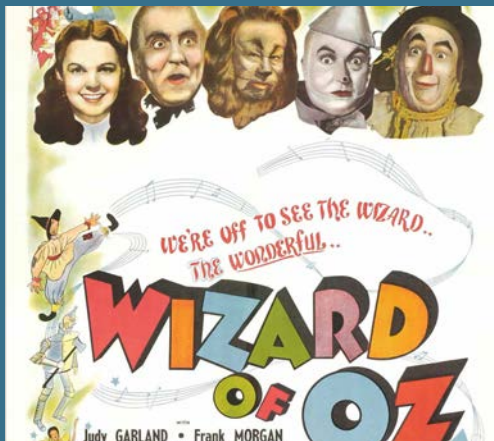


THE HISTORY OF MUSICAL MOVIES

FROM THE GOLDEN AGE TO PRESENT DAY
BY ALICIA MARTIN





Hollywood

MUSICALS



STUDY GUIDE OVERVIEW

VOCABULARY

Before beginning, teachers and students may want to discuss the definitions of these words.

musical movie - a style of movie, or dramatic production, that combines acting, singing and dancing to tell a story. The singing and dancing usually help to develop or further the plot or the character's stories

highbrow - intelligent, intellectual humour

lowbrow - not intellectual or cultured

operetta - a short opera, usually on a light or humorous theme that contains spoken dialogue

burlesque - dramatic or musical work intended to cause laughter by making fun of the spirit of serious works

variety shows - shows made up of a bunch of different acts including music, sketch comedy, magic, juggling, acrobatics, dance, ventriloquism

vaudeville - "a farce with music"; it was a light entertainment during the 1890s-1930s made up of 10-15 individual acts featuring magicians, acrobatics, comedians, trained animals, jugglers, singers and dancers

minstrel shows - American entertainment that consisted of comic skits, variety acts, dancing and music performances that depicted people of African descent. The shows were performed by white people wearing dark makeup for the purpose of playing the role of a black person

blackface - term used to describe a form of theatrical makeup used by primarily non-black performers in order to represent a caricature of a black person

composer - a musician who is an author of music in any form including vocals and instrumental

talkies - the nickname given to early films that introduced synchronized sound with picture

choreographer - a person who creates the sequence of steps and moves for a performance

biopics - a biographical motion picture that dramatizes the life of a non-fictional, or historically-based person

lyricist - a person who writes the words to a song

phonograph discs - a record with an inscribed spiral groove that travels from the outside edge to the centre of the disc

technicolor - a series of processes used to create colour in motion pictures

RATIONALE

This resource has been designed for students in grades 6-7, but can easily be used and adapted for older grades. This teaching/study guide focuses on the history of musical movies, primarily during Hollywood's Golden Age (1930s-1960s) and the movement into animated musicals and modern musicals. By using specific case studies, the goal is to provide opportunities for students to experience something new, and to gain an appreciation for musicals and its rich history.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

**What is a musical movie?

**Why is it important to learn about the history of musical movies?

**What are the key differences between musical movies and live theatre productions?

**What are some meaningful contributions that musical movies made in the past, and in today's society?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

**Explore ways in which musical theatre impacts society

**Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental contexts in relation to the arts

**Develop a basic understanding of the history, elements and time period of musical movies

**Develop the ability to think critically and creatively by comparing and contrasting, relating ideas to personal experience, analyzing and critiquing, and reflecting on ones learning

**To enhance student interest in and knowledge about the history of musical movies

The History of Musicals and the Golden Age

In order to fully understand the history of musical movies, we need to go way back in history to look at the origins of where and how these films began.

The early history of musicals started with opera – yes opera! In 18th century Europe, people watched what is considered high-class opera, where the storylines were about upper-class people, comical opera that was both **highbrow** and **lowbrow**, and **operettas**. Operettas were much less serious and told simpler stories often using popular songs.

By the mid-1800s, musical theatre entertainment in America was primarily musical **burlesque shows** and **variety shows** which later developed into **vaudeville** and **minstrel shows**. Towards the late 1870s, musical comedies began featuring characters and situations from the everyday life of the lower classes of people and represented a significant step forward towards a more cultured theatre form.



Vaudeville photo and poster

Modern musical theatre began in North America in the late 1800s as a result of changes in society. Transportation was improving, so it was easier for people to travel to theatres. Better jobs and salaries meant that people had more money to spend on entertainment. The invention of electricity led to streetlights, which made it safer to go out at night. Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *The Pirates of Penzance* (circa 1878) was designed for family audiences and helped raise the standard for what was considered a successful show. Their influence on later musicals was profound, creating examples of how to “integrate” lyrics and dialogue in a story.

Musical film was the next natural step after the stage musical, especially after the arrival of sound film technology. **Musical movies** typically contain elements of theatre: performers often treat their song and dance numbers as if a live audience were watching. The biggest difference being the use of extravagant scenery and backgrounds that are not possible in a live production.

In the early 1900s primitive “**talkies**” with synchronized sound were introduced in vaudeville shows, but audiences then weren't impressed. The quality of sound and projection were very simple and poor. Audiences were used to silent films, and very few people in the movie business believed that films with sound would amount to anything.

But, the technology slowly improved, and by the mid-1920s several Hollywood studios were experimenting with sound. Warner Brothers Studio took a gamble on a system that coordinated filmed images with sound recorded on large **phonograph discs** with an amplified speaker system that could fill large theatres with relatively clear sound.



Sound and film projector circa 1926

From the beginning, Warner Brothers was more interested in music than in dialogue that could be heard. The sound technology was fragile, the sound disks had to be replaced after ten uses, and it was very easy for the picture and disks to fall out of sync. Nonetheless audiences responded enthusiastically to the new technology, so Warner Brothers decided to use pre-recorded background scores for all their feature films, but still didn't want to focus on dialogue.

The Hollywood film industry initially wanted to ignore the idea of including synchronized sound with their motion pictures, but the enthusiasm and demand from the public changed their opinions. This growing demand for “talkies” all began with a well-loved performer in blackface minstrel makeup



Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer* (1927)

In 1927, Warner Brothers released *The Jazz Singer* – the first full-length feature film to include recorded songs and dialogue – starring Al Jolson, an established stage performer nicknamed “The World's Greatest Entertainer” and known for his performances in **blackface**. The film is mostly silent except for Jolson's very brief yet exciting sound sequences. Originally the movie had been planned with no dialogue until Jolson began ad-libbing lines in his songs. Audiences loved his musical scenes, and movies would never be the same again! Theatres rushed to install the sound equipment necessary, and movie studios hurried to hire Broadway **composers** to write musicals for the screen.

