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American Musicals, American Freedom

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Artistic Principles: What is this Unit About?

American musical theater is one of the major contributions the United States has made to the world theater community. As it evolved from its foreign influences, the American musical has developed into a performance style that uniquely reflects the growth of the American people and their country. Gaining prominence in the twentieth century, the American Musical served not only as a historical lens but also a system of engagement for United States citizens. In an era that brought the U.S. five major wars, the Depression, the Civil Rights movement, women's suffrage, and the Digital Age, musical theater was ever-present, tracing the perspectives of such principles as "freedom" throughout this tumultuous time in history. Notably, as the century passed, increasingly distinct voices were heard within the confines of a physical space that united everyone in the act of spectatorship. Despite the diversity of ethnicities, classes, and sexualities, American musicals engaged all audiences in a negotiation of national identity. Raymond Knapp comments:

> Musicals eventually proved to be a particularly effective place to [define and *re*- fine what it meant to be American] since what happened on stage not only brought a specific audience together within a constructed community, but also sent that audience out into a larger community armed with songs to be shared, providing at least some basis for achieving a sense of unity among the increasingly varied peoples of a country. [1]

The musical's variety of historical perspectives provides the ability to investigate how Americans' sense of "freedom" has changed according to the social and political landscape. Eric Foner writes, "The history of freedom offers a unique vantage point from which to probe the depths of American culture, and to view the interconnection between changing patterns of thought and social experience in American history." [2] Primarily, this unit aims to investigate these patterns at different points in American history and how musical theater contributed/responded to these patterns. Most importantly, this unit calls into question the materiality of our own culture in the works we produce. How much of our culture is embedded in the mere expression of our needs, desires, and ideals? What are the ideals that have persisted and evolved throughout American history, and how might these ideals be central to our definition of America?

This unit will focus on the historical contexts of the American musical and how these musicals were related and responsive to the times in which they were created. Specifically, it will use the evolving concept of

"freedom" to reflect the needs, wants, and ideals of Americans at different points of the twentieth century. Finally, it will challenge students to evaluate their own place in history by determining which freedoms they feel should be represented in musicals today and in years to come.

Setting the Stage: the Numbers, the School, and Theatrical Culture

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Middletown High School is part of Appoquinimink School District, the fastest growing school district in the State of Delaware, according to the district website. [3] The growing student population at Middletown consists of grades 9-12 in the primarily suburban to rural regions of Middletown, Odessa, Townsend, and Bear, Delaware. As of 2008, the addition of a second high school to our district has alleviated the overpopulation problems at Middletown; however, district estimates put schools at full capacity once more by 2015. This growth presents problems to many classes in our school, especially drama classes, which require space for rehearsal and practical work uninhibited by desks and other classroom furniture. Thus, I design my units with the knowledge that class sizes may drastically change from under twenty students to above thirty students within a short period of time. This unit aims for the former but can be adapted depending upon space and class size.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics and Common Core Data, Middletown serves 1430 students, approximately 67% White, 25% Black, 4% Hispanic, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander and smaller than 1% American Indian. Of this population, approximately 17% are free or reduced-price lunch eligible. [4]

Over the past twenty years, Middletown High School has developed a performing arts program that has grown from single drama classes to a fully articulated curriculum that includes four levels of acting courses, 2 levels of stage craft, and a newly created musical theatre performance class. All of these classes are practically engaged with theatrical production, developing skills that are supported by two after-school programs. In the Fall Middletown auditions a play where cast sizes are smaller and special focus is given to acting growth. In the Spring Middletown produces one of the largest theatrical productions in the state of Delaware with its spring musical. These ambitious shows place over 100 students on a single stage, dancing, singing, acting, moving set pieces, and flying drops for a two week run. Spring 2012 will be the 22nd consecutive musical season performed at Middletown. With a deep history backed by an ever-growing interest in the performing arts, the Spring Musical is one of the most well established programs in Middletown High School. I currently serve as a Spanish and Drama teacher at Middletown. In addition to teaching level I courses in Spanish and Drama, also I am co-director of our Fall play, Dramatic director of our Spring Musical, and Director of Puppetry in Education, an educational outreach program where high school students perform puppetry shows for elementary students.

The Audience: Who Can Use This Unit?

With the addition of our Musical Theater class, Middletown performing arts faculty found that our beginner-level curriculum needed realignment to provide a smoother transition into musical theater rather than simply plays. Hence, this unit is designed for high school introductory drama classes, especially those interested in incorporating musical theater into an otherwise play-heavy curriculum. However, I see easy transference to English or Social Studies classes as well. English classes may aim to utilize performance analysis as an approach to understanding a text and its relationship to its historical contexts. Likewise, social studies teachers can use this unit to help students understand how a historical period is closely attached to its respective primary sources possibly even incorporating musicals as a non-traditional primary source. Finally, political science or civics classes could use this unit to explore the evolving concept of "freedom" throughout the twentieth century in comparison to foundational texts in our country's history.

Understudies: Defining Freedom

Needs, Wants, and Ideals

Since this unit will investigate the meaning of freedom, I find it useful to develop a brief synopsis of the rhetoric of freedom. Additionally, I think it is useful to understand the theoretical constructs of "freedom" upon which many of the debates in American history were founded. These definitions will help to more clearly articulate students' perspectives and more interestingly, make them question what it really means to "be free." When asked, "What is freedom?" students will use a wide variety of words and phrases that seem synonymous: "we want to think for ourselves," "not have to listen to our parents all the time," "need some personal space." I would like to suggest that simply trying to define "freedom" or "liberty" will bring to surface the nuances we take for granted in classroom discussion. To help determine how to classify words associated with freedom, Colin Campbell's discussion of "needs" and "wants" in his article, "Consumption and the Rhetorics of Need and Want" is a useful start. Campbell describes *need* versus *want* in terms of consumerism, but the distinctions of "freedom" involve similar rhetoric as citizens establish their individuality, the role of their government, and how these two interact. Thomas Jefferson serves as a primary example in the Declaration of Independence, "it becomes *necessary* for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another." [5]

