



Behind the Movie Chicago



VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 2

Note to Teachers: The programs viewed in conjunction with these lesson plans may include references, consistent with the eras portrayed, to substance abuse, violent acts, and topics of a sexual and/or political nature. Because this may be considered inappropriate for classroom use in some communities, you are encouraged to review the programs before presenting them to your students, and if necessary, choose those sections that enhance your lesson and are acceptable for use in your classroom

Objective

- Students will explore the genre of the musical film and its history.
- Students will draw conclusions on relationships between a stage musical and a musical film.

National Standards for Music Education:

8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

- VHS VCR Player
- Television
- VH1's *Behind the Movie Chicago*, Act Two
- Web-based lesson materials
- Copies of "Film Musicals" worksheet (included with lesson) for students
- Chalkboard (or overhead projector and transparency, etc.)
- Internet access (either as a class, or computer lab stations) OR printed research materials on the film musical (see Supplemental resources below for suggestions)

Procedures

1. As a class, have students brainstorm a list of familiar fairy tales (e.g. "Hansel and Gretel," "Cinderella," "Jack and the Beanstalk," etc.). Students should feel comfortable enough with the stories to be able to tell them in relative detail. Write the titles on the chalkboard, overhead projector, etc.
2. Ask students to choose a partner, and select a story from the list with which they are both very familiar. Have Student A begin telling the story to Student B as a quiet bedtime story. After a few moments, give the signal for Student A to stop. After a pause, ask Student B to continue the story from the point where Student A left off, this time as a sports announcer might tell the story over the roaring crowd at a sporting event, until given the signal to stop. Students should continue telling the story in this manner at different intervals until finished (each in the assigned persona).
3. At the end of the exercise, discuss the effects of Student A's presentation vs. Student B's presentation. Both are telling the same story in tandem, yet would B's delivery be appropriate as a bedtime story? Would A's gentle storytelling be heard over the crowd at a sporting event? Lead the discussion to conclude that each presentation is suitable to its original environment.
4. Just as shouting is not always the best way to tell a bedtime story, translating a stage musical to film has met mixed success in recent times. Film media allows audiences to be carried into a setting and circumstances close up. Being accustomed to more realistic comedies and dramatic films, the modern film audience is not always prepared to see people suddenly bursting into song with full orchestral accompaniment! Ask students to speculate on some of the potential difficulties and pitfalls involved with adapting a stage musical to film, and share the following points:

The classic film musicals of the 1930s, '40s, and early '50s centered around romance, comedy, and mistaken identity, allowing directors a clean way to split from the real world into the musical world, then back again. Then the advent of filming on location rather than in a movie studio, coupled with dramatic stories of everyday people, began to mean that the more believable a movie was, the better. Steadily, realism was slipping into movies, including musicals, making song and dance on film less believable - even from animated characters.

Musicals were popular fare during this time, with some based on stage musicals (*My Fair Lady*, *Guys and Dolls*, *The Sound of Music*, etc.), while others were written especially for the big screen (*A Star is Born*, *Mary Poppins*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*). Before *Moulin Rouge* in 2001, it had been 22 years since a live-action musical was nominated for a best picture Academy Award (*All That Jazz*), and 33 years since a musical had won (*Oliver!*).

Chicago Director Rob Marshall (who previously directed the recent TV versions of *Annie* and *Cinderella*) has wisely placed most of the musical numbers in Roxie's imagination. The audience is taken back and forth from the events happening around her to their Vaudeville song and dance equivalents. This concept allowed for an effective blend of the best cinematic and theatrical elements.

5. Show VH1's *Behind the Movie Chicago*, Act Two.

6. Guide students in discussing some of the following topics:

- How did the producers/writers add realism and believability to the musical numbers?
- Did the producers really need "stars" to play the parts? Would musical theater performers have been a better choice? Why did they choose well-known actors, especially actors who are not known for their music and dance skills?
- Why were the performers hesitant and doubtful that Marshall's concept would work? How did they feel after the filming was complete and they saw the finished product?
- Did the producers succeed in creating a believable movie version of the musical?

7. Distribute copies of "Film Musicals" worksheet. Ask students to research to find movie musical titles representative of each decade of the film musical listed on the worksheet, as well as the prominent people involved, and the most well known songs from the show. Students may use the Internet (begin by visiting www.musicals101.com/erafilm.htm), or teacher provided printed resource materials (see Supplemental resources below). (NOTE: If preferable, students may complete the worksheet as homework, and step 8 may take place during the next class.)

8. Have students share the results of their research as a class. How many of these films have been seen by students in this class? Do musicals have a place in today's cinemas? Why or why not?

Curriculum Connection:

Math - Watch the *Behind the Movie Chicago*, Act Three program segment. Plot a production timeline of *Chicago: The Movie* from rehearsals to premiere. How many work hours do you estimate it took to make *Chicago* once filming began?

Social Studies - The people and events in *Chicago* are loosely based on real life happenings. View other movie musicals based on true stories such as *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Cabaret*, *Calamity Jane*, *Camelot*, *Evita*, *Funny Girl*, *Hans Christian Andersen*, *The Jazz Singer*, *The Rose*, *The Sound of Music*, *Topsy Turvy*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, etc. Research the true story or characters, and compare to the musical version. Are the characters and situations enhanced by song, or does it make the story seem "less real?"

“Film Musicals” Worksheet

Using resource materials on the Internet (www.musicals101.com/erafilm.htm) or those provided in class, find movie musical titles representative of each decade of the film musical listed on the chart, as well as the prominent people involved, and the most well known songs from the show. Be prepared to share your findings. How many of these films have you seen?

	FILMS	PEOPLE	SONGS
1920's - sound-on-disc system adapted for film			
1930's - song and dance integrated into story, Rodgers & Hart, Busby Berkeley and the "escape" musical, Astaire & Rogers, Shirley Temple, first animated musical, first Technicolor film musical			
1940's - "biopic" musicals, Gershwin, Berlin, Porter			
1950's - stage to screen musicals, advent of rock and roll, advent of television			
1960's - Lerner & Loewe, location vs. studio production costs			
1970's - nostalgia musicals			
1980's			
1990's - Disney animated revival			
2000's - blend of realism with theatricality			

Supplemental resources:

- Barrios, Richard. *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film*. Oxford University Press, New York. 1995.
- Feuer, Jane. *The Hollywood Musical*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 1982.
- Fordin, Hugh. *The World of Entertainment: Hollywood's Greatest Musicals*. Doubleday, NYC. 1975.
- *That's Entertainment*, VHS, MGM Studios, 1974.
- *That's Entertainment 2*, VHS, MGM Studios, 1975.

National Standards for Music Education

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.



These standards-based materials are provided through a partnership with MENC: The National Association for Music Education. This lesson plan was created by MENC member Christopher Fitzpatrick, Theater Division, The Boston Conservatory, Boston, MA.