The enthusiasm and demand from audiences was so great, that in less than a year all the major Hollywood studios were only making films with sound. In 1929, MGM Studios released *The Broadway Melody*, and claimed it was the first “All-Talking, All-Singing, All-Dancing” feature film. It was such a hit that it won the Academy Award for Best Picture! Suddenly all the major studios were flooding theatres with musicals filmed using colour sequences.



The Broadway Melody (1929)

By the mid 1930s audiences were overwhelmed with musicals. The public had quickly connected colour with musicals, and the decline in their popularity also resulted in a decline in colour productions as well.

Musical films gained some popularity again in 1933 thanks to Busby Berkeley, a director and **choreographer** known for elaborate sets and kaleidoscope style choreography. In his musical movie *42nd Street* for example, Berkeley's tap dance numbers typically begin on stage, but gradually build on complexity and outgrow the limitations of the stage: his routines involve performers forming patterns that can only be viewed from straight above. This was also the decade that gave us Disney's first animated feature film that used Technicolor, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937.



Examples of Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscope choreography

During the 1940s and 1950s musicals continued to grow in popularity and depended on star power. Musical stars became household names: Judy Garland, Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Jane Powell, Howard Keel, Cyd Charisse, Ann Miller, Leslie Caron and James Cagney to name a few. These films also relied on film directors such as Stanley Donen, Vincente Minnelli, as well as songwriters Betty Comden and Adolf Green, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and the Gershwin Brothers. The 1930s through to the late 1950s is considered the Golden Age of musical films. This was when this style of movie was most popular.

The 1960s musical films were based largely on Broadway stage musicals adapted for the screen and became box-office successes such as *The Sound of Music*, *West Side Story* and *Oklahoma!* The most successful musicals written specifically for film included *Mary Poppins* and *The Jungle Book*. However, rock n' roll music began influencing popular musical tastes, and Elvis Presley and the Beatles made a few musical films using their own popular music.

During the 1970s the age and expectations of moviegoers changed. People wanted more realistic films and felt that the entertainment quality of the classical-era Hollywood musicals was old-fashioned, although many stage adaptations were quite popular and successful such as *Grease* and *The Wiz*.

The 1980s and 90s saw most musicals coming from Disney animated films, from the team of Howard Ashman, Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz. Since then, the musical genre was refreshed with musical **biopics**, dramas and comedy-drama musicals such as *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*, *Hairspray*, *La La Land*, *High School Musical*, *The Greatest Showman*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Rocketman*, *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Hamilton*.

Questions for discussion and activities

*Why do you think musical movies and musical theatre remain popular today?

*Why are musical movies more accessible for kids to watch than live theatre?

*What are some of the biggest differences between movies and live action? Which do you think you would prefer to watch, and why?

*What is a musical movie?

**Discuss the difference between watching dance in a movie and watching dance in a theatre or live venue. What are the positive and negative benefits to both?

**Research one of the songwriters mentioned. How many songs have they written that you recognize or are familiar with?

**Search *42nd Street* on YouTube. This is a very popular show on Broadway. How do you think the choreography, sets and costumes need to change to still give off the kaleidoscope effect while on stage?





MGM STUDIOS During the Golden Age

MGM was one of the first studios to experiment with filming in Technicolor, using the two-colour process then available. The studio released *The Viking* in 1928, the first complete Technicolor feature with a synchronized score and sound effects, but no spoken dialogue. With the arrival of “talkies”, MGM moved very reluctantly into this new era of films, however their first full-length talkie, the musical *The Broadway Melody* (1929) was a box-office success and won the studio the Academy Award for Best Picture! Even with this accomplishment, MGM was the last studio to convert to talkies. The studio's first all-colour, all-talking sound movie with dialogue was a musical released in 1930. In 1937, MGM had to be convinced to purchase the rights to make a film version of the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* – it turned out to be one of their best decisions!

As World War II ended, MGM studios entered what would become known as its most successful period in history. A new production unit was established – The Arthur Freed Unit – and it was up to this unit to transform MGM's style into something new and modern to appeal to the audiences. People wanted to escape the horrors of the war they had just witnessed. Freed was given the difficult job of reinventing the musical. One of the first films to follow this new formula was *Meet Me in St Louis*, released in 1944 and starring Judy Garland.

THE ARTHUR FREED UNIT

Arthur Freed was an American lyricist and Hollywood film producer during the Golden Age of musicals. He was also the co-lyricist for *Singin' in the Rain*, seen as being his most recognized film.

In 1939, after working as an uncredited associate producer on *The Wizard of Oz*, Freed was promoted to head his own production unit at MGM Studios, and helped make the studio the leading creator of musical movies. Arthur Freed's vision of musicals made the transition from the old fashioned, repetitive formulas, to something new and ground-breaking. Freed reinvented the musical into an integrated style – the songs and dances were woven into the plot and contributed to the story, and helped to develop the characters and kept the plot moving, as opposed to the past styles of songs for the sake of singing with no purpose.

MGM soon became the leading studio in musical movies, all due to the creative freedom Freed allowed his directors, choreographers and writers, and all other studios struggled to compete with MGM's sophisticated musicals. An example would be *An American in Paris*, starring Gene Kelly and French dancer Leslie Caron, featuring a 15-minute ballet sequence at the end of the film. MGM's Freed Unit continued to flourish throughout the years, and capitalized on its rising stars such as Gene Kelly, Judy Garland, Fred Astaire and Frank Sinatra.

The early 1950s saw some big changes happen. The new rival for entertainment was the television, and unfortunately Hollywood's release of movies decreased. Audiences were also changing – more and more teenagers were going to theatres, so to play to the demands of the population, MGM released a new musical starring teen sensation Elvis Presley in 1957. That was the same year that Fred Astaire decided to retire.

As 1958 drew to a close, the entire filmmaking industry was changing in order to keep up with audience trends and demands. MGM quickly realized there was no longer the same demand or need for the post-war escapist entertainment of Freed musicals. And in 1958, the very last Freed Unit musical was released. *Gigi*, starring Leslie Caron and directed by Vincente Minnelli, won ten Academy Awards, and was Freed's highest grossing musical.