I identify the terms "needs," "wants," and suggest the incorporation of "ideals" because I think making a distinction between them will aide classroom discussion of what formulates a sense of freedom. I define "ideal" as a concept that is the perfect condition of human life. A "need" is something that is necessary to survive. These are the principles students will say must be present to exist: food, water, and shelter are the most probable initial responses. A "desire" or "want" is something that is not essential to human survival but important. To Campbell, want is a "search for pleasure [that] expose[s] oneself to certain stimuli in the hope that they will trigger the desired response within oneself." [6] In the case of this unit, the stimulus is American society and the desired response is a sense of freedom. The duality of need versus want will help students think about what they believe is absolutely necessary to their lives and why these principles are essential. Here is where debate arises in the classroom (and by parallel, America) since many will believe that ideals,

such as the ability to "do your own thing"/live unencumbered by another (i.e. their guardians, teachers, peers) are not just important but essential to their existence. This is a microcosm of America's historic progression towards autonomy. In terms of freedom, it is helpful to look to Colin Campbell's view of need as "a state of deprivation, one in which there is a lack of something necessary to maintain a given condition of existence." [7] The Declaration of Independence's statement of freedom from tyranny alludes to just such a deprived state.

The true question that must arise is how to identify whether an ideal is a need or a want. Perspectives that demand progress would argue that if a belief is an ideal, we must continually try to bridge the gap between what we have and what we truly need. The juxtaposition of need versus desire is intended to make students question whether there is any tangible or intangible entity that they believe is not necessary to their lives. I imagine that once students start entering the world of intangibles, they will more easily identify tangible items unnecessary to survival, like certain material possessions they did not own as a child or did not exist for previous generations. Intangibles will bring much more heated debate. At the center of America's intangible debate of freedom, and more than likely students', is the tenuous relationship between the individual and the community.

As Raymond Knapp observes,

> America has often been understood as founded on two principles, embodied in the name 'United States': union (community) and independent units (states). Thus, America tries to preserve both of these sometimes opposing principles, balancing the strength promised by union against the rights and independence of the smaller units being joined, ranging from states, to minorities defined in various ways, to individuals. [8]

Do we *want* or *need* individual rights, and if so how are these to be governed, if at all? Late eighteenth century liberalism placed particular emphasis on freedom through economic independence. By owning one's own land, a citizen may be considered free because he is unable to be coerced economically by the powers upon which he is dependant. [9] In the same regard, if a citizen is to be expected to be an autonomous being, he must be afforded the opportunity to achieve such freedom. From here, citizens against slavery criticized it as not merely an infringement of political freedom, but more generally, individual freedom. America experienced a more diverse shift from the want for individual freedom to a need. Rhetoric cited inalienable rights of man and equality as the need to change the concept of freedom. Fredrick Douglas writes, "Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty?...am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow man?" [10] It is from this sense of individual freedom within a community that two definitions of freedom arise: Positive freedom (freedom *to*) and negative freedom (freedom *from*).

Regarding this unit, I think it became apparent to me that the more I investigated what types of freedoms America sought throughout its history, the more I was aware that musicals that offer social commentary seem to be created when an ideal that was formerly just a want shifts to being a need. The musicals chosen here demonstrate how a sense of freedom was taken for granted (or simply taken). Consequently, Americans decided that these lost or infringed upon freedoms were actually essential to American life. Hence, they required a medium that would allow the communication of this discrepancy to the masses.

Freedom To and Freedom From: Positive and Negative Freedom

First, throughout this unit, I will use "freedom" and "liberty" interchangeably. There are not a wide variety of

sources that clearly define a difference between the two, and if there is a difference, the nuances between the two are not useful for this unit. To define positive and negative freedom, my primary source is Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty." Initial inquiry through student discussions may develop various concepts of freedom. I cite Berlin because he simplifies the many types of freedom likely to arise in the classroom into two categories: positive freedom and negative freedom. [11] At its most basic level, positive freedom represents one's *freedom to* something: freedom to make one's own decisions and live independently according to one's needs/wants. Whereas, negative freedom represents one's *freedom from*: freedom from the oppression of others or *from* the system created by the other that gave the other power. The objective of this unit is to analyze how and why particular time periods found it necessary to create musicals that stage positive and negative freedom.

Of course, there is an important distinction to make regarding the nature of this unit. This unit understands musical theater as a representation of freedom(s) in America through its citizens that define "freedom." Hence, this unit is by nature a politically/socially-driven entity. That is, there is a presumed social or political context to all of the selected shows. While some would argue that certain shows are meant to be completely diversionary and without social context, I believe this to be impossible. Since Americans create and perform these musicals, their cultural heritage is inextricably connected to the story and songs onstage. Marvin Carlson explains, "However general may be the 'airy nothing' with which the poet begins," (for the sake of this unit, Freedom), "when it is brought into the world of objects" (that is, theater) "…then that process must inevitably be conditioned by the artistic tools of the artist's own culture and by the ways that culture defines and interprets artistic artifacts." [12] Whether diversionary or not, these performances are conditioned by American cultural influences.

The advantage of this cultural conditioning is that *any* representation of liberty in the American musical is an authentic engagement because the musical, for the most part, was made for and by Americans. Hence, the potential musical selections and types of freedom explored are as large as the number of musicals created with some influence from American artists and audiences.

The selections I use in this unit are merely examples, carefully chosen to represent particular freedoms of interest. I would encourage any teacher to first gain an understanding of what freedoms are important to his/her students and make selections that compliment their understanding. After all, by engaging with these musicals, students will attribute their own reading of freedom, just as audiences have done since the inception of each show. Thus, shows like *Oklahoma!* can be seen as both a diversionary experience that takes Americans out of their real lives and into the Old West or a socially observant performance that reveals America's search for a glorious past in a time of war. Perspective is essential. Positive and negative freedom, by definition, are opposing forces, but this does not preclude that a musical cannot explore both. In fact, within the frameworks I establish for my students, I hint that these two freedoms respond to each other: where we might see the representation of freedom *from* government oppression, we might also view a celebration of the freedom to protest. Perhaps the dual reading of a shared text is the reason why musicals are created: we need a means of articulating social issues and then responding to how we fix these problems.

