lack of pre-existing audition material, I would encourage any student giving serious consideration to college-level work to meet with their Theatre and Music teachers to discuss audition criteria and appropriate material. Students should know their material inside-out by the time their first college audition date arrives. Again, the responsibility of reminding students about preparation tends to lie with the educator, as does audition material selection. If a student is studying voice with a private teacher, then that teacher may have their own opinions regarding song selection. This should be respected, but it is still acceptable to offer suggestions. If the student does not have a private voice teacher, then that becomes part of the discussion between the Theatre and/or Music teacher.

Material should be selected according to the student and their abilities as a performer. I would not advise advanced material of any kind, as that requires more extensive preparation which the student may not be able to fulfill due to other demands on their time. It is best to find material that highlights a student’s strengths while showing that they have at least a very basic understanding of their craft.
CONCLUSION

A strong Musical Theatre program design, whether in a Performing Arts or public high school, will be structured in such a way that students can come away from the program with a better understanding of the medium and therefore a firm foundation. Once they matriculate to the college level, many will already find that they are at least a half step ahead of many of their peers. Many college programs do not introduce the type of work they have been doing until after the freshman year. Being aware of this edge will help students with their own self-confidence as performers. They will hopefully discover that they are more self-aware than many of their classmates, allowing them to advance further at a faster rate. It would also contribute toward their leaving college with a strong skill set under them, which could potentially lead toward their success as an actor.