*Do you think The Arthur Freed Unit helped shape the course of future movies? Why or why not?

**Have students look up how many careers Arthur Freed helped shape (stars, directors, writers etc)

Freed brought talented people from Broadway theatres to MGM including director Vincente Minnelli, the song writing duo of Betty Comden and Adolf Green and many others. He also shaped the careers of many stars including Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, Howard Keel, and Jane Powell. Freed was also integral in bringing Fred Astaire out of retirement and over to MGM to star in *Easter Parade* with Judy Garland. Freed's unit of writers, directors, composers and stars produced a constant stream of popular and critically acclaimed musicals until the late 1950s.

What set Arthur Freed apart from other producers, was the fact that he gave his directors and choreographers creative freedom to do what they wanted, which wasn't really done in those days. Freed is also credited for widening the boundaries of film musicals by allowing moments such as the fifteen-minute ballet at the end of *An American in Paris*.

COSTUMING

Costumes help to enhance the storyline, and also tell the audience information that can't necessarily be said. A costume can completely change a performance or make a performance come together. Stage costumes tend to be a bit more exaggerated, as the entire theatre audience needs to be able to see, compared to a movie audience where the camera can zoom in and do a close up. The costumes are researched, especially when doing a period piece, and are designed so that the performers can dance and move freely while wearing them. Broadway costumes need to be designed in a way that allows for quick changes – the show can't stop for a costume change! Some iconic costumes from movie musicals (and Broadway musicals) include:

Mary Poppins' White Dress in Mary Poppins - light chiffon was easy to move in
Green Plaid Suits in Singin' in the Rain - loose pant legs and light flexible material to be able to dance and move in



Glinda's Bubble Dress from Wicked – ice blue, sequins, nine different fabrics and a harness built in to secure her to the flying bubble

The Phantom's Mask in The Phantom of the Opera – a half mask that covers the character's disfigured face; the mask adds to his mysterious and elegant nature

Hamilton – the costumes had to be authentic and based on fashion from the time period

Belle's Yellow Gown in Beauty and the Beast – it became famous in the animated version, and costume designers worked hard to recreate the rich colour, volume and elegance of the dress for Broadway and film

CHOREOGRAPHY

Here are some examples of innovative, creative, athletic choreography. Many choreographers today have copied the style of classics from the Golden Age. Bob Fosse is one of the most copied and revered choreographers for his unique jazz style – rounded shoulders, turned-in knees, finger snaps, bowler hats, sideways shuffling and jazz hands.

An American in Paris – Gene Kelly – his choreography was innovative and showcases his ability to tell a story (the dream ballet sequence at the end) Gene Kelly was a trained ballet and tap dancer, but his ballet background came through more when choreographing routines (**Dream Sequence Ballet**)

Anchors Aweigh – Gene Kelly – choreography was creative, he dances with a cartoon mouse! (**Gene Kelly and Jerry Mouse**)

West Side Story – Jerome Robbins – the story of the film unfolds through dance. Great storytelling that can't necessarily be done with words, and the choreography is very athletic (**Prologue; Cool; America**)

Singin' in the Rain – Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen – an excellent chemistry between the three main leads; there's no fear of being silly at all (musical comedy at its finest!) Shows Gene Kelly's talent (**Good Mornin'; Moses Supposes; Singin' in the Rain**)

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers – Michael Kidd – The brothers were all trained ballet dancers who were trained how to act for this movie! The dance scenes show off their athleticism, and their need to show off. Excellent storytelling through dance (**Barn Raising Dance**)

The Royal Wedding – Nick Castle, Fred Astaire – Fred Astaire was a known perfectionist – he would rehearse and film and go back six months later and re-do it, and have the routine be completely identical. The scene where he was dancing on the ceiling is extremely advanced and ingenious. Showcases Fred Astaire's classical ballroom and tap training. (**Dancing on the Ceiling; Hat Rack Dance**)

Stormy Weather – showcases the incredibly nimble and acrobatic style of the Nicholas Brothers. They were known for their flash dancing style – which combines acrobatics and tap dancing (**Jumpin' Jive**)



Questions for discussion and activities

*What are the biggest differences in costuming between a movie musical and a live musical?

*How does choreography help tell a story?



Watch some of these examples of choreography, and with a partner, try to figure out what story is being told:

<https://youtu.be/2msq6H2HI-Y> (Jerry Mouse and Gene Kelly)

<https://youtu.be/QbzJtP75NqM> (Barn Raising Dance)

<https://youtu.be/CsoYyDIYU8M> (Dancing on the Ceiling)

https://youtu.be/_8yGGtVKrD8 (Jumpin' Jive)

https://youtu.be/bxoC5Oyf_ss (Prologue - West Side Story)

<https://youtu.be/GB2yiloEtXw> (Good Mornin')

*Which of these dance scenes did you enjoy, and why?

*Which did you not enjoy and why? How is this choreography different than what we see in today's musicals?

**With a partner, try recreating your own version of storytelling through dance using songs from any Golden Age musical

TECHNICOLOR

Technicolor is a series of processes used to first produce colour in motion pictures. The first version was created in 1916 and followed with improved versions through the 1950s. The Technicolor company continued to improve its system so that the process of colouring films was available to Hollywood. Technicolor films are known for their very bright, bold and saturated colours. Technicolor was the most popular colour process in Hollywood from 1922-1952 and was most commonly used for filming musicals.

One major setback to the three-strip process was that the cameras needed a special, bulky sound blimp, and film studios could not purchase Technicolor cameras – they needed to be rented along with a special camera technician and a colour supervisor to ensure the sets, costumes and makeup didn't push the limits of the system. The process of splitting the image reduced the amount of light reaching the film. Since the film speed used was somewhat slow, early Technicolor productions required a greater amount of lighting than a black-and-white production. Many actors claimed to have suffered eye damage from the extra bright lights. Because of the added lighting, triple the amount of film needed and the expensive nature of producing the dye transfer projection prints, Technicolor films required large film budgets.