Spotlight: The Shows and their Freedom

Oklahoma!

Oklahoma! (1943) is one of my first choices for a socially relevant musical because it weaves many prevalent trends of Broadway into one romantic story that seems familiar to many audiences. Its employment of nostalgia is a characteristic familiar to many musicals throughout the twentieth century and beyond, working very deliberately to create and glorify a national identity from times long gone. Specifically, *Oklahoma!* develops the identity of the pioneering individual, free to start a new life, and free from foreign agents who might inhibit his newly found sense of autonomy. I especially like the idea of starting this unit with *Oklahoma!* because, like my students at the beginning of any unit, Old West America and World War America were still developing a vocabulary with which to define American freedom. This musical will serve as an easy introduction to how student will analyze a musical and its relationship to the time in which it was written, offering a more straightforward plot and fairly transparent characters. The Old West derives connotations of an iconic America, a distancing from "real life" that may encourage students to comment on freedom more easily, without the fear of being historically inaccurate. Encourage students to continually evaluate the role of individual freedom, even outside of historical contexts, and how this freedom might be tested by social expectations (sometimes embodied by actual characters).

Oklahoma! not only represents one of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's most successful musicals, but also one of their most significant in terms of its contributions to musical style and reflection of nationalist ideals. Concerning form, Rodgers and Hammerstein perfect their ability to weave songs into the plotline. Sixteen years before, Hammerstein had experimented with the idea of allowing music to drive a plot or deepen a character with his work in *Showboat*. In this form, they employed the reprise to allow for reflection or scene/character juxtaposition. In many ways, this sense of juxtaposition transposed itself into American culture as audiences left singing tunes that placed their current social conditions in contrast to that of the musicals they patronized, starting a new means of social reflection.

Steeped in the remnants of the Depression and the on-going battle in World War II, *Oklahoma!* was developed in a time when American freedom, both domestically and internationally, was being threatened. As it is so frequently done, in times of crisis, especially when Americans seek to exercise their freedom *from* (in this case, foreign control and economic ruin), audiences look to the past with the hopes of restoring a lost freedom. Knapp comments about Friedrich Schiller's perspectives: "From the vantage point of an imperfect present, we may look forward to a return to this alignment [of ideals], …and it is the poet/artist who articulates our position and attitude." [13] This sense of nostalgia for a lost ideal is employed by American musicals throughout the twentieth century; *Grease* (1971) took post-Vietnam America back to its 1950s poodle-skirts-and-leather-jackets roots. *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967) returned Broadway to its former flapper glory, mimicking the "Cinderella" musicals about a genuine girl who hopes to find love and prosperity in marriage. [14]*Oklahoma!* is no different in its regard to a historical period which Americans believe significant to their national identity: the Old West. Evidenced by the popularity of John Wayne and the Western film from the late 1930s to 1950s, America regarded the West as a nostalgic celebration of its search for individual freedom and prosperity. Manifest Destiny demanded the expansion of American democracy to the west, an ideal that inevitably allowed for American settlers to move westward with the hopes of starting a new life and gaining a renewed sense of freedom. Pioneer culture embodied the freedom *to* financial independence (partially through property ownership), a liberty not to be taken for granted by a generation that saw the stock

market crash just over fifteen years previous. Financial independence that simply seemed like a *want* in the decadence of 1920s Broadway shifted to being a *need* necessary for American life. The promise of the West gave American's the freedom to start anew. Especially regarding the Dust Bowl years of the Midwest,

> *Oklahoma!*, with its mix of hopeful and playful songs partly eclipsing America's memory of a devastated landscape and displaced multitude of people, quickly became a vital component in building and maintaining America's resolve during the height of its involvement in World War II, and in providing it afterward with the confidence and energy to help rebuild a world ravaged by years of war. [15]

With a strong sense of freedom to hope for a better tomorrow, wartime America looked back to the West as a reminder of times of economic independence (and possibly even as a starting point to America's prominence as a world power). The concept of Manifest Destiny juxtaposed with the threat of foreign invaders imposing their own brand of destiny brought to head the question of America's treatment of the "other." What was formerly a country bent on the Unionization of territories was now forced to reflect on its transgressions as Axis powers threatened a similar takeover, this time with the U.S. on the wrong end. Yet, remnants of America's treatment of the "other" still remain in *Oklahoma!*'s portrayal of Haji Ali, the Persian peddler. Towards the end of Act I, Scene I, Ado Annie's father, Andrew Carnes, forces Ali Hakim at gunpoint to marry his daughter after discovering that the two have been spending time together. Ali Hakim laments the arranged marriage as an infringement of his freedom in the song, "It's a Scandal! It's an Outrage!" He sings:

> Twenty minutes ago I am free like a breeze,/ Free like a bird in the woodland wild,/ Free like a gypsy, free like a child,/ I'm unattached!/ Twenty minutes ago I can do what I please,/ Flick my cigar ashes on a rug,/ Dunk with a doughnut, drink from a jug,-/ I'm a happy man!/ I'm minding my own business like I oughter,/ Ain't meaning any harm to anyone./ I'm talking to a certain farmer's daughter-/ Then I'm looking in the muzzle of a gun! [16]

Very much like the displaced Native Americans in Oklahoma, Ali Hakim finds his freedom to live according to his own standards violated by force. He alludes to an unsophisticated life of doughnuts, jugs, and cigars, a rhetoric common to the values of the West, serving as contrast to the urban, industrial steel production of audiences' wartime America. The contrast between the rural fictional and industrially-driven real-life settings are directly addressed with the song "Kansas City," evaluating modernization on the height of buildings (a skyscraper seven stories high-/ About as high as a buildin' orta grow) and, cheekily, the apparent sophistication of theater ("a big theayter they call burleeque./ Fer fifty cents you c'n see a dandy show." [17] This rhetoric of a simpler time, free from war, is infused in many of *Oklahoma!*'s songs. "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" uses the imagery of "corn as high as en elephant's eye," cattle "standin' like statues," and "a weepin' willer...laughin'," to illustrate the simplicity of setting. The cultural value of the song's waltz form compliments these intentions: "...the waltz was by the early twentieth century being displaced by the two-step and ragtime, and its presence here would have thus seemed nostalgic for a simpler time, not only for the audience but also to some extent for the characters within the show." [18]

Upon the grounds of this freedom to live a simpler life, we see the main social conflict between cowboys and farmers take root. Both *want* a simple life, unencumbered by the other: the cowman wanting open land to roam, and the farmer wanting the land for harvest. In the Act II opener, "The Farmer and the Cowman," Carnes sings of the paralleled simplicity, mentioning how "one likes to push a plow, / the other likes to chase a cow." He concludes, "the farmer and the cowman should be friends...territory folk should stick together," alluding to a peaceful co-existence referenced in many speeches regarding the "other." Woodrow Wilson

comments, "America was created to unite mankind by those passions which lift and not by the passions which separate and debase." [19] The word choice of "The Farmer and the Cowman" is especially complimentary to Wilson's perspective as it focuses on the sharing of the West: "The cowman ropes a cow with ease,/ The farmer steals her butter and cheese." [20] The only "debasing" words in this song are made in jest, acknowledging a stereotype rather than a reality. One could even argue that this song suggests a peaceful compromise in American identity allowing for both the agricultural past/search for open spaces and the industrialized present/growth of cities that accompanied America's ascent to a world power. Knapp remarks:

> We might call this particular strand of American mythology its "frontier brinkmanship": its ability to manage the threshold of its domain, to extend its purview carefully, wisely, and inclusively, and thereby negotiate the transition from wilderness to civilization, from lawless to law-abiding, from frontier to community, from territory to state, from fledgling nation to world power. [21]

The culmination of this union is confirmed with the final scene where audiences learn Curly, the lead cowman, has traded in his stirrups for a plow and a wife, and Oklahoma is finally a state. Knapp mentions the use of the "marriage trope to represent the merger of supposed incompatibilities," (i.e. the cowman and the farmer) as well as suggest the inclusiveness of America as a whole. "Oklahoma" bolsters American ideals of unity saying, "We know we belong to the land,/ And the land we belong to is grand!" [22] Thus, in the shows final moments, the audiences of *Oklahoma!* are left with a sense of national unity and the hope for global unity.

West Side Story

West Side Story is a natural choice not only because of its status as Broadway canon but also because of its universal application addressing the freedom from prejudice. The transcendence of the story from its Shakespearian roots serves any time period with a cautionary tale that questions what sacrifices will need to be made to achieve a greater sense of freedom. Unlike *Oklahoma!*, *West Side Story* is more serious in tone. This shift will allow students to take the vocabulary of freedom acquired in previous lessons and apply it to a more realistic setting. In *West Side Story*, we see real people experiencing racial tensions that occurred at many points in history. In this part of the unit, encourage students to investigate how inclusive or exclusive is the American identity they defined in *Oklahoma!*. The freedom to belong to a community is divided in a local and national sense. Locally, the gang members of *West Side Story* feel that they are inclusive to their own kind but exclusive of others. The relationship of Tony and Maria, the Romeo and Juliet of this musical, suggests a more national sense of community, one inclusive of everyone, regardless of ethnic origin. Hence, the ultimate freedom fought for here is not simply the freedom to belong to a local community but a national community shared amongst a very diverse population.

With *West Side Story* (1957), Jerome Robbins intended to update William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to show prejudice in 1950s to 1960s America. Although originally posed as a conflict between Catholics and Jews in New York, *West Side Story* was changed to a Puerto Rican/Melting-Pot-American conflict, possibly out of the interests of universalism and avoiding a specific topicality and appearing dated decades later. [23] The underlying concerns of immigrant assimilation and racial ghettos fuel the hatred between two groups who are located at different points on America's timeline of immigration booms. Both the Sharks (Puerto Ricans) and Jets ("white" Americans) seek a sense of belonging in an America whose national identity had been reaffirmed with victories in Europe and Asia. In *West Side Story,* this search for belonging is afforded through gang culture. Riff, leader of the Jets, sings, "When you're a Jet./...you've got brothers around/...you're home with your own." [24] This desire for inclusion is then shown to require exclusion as the Jet gang continues to sing,

"We're drawing the line,/ so keep your noses hidden!/ We're hangin' a sign/ Says 'Visitors forbidden'." [25]

The duality of inclusion in versus exclusion from American ideals is carried over to the immigrant perspective in the Shark's song, "America." The lead Shark female, Anita, discusses the advantages of being in America versus Puerto Rico. It is important to note that Puerto Rico is considered part of the United States but is not a state. Very much like the nostalgic return to simpler ways in *Oklahoma!*, "America" starts as a reminder of the island's positive attributes: tropical breezes, pineapples, and coffee blossoms. However, Anita reverses the effect of this fond remembrance by casting her home in a negative light. Where Rosalia sees "hundreds of flowers in full bloom," Anita sees "Hundreds of people in each room." [26] Here, rather than viewing the past as an ideal from the perspective of an imperfect present, the Shark women, save Rosalia, see from the perspective of an imperfect past to place value on a better present. Their freedom to start anew has already begun; whereas, in *Oklahoma!*, it is a prospect for the future.