In 1932, one of the creators of Technicolor convinced Walt Disney to film one of his Silly Symphony cartoons (The Three Little Pigs) in three-strip Technicolor. Seeing the potential of full-colour animation, Disney negotiated an exclusive contract for the use of three-strip Technicolor until 1935. Other animation studios had to settle with two-strip processes, or a competing process. Disney had such success with his Silly Symphony, that all future animations were filmed on three-strip: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and Fantasia to name a few.

Discussion questions

- How do you think movies would be different if they were only filmed in black-and-white?
- How do you think colour helps contribute to the overall effect of movies?



TECHNICOLOR

PROCESS 1: (1916-1917) It originally was a two-colour system (red and green). A prism beam splitter behind the camera lens exposed two side-by-side frames of black-and-white negative film at the same time, one behind a red filter, the other behind a green filter. This process involved adding the colour to the black and white film.



PROCESS 2: (1917-1928) Also called two-strip Technicolor. The movie frames exposed behind the green filter were printed on one strip of black-and-white film, and the frames behind the red filter were printed on a different strip. Each print was toned with a complementary colour to the original filter. The two prints, printed on film paper half as thick as regular film, were then glued together to create a projection film.

For further reference

The Making of Snow White: Walt's Masterpiece

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZBsA3XdPAM&feature=emb_logo

Two-Strip Technicolor:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9S76vbk4Ro&feature=emb_logo

Three-Strip Technicolor:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-T8MVrw1L0&feature=emb_logo

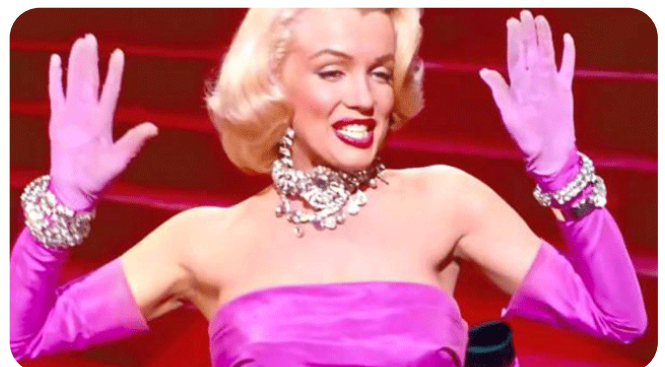
One Hundred Years of Cinema Youtube channel

<https://youtu.be/U3o3h1eJdug>

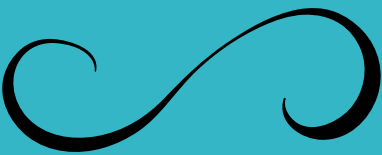
PROCESS 3: (1928-1932) This was invented to get rid of the film that was glued together. The red and green-filtered frames were filmed on specially designed strips of film. After processing, the gelatin on each film was left hardened where it was most exposed to light. The film strips were then soaked in dye baths of complementary colours to those of the camera filters. The thicker the gelatin, the more dye it absorbed.



PROCESS 4: (1932-1952) This process was called three-strip Technicolor and a new three-colour movie camera was created that recorded a different colour from the spectrum – red, green or blue – on separate film. The camera for this process contained three separate rolls of black-and-white film (which is why this process is called three-strip) The final processing of the film is similar to Process 3,



The Stars of The Golden Age



• Gene Kelly •
• 1912-1996 •



• Frank Sinatra •
• 1915-1998 •



• Debbie Reynolds •
• 1932-2016 •



• Bing Crosby •
• 1903-1977 •



• Fred Astaire •
• 1899-1998 •



• Judy Garland •
• 1922-1969 •



• Jane Powell •
• 1929- •



• Howard Keel •
• 1919-2004 •



• Ann Miller •
• 1923-2004 •



• Cyd Charisse •
• 1922-2008 •



• Leslie Caron •
• 1931- •

Musical Movies From The Golden Age



An American in Paris - 1951



Anchors Aweigh - 1945



On the Town - 1949



Meet Me in St Louis - 1944



Royal Wedding - 1951



Silk Stockings - 1957



White Christmas - 1954



Yankee Doodle Dandy - 1942



Seven Brides For Seven Brothers - 1954



Oklahoma! - 1955



Singin' in the Rain - 1952

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

What makes the Golden Age of musical movies so special? It was when they were the most popular - glamorous costumes, intricate choreography, beautiful music and singing, large production numbers, a somewhat predictable plot, not to mention the star power.

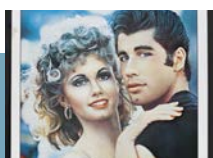
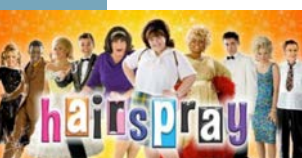
Classic musical movies usually always include elements of comedy and/or romance (and the drama that goes with that romance!) dancing and singing in jubilant chorus scenes.

But the society that existed when these movies were popular, is not really the same society we live in now. The musical movies have evolved and adapted to the changing times, and feature themes and topics that are more relatable and mature. Take *Frozen* for example, it was the first Disney Princess movie that taught young kids (girls especially) that finding a man isn't everything. *The Colour Purple* on Broadway, offers complex, interesting lead roles for people of colour - an unfortunately alien concept during the Golden Age.

The modern musical movie is more diverse. They include current popular music from classical to pop, rock and hip-hop, or jukebox hits woven into the storyline. There's a bit more of a rock n' roll feel to them. A perfect example would be *Pitch Perfect* and *Hamilton*, which both include a variety of musical styles. Modern musicals also feature current popular stars to keep the film genre mainstream and current.

Examples of modern classics include: *Annie*, *Chicago*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*, *Hairspray*, *The Sound of Music*, *Grease*, *Mary Poppins*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Newsies*.

Examples of modern musicals include: *Mamma Mia!*, *La La Land*, *The Greatest Showman*, *Hamilton*, *Enchanted*, *Pitch Perfect*, *High School Musical*, *Mary Poppins Returns*, *Moulin Rouge*.



Activities

**Survey the class to see who's seen any Golden Age movie musicals

**Survey the class to see who's seen a modern musical on TV, Netflix or Disney+

**Using a Venn Diagram, compare and contrast the similarities and differences between Golden Age musicals and modern musicals.

**Explain and explore the concept of the emotional staircase using the case study examples provided, and other musical movies (Golden Age or modern)

**In all musicals there exists the concept of an emotional staircase. It has three steps, and characters move up the steps as their emotion heightens.