However, while immigrants like the Sharks may experience more freedom than in their homeland, they are still subject to racial prejudice. The song "Somewhere" most poignantly articulates the freedom from racial labels and the freedom to a peaceful co-existence. Sung by Tony and Maria (Arthur Laurents' Romeo and Juliet, Jet and Shark respectively) "Somewhere" envisions a utopian dream-like world, "somewhere there must be a place we can feel we're free,/ Somewhere there's got to be a place for you and for me." Imagery called for in the stage direction creates a chaotic world around a running Tony and Maria, as "figures of gangs, of violence, flail around them" only for the lovers to break through and discover a world with "no sides, no hostility now; just joy and pleasure and warmth." [27] Their dream world is once again destroyed by recreating the deaths of Bernardo and Riff. This nightmarish ending to an ideal world left *West Side Story*'s post-war audiences wondering if such a level of freedom could ever exist in world where politics are overrun with the Red Scare and the fear of Communism. McCarthyism introduced a rhetoric aimed at identifying the "other" (Communist) in one's own home, an invader that threatened the very ideals of peace and freedom. What was once formerly a unified nation represented in *Oklahoma!* became a nation divided by paranoia and distrust of one's own neighbor.

The depth of how deep or shallow this divide between people could grow is never more evident in *West Side Story* than in the closing scenes. After the accidental death of Bernardo at the hands of Tony, Anita's perspective of America and the need for assimilation is changed. What was formerly a wishful acceptance of the American community transforms into a hatred for the country whose ideals killed her lover. "A Boy Like That" explains Anita's deepened skepticism in a peaceful co-existence: "A boy like that who'd kill your brother,/ Forget that boy and find another!/ One of your own kind-/ stick to your own kind." [28] This song acts as an eerie foreshadow to Tony's shooting, where Chino, a fellow Shark, hunts down Tony out of rage for Bernardo's death and Maria's courtship. Most relevant to audiences of any era is the closing image of Jets and Sharks joining together to mourn alongside Maria. In this last tableaux, shared remorse unites the two gangs, foreshadowing the possibility of freedom from racial prejudice whilst also asking at what cost. Years after *West Side Story*, America, like Maria, would discover the cost of this freedom as the Civil Rights Movement confronted similar prejudices with tragic results.

Hair

In contrast to the universal implications intended by Laurents' *West Side Story*, "*Hair*'s content and vocabulary, encapsulating the look, sound, and feel of the late 1960s, tied the musical more to its moment in history than perhaps any other in the annals of Broadway." [29] Tied closely to the period in which it was produced, *Hair* addresses the growing schism experienced between a younger, more liberal generation's and

an older conservative, seemingly out-of-touch generation's concept of freedom in America.

Often staging scenes with hippies in conflict with their parents, teachers, or government officials, *Hair* demonstrates a shift in freedom away from a specific type of oppression towards a more general freedom from any type of authority. By this point in the class, students will have a general idea of the types of freedoms needed in America as represented by musicals prior to *Hair*. *Hair* should make them question whether by the end of the 1960s these freedoms were still viable and if there were other freedoms left unexplored. The fragmented plot of *Hair* mimics the deconstruction of a formerly accepted national identity established by plays like *Oklahoma!* and *West Side Story*. In response, the hippie cast simply seeks a general freedom to choose their own definition of autonomy (the right to do whatever they want or need) and to see how far that freedom could reach.

Subtitled as "The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical," *Hair* (1967-8) represented an age of revolution in terms of its social content as well as general form and style. *Hair* utilized popular music styles, particularly rock, set to a narrative of what Knapp calls "a series of associated vignettes related to a central theme, with the barest hint of a storyline connecting them." [30] By breaking from the linear model of storytelling, and incorporating non-traditional Broadway music, *Hair* explored freedom by questioning the authority of systems in place, both on Broadway and in Washington. At its core, *Hair* aimed to make mainstream audiences aware of the principles of counterculture, with the hopes of starting its own movement. Knapp suggests that the cultural authority the show acquired as its songs climbed the Billboard charts is demonstrative of the shows impact in progressing the hippie movement. [31][32]

The questioning of authority widely subscribed by youths in the late 1960s leads *Hair* to a focus on topics relevant to their lives. Sex and drugs were representative of the spirit of "openness" to new experiences. The songs "Black Boys" and "White Boys" discuss the appeal of each in the perspective of a free love Tribe member. I must note that while I feel this theme is relevant to the time period, it is probably best avoided in the classroom for age appropriateness. Regarding drug use, one could argue that the fragmented nature of the show mimics the hallucinogenic experiences of its characters. Again, concerning content in the classroom, I would be hesitant to highlight this theme, and hence, I will not provide further investigation. However, one of the probably more relevant and politically-linked themes is the Vietnam War. Claude, a member of the Tribe who is reluctant to burn his draft card because of the expectations placed on him by conservative parents, is sent to fight, and serves as a representation of counterculture's treatment of war. More generally, the hippie movement preached peace, and hence the Tribe in *Hair* demonstrates the same reluctance. "My Conviction" speaks of the freedom qualified on not bringing harm to others: "I wish every mother and father in this theater would go home and make a speech to their teenagers and say: ['] Kids, be free, no guilt, be whoever you are, do whatever you do, just as long as you don't hurt anyone.'" [33] The direct-address to the audience implicates the spectator in the action on stage, inviting them to a similar freedom to protest. In "What a Piece of Work is Man," the Tribe questions man's relationship to "The beauty of the world." Allusions to the earth and the air, described in mimic Shakespeare [34] as the "goodly frame" and "excellent canopy," are juxtaposed with a "foul and pestilent congregation of vapor" arising from the destruction of nature in war. [35] Very much like the ending of *West Side Story*, the final scenes of *Hair* problematize freedom in terms of violence. We discover that Claude has died in battle and must choose an action to take. The show's final number invites audiences to "Let the Sunshine In," hoping that Americans will chose to face their discontent with the government with peace. The use of death to demonstrate the pointlessness of violence and war draws on the same sense of optimism we feel when we see Jets and Sharks standing together. With this sense of disappointment in current times comes a new regard for hope. Yet with this discontent for society to its politics, John Bush Jones reminds

us:

> there is nothing in the songs, script, or staging that indicates the kids are un- or anti-American, collectively or individually. Rather, they are saddened by much of what American has become – material values replacing moral values, for example –and they plead for a return to those values beneficial to both society at large and to the dignity of each individual. [36]

Hence, not only does *Hair* make audiences aware of their freedom from government control, but also reassure a sense of autonomy and unity that transcends government, a currency similar to the inalienable rights of man.

Urinetown

Urinetown (2001) is a great example of a modern musical that offers social reflection because of its awareness of the consumerist society in which it was produced. It is a satire that not only critiques the form of a typical Broadway musical (breaking into song and dance yet somehow never aware of an audience) but also the late twentieth century society that was responsible for some of the most expensive musical productions to ever hit the Great White Way. Less than a decade after Disney inaugurated corporate sponsorship to Broadway (see *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*) and the same year that *The Producers* offered $500 premium seats, *Urinetown* asked audiences whether society's tendency to spend more and more was a freedom or a curse. For this reason, I think *Urinetown* presents something unique to classrooms because it poses the idea that perhaps the "freedom to" which seemed so empowering in other musicals (and for a vast majority of its own plot) could actually be detrimental to society. I especially like this musical as the final focus to the unit because its questions the value of freedom and whether there should be limitations to restrict the extent of freedom. While *Hair* required unencumbered freedom, *Urinetown* will ask students whether America has demanded and been given too much freedom.

A story that more directly addresses government control, *Urinetown* shows the poor population of Urinetown forced to "pay-to-pee" at public amenities by a monopolistic corporation, run by Caldwell B Caldwell, that has outlawed private toilets because they consume too much water (Urinetown is in a twenty-year drought). To pee in private or outdoors is an offense punishable by "exile." Inevitably, the poor population revolt against the growing prices and strict laws that prevent them from peeing whenever and wherever they want. In the struggle of Bobby Strong and his poor compatriots, audiences see an everyman hero who fights for his individual rights, represented simply as the ability to urinate without paying a fee. The catalyst for dramatic conflict is similar to the justifications for the American Revolution: a freedom from unlawful taxation, and the freedom to basic human needs. In his revolution speech, Bobby preaches, "no man would be denied his essential humanity due to the condition of his pocketbook." [37] The use of "essential humanity" to represent free urination echoes the sentiment of natural rights in the Enlightenment thought that influenced America's founding fathers to write of "inalienable rights" in the Declaration of Independence. By comparison, the "fee to pee" taxes seem trivial yet patronizingly similar to the taxes enacted during the years leading up to the American Revolution. The connection of these two revolutions suggests that spectators apply the gravitas of the American Revolution to the revolt in Urinetown. In terms of the modern audiences who viewed *Urinetown*, the citizens exercise their freedom from oppressive capitalism/government.

The essential humanity in the contexts of the show is the ability to urinate without paying a fee, but the larger implications extend to the general population being able to spend their money however they please. The freedom from oppressive capitalism also ironically allows for the freedom to spend money however citizens

see fit. The use of a basic bodily function shifts the rhetoric of consumerism and spending from a want, something luxurious but unnecessary to life, to a need, something essential, an inherent freedom of all people. This sentiment is echoed once the battle is won, with Caldwell's daughter and Bobby's love interest, Hope Caldwell, speaking of the unity achieved with this renewed freedom to spend:

> Now is a new day when each of us, regardless of race, creed, class, or criminal history, can come together as one people and share the fruits of our labor as one. Now is the dawning of a new age of compassion and the right to do whatever you like, whenever you like, with whomever you like, in whatever location you like. [38]

While this can be read with socialist undertones ("share the fruits of our labor as one"), I would argue that the true unity Hope speaks of is achieved through the shared *experience* of consuming, rather that the literal sharing of the product. In fact, *Urinetown* makes very little mention of there ever being a shared product of labor. In the last pages of the musical, Josephine says, "Such a fever. If only I had a cool tall glass of water..." to which Hope retorts, "But don't you see, Mrs. Strong? The glass of water's inside you; it always has been." [39] This suggests that the product is less important than the act of consuming; the potential to purchase water has always been there, the only problem is that there is not product to fulfill this need to consume.

The same way that *Hair* discusses Americans' freedom to choose however they want to live is echoed in the words "the right to do whatever you like, whenever you like, with whomever you like, in whatever location you like." The primary difference between the 1960s and turn of the millennium is that the general freedom to choose of the 60s has become a more focused need, centralized around consumerism. The ability to consume gives choice to the individual in the same way *Hair* asked, only choice is now tied to a monetary value, rather than something simply intrinsic. Americans can buy whatever they want, but must pay to get it. Rather than the government oppressing citizens by drafting soldiers and illegalizing narcotics, it manages its citizens' freedom by "controlling consumption through the regulating mechanism of cash," according to Caldwell. [40] Hence, by overthrowing Caldwell, the citizens demolish any system that would limit their freedom to consume.

In the same regard, *Urinetown* also serves as an exploration of consumerism beyond the happy ending of freedom to spend according to one's own desires. Like *West Side Story*, it questions the cost of our freedom. In the Act I Finale, Bobby sings, "We're suffering now/ Such lives of sorrow!/ Don't give us tomorrow,/ Just give us today!" [41] While his comments place a sense of urgency at the end of Act I, they also very subtly hint that the citizens are more concerned with enjoying the fruits of present freedom than sustaining this freedom for the future. In Act 1, Scene 6, when Bobby is asked about he condition of the bathrooms after the citizens have seized control, he comments, "[There's] a little spillage, nothing to be concerned about. The people are happy, that's the main thing." [42] Bobby's words are met in direct opposition to Caldwell's retort later in the same song: "Think of tomorrow, Mister Strong!/ Our resources are as fragile/ as a newborn baby's skull!/ With your actions you would gut the child/ and leave a lifeless hull!" [43]

In the end, audiences find out that the unrestricted use of toilets led to the unsustainability of the already limited water supply of the town, leaving the townspeople in a worse condition than when the musical began. The narrator, Officer Lockstock, comments: "it wasn't long before the water turned silty, brackish, and then disappeared altogether. As cruel as Caldwell B. Caldwell was, his measures effectively regulated water consumption, sparing the town the same fate as the phantom Urinetown." [44] Thus, unlike the other musicals in this unit, *Urinetown* asks whether a "freedom to" (consume) should be valued more than a "freedom from" (irresponsible capitalism). In the end, the government that was once perceived as limiting freedom is

consequently posed as a power able to regulate the potentially unrestricted/excessive freedom of the individual. Writers Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis place the responsibility in the audience's hands in two quick lines:

- LITTLE SALLY: I don't think too many people are going to come see this musical, Officer Lockstock.
- Lockstock: Why do you say that, Little Sally? Don't you think people want to be told that their way of life is unsustainable?