- Step 1 - speaking - characters use dialogue and speech as a way to convey their wants and intentions
- Step 2 - singing - characters move up the stairs to the next step when speaking isn't enough. Characters break into song because something happens that heightens the dramatic moment, and they are in a place of more: more intensity, more action, more obstacles working against them, more problems to solve, more resistance to overcome (we see this especially in Disney movies)
- Step 3 - dancing - when words fail the characters completely, they must dance. The wordless, physical explosion of dance is a final attempt to communicate using every fibre of one's body.

Adapted from Tracey Moore's Acting the Song: Performance Skills for the Musical Theatre

**Choose a star from the Golden Age, and explore a bit about their life and career

**Choose a musical movie from the Golden Age or a modern one and present the emotional staircase for a musical number or dance scene; be a movie critic and present the film to the class. Why should we watch this? Why shouldn't we?

Discussion questions

*Why are musical movies still popular today?

*Why do you think musical theatre remains popular today?

*Is there any reason why you think so few (or so many) students have or have not seen musicals?

*What do you think are the characteristics of any new musical?

Disney Renaissance

The period between 1989 and 1999 is considered Disney's renaissance, when Disney animation returned to producing highly successful animated films. The majority of these films were based on well-known stories, just like the studio did during Walt Disney's time between the 1930s to 1960s. This revival allowed Disney's animated films to become powerhouses at the box office once again.

After the deaths of Walt and Roy O. Disney, the films released over the next 18 years did not perform as well as anticipated. An especially hard blow was when long-time Disney animator Don Bluth left to start his own rival studio, Don Bluth Productions, and took many animators with him. In the mid-1980s Disney made some major changes in organization: new CEO and president and downsizing the animation studio. The Disney renaissance was inspired by competition with Don Bluth's productions along with the evolution of overseas animation, and the development of CGI for animation.

The Little Mermaid

Released in 1989 with a Broadway feel to it. Lyricist Howard Ashman and composer Alan Menken, both who worked on Broadway before, wrote and composed the songs and score for the movie. It won two Academy Awards for Best Original Song and Best Original Score.

Beauty and the Beast

In 1991 *Beauty and the Beast* was released. It was the first animated film nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture. *Beauty and the Beast* did win two Academy Awards for Best Original Score and Best Original Song.

Aladdin and The Lion King

First came *Aladdin* in 1992, followed by *The Lion King* in 1994. Howard Ashman wrote many songs for *Aladdin* before he died, but only three were used. Tim Rice then joined and completed the score and songs with Alan Menken. Rice went on to collaborate with Elton John to write songs for *The Lion King*. Both films won Academy Awards for Best Original Song and Best Original Score.

Pocahontas, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, and Hercules

In 1995 *Pocahontas* was released to mixed reviews, but it won two Academy Awards for Best Original Musical Score and Best Original Song. In 1996, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was released followed by *Hercules* in 1997.

Mulan and Tarzan

Mulan was released in 1998, and *Tarzan*, released in 1999, is considered the end of Disney's renaissance period. With songs by Phil Collins, *Tarzan* won an Academy Award for Best Original Song and became Disney's most successful film since *The Lion King*.

Disney continued to produce many animated musicals but was unable to produce films of similar impact until they released *The Princess and the Frog* in 2009. This film showcased a return to traditional animation and Broadway musical style songs, but also broke the colour barrier and featured Disney's first ever black princess. Disney went on to release *Frozen* in 2013, a critically acclaimed computer animated film. Many film critics consider this musical to be Disney's best since its Renaissance era. *Frozen* features a cast of Broadway musical performers and won two Academy Awards for Best Animated Feature and Best Original Song. *Moana* was released in 2016 and also received many positive reviews, particularly for its animation, music and vocal performances.

Discussion questions

*Which of the Disney Renaissance films have you seen? What do you think about other Disney animated musicals?

*How did Disney's Renaissance period help shape future animations?

*Why do you think Disney animated films are so popular? Who do you think the intended audience is?



SINGIN' IN THE RAIN (1952)

STARRING: GENE KELLY, DEBBIE REYNOLDS, DONALD O'CONNOR

***Singin' in the Rain* shows a lighthearted depiction of what Hollywood was really like in the late 1920s, with the three main stars portraying performers transitioning from the silent film era to talkies. It gives the viewer a realistic look at all the trials and tribulations of what it was like to move from the silent films into talkies. Not only is *Singin' in the Rain* an excellent example of movie making in the 1950s, it is also one of the greatest movies ever made about the history of movies.

***Singin' in the Rain* was written by MGM Studios writers, Betty Comden and Adolf Green, who were both part of the Arthur Freed Unit. They had been asked by Freed to write a script to go along with a selection of his songs that he had co written with Nacio Herb Brown in the late 1920s. These songs, including the popular *Singin' in the Rain*, had been used previously in other early MGM musicals. Comden and Green found this task extremely difficult, and were almost on the verge of quitting, when they came up with the idea of using the historical background of the songs (they were written during the silent film era, right when talking pictures were being introduced) and then setting the film around the time of Hollywood's transition into talkies.

***Hollywood* musicals were initially successful in the early sound period where the songs were used as interruptions within the storyline, as seen in Busby Berkeley musicals. *Singin' in the Rain* is an example of the integrated musical, where the musical numbers are integrated into character and plot development. Freed and MGM were influential in the creation of the integrated musical. Some other examples being *The Wizard of Oz* and *Meet Me in St Louis*

***The camera angles and wide frames were very important in showing that the dancing wasn't faked. Wide frames were used in MGM musicals to showcase the dancing and the dancers and to be used as a focal point, whereas with contemporary musicals the dancing can be faked through segmenting or editing.*



*****The integration between the story and the musical numbers is flawless. Singin' in the Rain* could be considered a satire (the use of irony, sarcasm and ridicule to make fun of a situation or a story) where the musical numbers enhance the characters and plot, but also further the theme of the mishaps of the transitions from the silent era to talkies. Every song in the movie is about movies: *Make 'Em Laugh* is about the violence of silent film comedy; *You Were Meant for Me* is a parody of typical love duets in movies, and shows all the props used to manipulate audiences; *Beautiful Girl* is a tribute to Busby Berkeley; *Good Mornin'* showcases several different types of movie dancing; *Singin' in the Rain* demonstrates the art of the movie musical – making the scene appear so easy, relaxed, emotional, happy and carefree.