Especially in the contexts of the turn of the millennium, this theme of unsustainable consumerism hit hard to Broadway audiences. Quality of life grew substantially over the past twenty years of the twentieth century, as televisions filled every house, the Internet allowed for more easy access to information, and cell-phones made contacting someone nearly instantaneous. Movies employed increasingly more special effects, pressuring Broadway to compete with a digitized viewing experience that could be repeated nearly every two hours for a much lower price. Imported "mega-musicals" like *Cats, Les Miserables,* and *Phantom of the Opera* competed with cinema blockbusters by incorporating their own level of spectacle and runs that went beyond the Broadway norm. Other theaters welcomed movie-to-musical adaptations such as *The Lion King, Hairspray,* and *The Producers*, with the hopes that cinematic success would transfer to Broadway success. Hence, not only did *Urinetown* question whether America as a whole was becoming too obsessed with consumerism but also that Broadway was contributing to this obsession. The fact that *Urinetown* was produced with a smaller set and significantly less spectacle should not go unnoticed.

Classroom Activities

Activity 1: Defining Needs and Wants

The goal of this activity is to start conversation about what students believe is a want or a need in their lives. Many of the items listed will become part of the vocabulary used to help define what students expect of their freedom. While some will cite intangible ideas such as "freedom to self-expression" as a need, others will use more tangible examples, like the "freedom to play my guitar" and classify this as a want, or vice versa. While these two have similar objectives, students may or may not identify the symbolic connection between tangible and intangible items. I suggest pushing students to understand the connection between the two. When you move on to more intangible concepts, students can see that period examples in these musicals are representations of ideas that are connected to their own generation.

Put students into pairs, to encourage debate in the small group setting. In these groups, hand them a pile of cards with a list of topics they will divide into *wants* and *needs*. By providing this division in the instructions, the teacher suggests that there is a difference between *want* and *need*, but very importantly does not prescribe what is the difference. Part of the idea of this activity is for students to develop their own means of discerning the difference. Suggested items to include on cards: electricity, food, shelter, protection, self-expression, money, transportation, friends, family, teachers, jobs, hospitals, schools, doctors, air, plants, water, air-conditioning, the internet, cell-phones, pets, sports, music, movies, theater, wheels, ovens, garbage collection, books, your own space, clothing, government, equality, war, peace, birth, voting, police, fire fighters.

As is the case with a typical activity that explores students' background knowledge, this activity has no right

answers, simply a sense of inquiry that will help students create a vocabulary that will continually evolve as the unit progresses. Once students have come to some conclusions, give them blank cards and allow them to write anything they feel is missing from the list. While they are doing this, write "Needs" and "Wants" as column headings on the board. Eventually, have the pairs write down one of their items under the appropriate heading on the board. Allow for items to be listed more than once in order to see which topics students are in general agreement and which will bring debate. It would be worthwhile discussing why students think that certain items are clearly a need or a want, and others are debatable. Finally, after all items are listed and debated, students will group them in accordance to a type of freedom they think the items express. Perhaps "police," "fire-fighters," "shelter" and "protection" are all deemed needs: these ideas could be grouped more generally as the freedom from harm or the freedom to feel protected. Write these down on poster board and display them in your room so students have them to reference when analyzing the types of freedom explored in certain musicals. This will equip them with an analytic vocabulary with which to evaluate musicals, songs, and scenes throughout this unit. In the suggested culminating activity where students write their own mini-musical, students can use these needs to evaluate what types of freedom they believe should be represented in their work.

Activity 2

Activities 2 to 4 constitute a more general a lesson structure. I aim to use the following format everyday in class so students gain a familiar structure through which to analyze and engage with musicals. I suggest starting the unit by posting essential questions, to make students aware of what they will be able to answer by the end of the unit or lesson. Examples: What type of freedom is needed in America according to this musical? What historical events affected this musical? How might this musical have affected its audiences' perspectives of freedom?

This activity can be used as an activating strategy that will help students recall information from the previous lessons and introduce new ideas. I utilize two activities to accomplish this activation: first, a mental warm-up, and then a physical warm-up. Physical warm-ups can be simply an acting game that gets their bodies engaged in the lesson, because majority of the teaching strategies involve the performance of a scene. If they are to use their bodies in class, the teacher must provide a catalyst that will make them unafraid of expression using more than just their mouths or words. Viola Spolin is one of the most frequently used authors when it comes to classroom games. Her books *Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook* and *Improvisation for the Theater* are very useful and organized so you can choose specific objectives for a warm-up, such as trust in the classroom, developing character, developing setting, etc. I would also recommend Gavin Levy's *112 Acting Games* for the same reason. Concerning the mental warm-up, often I have students write a response to a question I post on the board. In this case, the questions will remain the same each day (see Appendix Figure 2). These questions will apply to one or two audio selections from musicals to which students will listen. Selections can vary from musicals we have studied or are about to study, selections from other musicals that cover similar themes, or possibly two contrasting perspectives of a particular freedom. The content of each lesson will depend on what the teacher wants from each lesson. For a list of suggested pairings and a brief summary of the use of this pair, see Appendix Figure 3. It is important that students are only provided the audio and written lyrics at first. Part of their excitement will derive from guessing to what musical the song belongs and when the musical was produced. The larger goal is to develop a language of analysis that students can apply to subsequent scene selections and their own work. Guessing the time period forces them to draw on historical background knowledge and apply it to the themes they believe are present in a song, and then legitimize why this song might be appropriate for that time period.