SINGIN' IN THE RAIN (1952)

STARRING: GENE KELLY, DEBBIE REYNOLDS, DONALD O'CONNOR

The Plot:

Don Lockwood is a popular silent film star who can barely tolerate his leading lady, Lina Lamont, who is vain and conniving. At the premiere of his newest movie, Don tells the crowd of his life story. To escape from his fans after the premiere, he jumps into a passing car driven by Kathy Seldon, who claims to be a stage actress.

At an after-party, the head of Don's studio shows a short demo of a talking picture, but the guests aren't impressed. Kathy pops out of a cake; turns out she's a chorus girl! Don teases her, which makes her mad, so she throws a real cake at him, but accidentally hits Lina in the face. Don, who's already fallen in love, searches for Kathy for weeks. While filming, Lina admits that she's the reason Kathy disappeared. Cosmo finds Kathy working on another set and gets Don.

After rival studio Warner Bros has an enormous hit with their talking picture *The Jazz Singer*, there's no choice but to convert the next Lockwood and Lamont into a talking picture. The production is plagued with difficulties especially Lina's grating voice and strong New York accent. Their talking picture screening is a disaster! Don, Cosmo and Kathy come up with the idea to turn the picture into a musical but are discouraged when they realized they have to deal with Lina's terrible voice. Cosmo suggests dubbing Lina's voice with Kathy's. When Lina finds out she's infuriated and threatens to sue unless Kathy continues for the rest of her career.

The premiere of their musical is a huge success and the audience calls for Lina to sing. Lina lip syncs into a microphone while Kathy sings behind a curtain. The audience finds out it was all fake and Kathy is introduced as the real star of the film.



Discussion questions (pre viewing)

*As a class, describe your expectations of Hollywood Golden Age musicals. Do you think you will enjoy *Singin' in the Rain*? Why or why not?

Discussion questions (post viewing)

*Why is this movie significant or important?

*When does the viewer first become aware that the world of the movie presents characters that sing and dance as they live? (this is normal behaviour for them)

*What did you think about the musical performances?

*Which performance was your favourite? Why?

*What qualities did the actors possess that made the performances so entertaining?

*Do you think that *Singin' in the Rain* is a good representation of the transition from silent films to talkies?

Activities (post viewing)

**Using the concept of the emotional staircase, try to pinpoint specific emotions the characters climb throughout the movie. How do the songs or dances help with this? Which song and dance performances were easiest to figure out? Why do you think they began dancing?

**Try choreographing your own version of *Singin' in the Rain*! What about *Singin' in the Sun*...

Did You Know?...

*Debbie Reynolds learned to dance for this role! She had to be carried off the set after the 16-hour day filming "*Good Mornin'*" as she had burst some blood vessels in her feet

*During the song "*Singin' in the Rain*" Gene Kelly was sick with a 103F fever!

*The amount of water used to film "*Singin' in the Rain*" caused Gene Kelly's suit to shrink, and it had to be replaced numerous times

*Donald O'Connor had to be hospitalized after filming "*Make 'Em Laugh*", not because of the dancing tricks, but because he smoked four packs of cigarettes a day

*In the speaking part of "*Would You*", the rich elegant speaking voice you hear is actually Jean Hagen, the actress who plays Lina Lamont!

THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939)

**STARRING: JUDY
GARLAND, RAY BOLGER,
BERT LAHR, JACK HALEY,
MARGARET HAMILTON**

This was not the first film that used Technicolor. But it was one of the first to use three-strip Technicolor. The *Wizard of Oz* isn't completely filmed using Technicolor – all of the scenes in Kansas are shot in sepia, a very bland yellow toned filter. Once Dorothy gets whisked into the land of Oz, the visuals are saturated in colour, which helps bring the audience with her into another world. In *The Wizard of Oz*, reality is represented by Kansas and is colourless, but the Land of Oz is vivid and colourful with extravagant painted sets that do not attempt to hide their artificial nature.

****There are many themes, or messages thought to be found throughout the movie. The main theme being the idea that your roots are important (the message that "There's no place like home") but the majority of the movie is spent in the dream of escaping. These two opposite ideas make the movie appealing to a broad audience: be happy with what you've got, but you can still dream of escaping to a better place. Another theme is the idea of good versus evil. People are portrayed as good in the movie, while all evilness comes from the Witch and her minions. This idea fits with the view held by many psychologists – that our goodness and strength come from within ourselves, while our wickedness comes from the outside. People are generally well-intentioned but capable of behaving badly under harsh conditions or cruel authority figures.**

****Film is considered a very collaborative art form, there are many teams that must work together to ensure its success, and the contributions made for *The Wizard of Oz* are near perfection – photography, sets, costumes, music, cast. This movie is best known for its use of Technicolor, fantasy storytelling, musical score and its memorable characters. *The Wizard of Oz* is highly regarded for its production design and technical brilliance as well. The visuals in the film are considered to be more impressive than any others from its generation. Much attention was given to the use of colour in the film.**



*****The Wizard of Oz* was selected by the United States Library of Congress for preservation in the National Film Registry for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant".**

****The production team had a difficult task of hiring and creating extensive costumes for the little people who played the Munchkins. Each one had to be photographed in detail so they could consistently apply the same costume and makeup for filming. There was also the challenge for creating the Tin Man's costume – several tests were done to find the right makeup and clothing. The original silver makeup was made with aluminum powder and caused such a severe reaction that the actor was hospitalized in critical condition and had to be replaced. Because of this, the makeup was changed to aluminum paste with a layer of white clown greasepaint underneath to protect the actor's skin.**



THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939)

**STARRING: JUDY
GARLAND, RAY BOLGER,
BERT LAHR, JACK HALEY,
MARGARET HAMILTON**

Plot:

Dorothy Gale lives with her family on a farm in Kansas. One day her dog Toto bites Miss Gulch, who gets a sheriff's order to have him destroyed. Miss Gulch takes Toto away, but he escapes and returns to Dorothy. She decides to run away to save her dog, but returns home as a tornado approaches. Dorothy takes shelter in her bedroom but hits her head, knocking her out. The house gets picked up by the tornado and Dorothy awakens to see various figures flying by, including Miss Gulch who turns into a witch.

The house lands in Munchkinland in the Land of Oz. Glinda the Good Witch of the North and the Munchkins welcome Dorothy as a hero, as her house fell on and killed the Wicked Witch of the East. The Wicked Witch of the West comes to claim her sister's ruby slippers, but Glinda has already given them to Dorothy. The Wicked Witch of the West swears revenge on Dorothy and vanishes. Dorothy follows the Yellow Brick Road to Emerald City, so she can ask the Wizard of Oz to help her get home. On her journey, Dorothy meets the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion. Despite the Witch's efforts, they reach the city and speak with the Wizard who agrees to help them if they bring him the Witch's broomstick.

On their way to the Witch's castle, she kidnaps Dorothy and plots to kill her so she can remove the slippers. The three friends rescue Dorothy. The Witch sets fire to the Scarecrow, forcing Dorothy to throw a bucket of water on him. She splashes the Witch, causing her to melt. Dorothy takes her broomstick back to the Wizard.

The Wizard helps everyone realize that they already possessed the qualities they wanted. He offers to take Dorothy home in his hot air balloon. As they prepare to depart, Toto jumps from Dorothy's arms, and while she chases him, the Wizard leaves. Glinda arrives and tells Dorothy she always had the power to return home using the ruby slippers.



Discussion questions (pre viewing)

*Before watching the film, discuss who has seen the movie, or what the class thinks it might be about.

Discussion questions (post viewing)

- *Why is this movie significant or important?
- *How is the transition between sepia and Technicolor used effectively? What things did you first notice? Do you think it improved the film?
- *What do the segments filmed in sepia represent? Those in Technicolor?
- *Are there any similarities between Kansas and Oz?
- *How would you describe each character that Dorothy meets along the way? How do they help each other?
- *What do you think the moral of the story is?
- *What is it about this movie that people find so appealing?

Activities (post viewing)

- **Using the concept of the emotional staircase, try to pinpoint specific emotions the characters climb throughout the movie. What clues helped you?
- **Using a Venn Diagram, compare *The Wizard of Oz* to *The Wiz* and *Wicked* (all three are based on the same story) What are the differences and similarities you notice between the three versions?

Did You Know?...

- *Technicolor cameras required incredibly bright lights to work as they were intended - the soundstage was hotter than 100F throughout filming!
- *The original Tin Man actor, Buddy Ebson, was poisoned from the silver makeup and hospitalized in critical condition
- *Dorothy's slippers were originally supposed to be silver, but were changed to red to showcase the vibrant colours of Technicolor
- *Judy Garland wasn't MGM studio's first choice to play Dorothy - it was Shirley Temple!
- *The green witch's makeup was copper-based and extremely toxic. So much so, that Margaret Hamilton couldn't eat on the days when she was filming!

MOANA (2016)

**STARRING: AULI'I
CRAVALHO, DWAYNE
JOHNSON, JEMAINÉ
CLEMENT, RACHEL HOUSE**

****The majority of the cast members are of Polynesian descent: Auli'i Cravalho (Moana) and Nicole Scherzinger (Moana's mother) are of Native Hawaiian heritage; Dwayne Johnson (Maui) and Troy Polamalu (minor cast) are of Samoan heritage; Rachel House (Moana's grandmother), Temuera Morrison (Moana's father) and Jemaine Clement (Tamatoa) are of Māori heritage.**

****The songs were written by Opetia Foa'i, Mark Mancina and Lin-Manuel Miranda; the lyrics are in English, Samoan and the Tokelauan language**

****The majority of the cast members returned to reprise their original roles for filming in Hawaiian-language and Māori-language versions**

****It took over five years to develop, research and produce Moana. The directors recruited experts from across the South Pacific to consult on the film's cultural accuracy and authenticity.**

****Moana is not a Disney Princess who needs to be saved by a Prince. She is a strong, smart, empowered young teen who is her own hero. She doesn't wait around for a prince to rescue her or save her island. Moana sends a powerful message that our own capabilities are endless regardless of gender or race.**

****Moana is a person of Polynesian descent – and we need more diversity and people of colour in the media. This movie is significant because the majority of the actors cast were of Polynesian descent. It is important to incorporate people of colour in telling their own stories and histories to avoid misrepresentations and misinterpretations, as well as achieving a level of authenticity to the story that is being told.**



Did You Know?...

*The Realm of Monsters is named Lalotai – in Proto Polynesian language, **lalo** means “below” and **tai** means “the sea”. Put them together and it means “below the sea” which is where the world is located.

*Maui is based on Polynesian mythology's own demi-god Maui.

*The name Moana means “ocean” in the Proto Polynesian language, and is a genderless word

*All of the costume designs for the characters was based on fabrics and materials that were present and available on the islands of the South Pacific 2000 years ago.



MOANA

(2016)

STARRING: AULI'I CRAVALHO, DWAYNE JOHNSON, JEMAIN CLEMENT, RACHEL HOUSE

Plot:

In the Polynesian islands, the people worship the goddess Te Fiti, who brought life to the ocean using her heart stone and source of power. Maui the shape-shifting demigod, steals the heart to give people the power of creation. Te Fiti disintegrates and Te Kā, a volcanic demon, attacks Maui. He loses his magical giant fishhook and the heart to the sea.

Many generations later, the ocean chooses Moana, the adventurous daughter of the chief, to return the heart to Te Fiti. Moana's parents try to keep her away from the ocean to prepare her to become the chief. Moana suggests going beyond the island's reef to find fish, but her father forbids it. Moana's grandmother shows her a secret cave full of ships, revealing that Moana's ancestors were voyagers. Te Kā's darkness is poisoning their island, but it can be cured if Moana finds Maui and forces him to restore the heart to Te Fiti. Moana's grandmother falls ill on her deathbed and encourages Moana to find Maui.

Setting sail on a boat from the secret cave, Moana runs into a storm and gets shipwrecked on an island where she finds the once-mighty Maui. She convinces him to restore the heart of Te Fiti. They set sail on a daring mission to recover his magical fishhook from Tamatoa, a giant crab who lives in Lalotai, the Realm of Monsters. They take back his fishhook, and in return Maui teaches Moana how to sail.



They arrive at Te Fiti's island but are attacked by Te Kā. Maui abandons Moana, who asks the ocean to find someone else to restore the heart. Moana's grandmother's spirit appears helping Moana to find her true calling. Moana confronts Te Kā, with Maui's help. She realizes that Te Kā is in fact Te Fiti, corrupted without her heart. Moana returns it to the goddess, who heals the ocean and islands of the blight. Moana returns to her family, takes up her role as village chief and wayfinder and leads her people as they return to their ancestral roots of voyaging.

Discussion Questions (pre/post viewing)

- *Why do you think this movie is significant or important?
- *Why do you think so many animated films are musicals?
- *Do you think animated films are only for children? Why or why not?
- *What do you think the main message, or moral of the story is?

Activities (post viewing)

**Using the concept of the emotional staircase, try to pinpoint specific emotions the characters climb throughout the movie. What clues helped you?

**The character Maui was based on the Polynesian mythical demigod Maui. Have the class research the myth, and compare the myth to the musical version. What are the similarities and differences between the two? Does Maui's song make the story seem more or less real?

**In films, drama comes from conflict, and Moana is torn between what she wants to do and what she feels she should do. Have students arrange the following values in order of importance (greatest to least) to Moana: being a good daughter, discovering her past, being true to herself, learning new skills, becoming a chief, exploring the ocean, listening to her grandma, helping her village, having an adventure. Discuss student answers. How would they arrange the same values for themselves?

*Adapted from IntoFilm.org Moana Study Guide

**Ask students to describe the setting of the cave. Note the objects Moana finds in the cave, and what they tell us about the story.



BIPOC PORTRAYALS IN MUSICAL MOVIES

BIPOC portrayals in musicals does not have a pleasant beginning. Their origins are offensive, disrespectful and racist.

In the early 19th century **minstrel shows** were a popular form of American entertainment. These shows were made up of skits, dancing and music performances that were performed by caucasian people in blackface makeup with the specific purpose of playing the racial stereotypical role of African-American people. This practice continued to be popular through the 20th century.

Many Hollywood stars during the Golden Age donned **blackface**. Al Jolson was known for performing in blackface; according to film critics, he became very successful by taking African-American music and popularizing it for the white American audiences. Bing Crosby, Judy Garland and Fred Astaire also performed in blackface.

The BIPOC community had a difficult time being offered leading roles, and were instead only given minor character roles. There were a few musicals and films that opened up new roles for black people. *Stormy Weather* (1943) for example, featured an all-black cast, and was based on the life of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. *The Wiz* (1978) was another movie that featured an impressive all-black cast - Michael Jackson and Diana Ross both starred!

There were a few musical movies that were forefront in changing this outdated practice of discrimination against BIPOC actors. Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* features the first black princess voiced by a black actress and the majority of the cast is black. *Moana* features a cast where the majority is of Polynesian heritage. *Hamilton*, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, also features a cast where the majority are BIPOC.



Questions for discussion

*Why is it so important to include diversity in film?
Diversity in animated film? Diversity in theatre?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

***Look into sampling (the practice of reusing a portion or sample of a sound recording in another recording; this is a foundation of hip-hop music) Many choruses or main tunes from musicals are sampled in today's music

**Compare the sampled song with the original. Which one do you prefer and why?

*Jay-Z - Hard Knock Life (from Annie)

*Arianna Grande - 7 Rings (from The Sound of Music)

*Gwen Stefani - If I was a Rich Girl (from Fiddler on the Roof)

**Finding elements of musicals in modern culture: there are many spoofs, or tributes on The Simpsons

<https://youtu.be/PshxGXHOxRc> (On the Town spoof)

**Drama activity, but literature circle style: split the class into groups of 4-5 students and give each group a musical that depicts an important moment in history, or strong emotions through song and/or dance. Have each group discuss the emotions found, or how the musical discussed a difficult topic. Examples include:

*Hairspray, Les Misérables, The Sound of Music, The Wiz, Enchanted, Beauty and the Beast, The Little Mermaid, An American in Paris, On the Town, Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, ShowBoat, Annie

**Have the students pick a musical of their choosing to watch, and discuss. Which songs/dances were their favourite?

**Play "Name That Tune" musical style! After having watched some musicals, or songs from musicals, play some clips to see if students can guess which movie they come from

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

Visit YouTube Channel - One Hundred Years of Cinema
www.tcm.com

Turner Classic Movies YouTube channel

<https://youtu.be/WjQuzn1jWZA> (Judy Garland interview)

<https://youtu.be/EEizqKN7dpA> (Debbie Reynolds interview on *Singin' in the Rain*)

<https://youtu.be/NYjMekxGKwc> (Gene Kelly's wife talks about the making of *Singin' in the Rain*)

<https://popcrush.com/pop-songs-that-sample-famous-musicals/> (for songs that sample musicals)

Netflix, Disney+ (to watch musicals)





STUDY GUIDE SUMMARY

SOURCES

- wikipedia
- YouTube
- Turner Classic Movies
- Singin' in the Rain (DVD)
- Moana (Disney+)
- The Wizard of Oz (Netflix)
- The Sound of Music (DVD)
- Seven Brides for Seven Brothers (DVD)
- Beauty and the Beast, Frozen, Aladdin, The Lion King (Disney+)
- GCSE Film Studies
- oscars.org
- academia.edu
- musicals101.com
- filmsite.org
- study.com
- edutopia.org
- YouTube - One Hundred Years of Cinema
- mtv.com/news
- imdb.com
- intofilm.org

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- *What is a musical movie?
- *Is it important to watch old movies from the Golden Age? Why or why not?
- *Why is it important to learn about history and things that happened in the past?
- *Why are musical movies more accessible for kids to watch than live theatre?
- *Are there lessons to be learned in musicals, or are they just for pure entertainment?
- *How have the roles for the BIPOC community changed, or improved over the past years? What else could be done to show more diversity?

SUMMARY

**All the musicals listed here are suggestions. There are so many wonderful shows and animated films that could be used instead.

**The ultimate goal of this teaching/study guide is to provide an opportunity for students to experience a different genre of movie, one that was popular for over three decades! There is a lot of rich learning experiences, and discussions that can come from watching shows where it is natural for the actors to sing and dance.

**The reason why musical movies and Broadway theatre have survived for 100 years, is because each performance and film is kept relevant for today's society