Activity 3

Once students are reminded of the vocabulary of analysis they will employ, they can then move on to specific musicals. Give students scene selections chosen specifically to explore the freedoms that make each musical unique. Read through the scene, either in performance or at their desks, and have them evaluate the scene based on character needs, setting, and conflict. From this information, ask them what might be the historical contexts of the show (when was it written, and what was happening at the time). Again, their curiosity and background knowledge will guide discussion towards the teacher revealing the actual historical context of the show. Challenge students to find ways to make audiences sympathize with one character or another by changing posture, voice tone, or way they share the stage with other characters.

Activity 4

Finally, as a summarizing strategy, ask students to develop their own character that values the particular freedoms discussed in class. This should take no longer than five minutes and will be used as source material when students have to write their own work. Identify what the character needs, who/what might prevent him from getting what he needs, and a situation where these two might come into conflict. To keep a visual archive of the freedoms you have explored as a class, have students post on the wall the new freedoms discussed during each lesson along with the freedoms and needs discussed in Activity 1. By the end of the class, there will be a running log of freedom throughout American history that students can draw upon as inspiration for their final performance. This activity will also serve as a reviewing tool that answers the essential questions of each day's lesson.

Activity 5

The culminating activity of this unit puts student analysis to practice by challenging them to make their own musical. Naturally, a full-length musical is too large for a beginner drama class, or other classes with little theater experience. Hence, the goal will be to perform a mini-musical that explores a freedom students believe is necessary to their lives. This activity will take five-six days, to allow for idea development, script writing, rehearsal, and presentation.

Performance Day One: Give students their Playbill Assignment. This is a written assignment that ensures students have justification for the decisions they will make in their show. See Appendix Figure 5 for Assignment Rubric. For their performance, in groups, students must identify the freedoms they feel are reflective of the times in which they live. Encourage them to use the "needs" from Activity 1 and the growing list of freedoms posted on the wall throughout the unit. From this point, have them look back into their notes to find a character they wrote about in Activity 4 that compliments the needs/freedom they wish to dramatize. This character will function as the protagonist. They should also have developed an antagonist in Activity 4 by writing about who would inhibit the protagonist's freedom. Their tendency will be to use an authority figure like parent or teacher, but question whether the antagonist needs to have an authority role to infringe upon the protagonist's freedom. Finally, choose a setting and situation that places these characters in direct conflict. All students must have a role, so it might be valuable to have multiple protagonists who have similar needs. While multiple characters may need the freedom to self-expression, one may exercise this need by playing an instrument and another by getting a new haircut. By the end of Day One, students should have a concept, with a protagonist/antagonist conflict, setting, and the beginning of a situation with beginning middle and end. Before starting on the actual script, students should complete the first draft to their director's note in the Playbill Assignment. This director's note will give students direction by asking them why they think the freedom they have chosen is relevant to their lives and why they chose to create these specific characters.

Performance Day Two will allow student the time to have their concept and director's note approved by the teacher. Once they have a clear direction, students will write their script and start the search for a song appropriate for one of their characters. Songs can be recordings from other artists or created by the students. If a student is uncomfortable with singing, lip sync with a good recording will suffice, provided that the student stays in character while lip syncing.

Performance Day Three is the first scratch performance of their script. Have each group present a reading (meaning, just sit in chairs and read the script aloud) while their classmates analyze what they believe is the type of freedom being explored. This will allow performers to see if their intentions were clearly communicated to the audience. Specifically ask students "What are the needs of each character?" Even the antagonist has a need and each should be clearly identified. If obscurity is present, allow students to make suggestions as to how the performance can make character needs and overall freedom themes more apparent. If the teacher has access to video recording, it is always helpful for students to hear feedback and then watch their own performance to look for ways to fix problems.

Performance Days Four and Five should be dedicated completely to rehearsal. Any adjustments based on feedback from the previous day's evaluations can be made during this time. Also, this is when students can simply work on memorizing their lines or blocking their scene (planning the movement of actors, where props/set pieces should be placed, etc.).

Finally, Performance Day Six is when students present their final performance. Be sure to allow time in the schedule for transition between each performance, for collecting written work, placing props and set pieces, etc. While each performance takes place, audience members should again write about the needs of each character, this time citing evidence in the performance that show these needs. On this day, students should submit their final Playbills as well.

Appendix

Figure 1: Delaware State Theatre Standards Addressed in this Unit

1.6 - Explore human issues and various outcomes in order to devise a performance piece that is linear in presentation form. – Students will explore freedom in America and create their own performance that explores a freedom they think is necessary to their lives.

1.7 - Write an original one- act play with clearly developed characters, setting, conflict and resolution – The culminating activity of this unit will have students write their own mini-musical of one act with all of the above elements mentioned.

2.3 - Identify character motivations through research and analysis and be able to articulate how they affect the character's actions – Students will analyze key characters in each play and cite the motivation for their actions in selected scenes and songs. Additionally, they will develop their own characters that represent the needs of their generation.

4.1 - Analyze the meaning of improvised or scripted scenes, scenarios and/or plays – Students will watch and act out scenes and listen to songs, evaluating them on what type of freedom is represented in each selection.

4.2 - Create a concept that conveys meaning for a scripted scene (be it linear, episodic, abstract) through the use of metaphor, mood

or theme – Freedom is the central theme to all of this unit, so everything examined and created will be based on a particular construct of freedom.

6.3 - Incorporate elements of dance, music, and visual arts to express ideas and emotions in improvised and structured scenes. – Students will listen to and write their own songs that explore a particular type of freedom.

8.2 - Analyze dramatic works in the context of the culture, time and place in which they originated. – Students will answer why certain freedoms are explored at particular points in American history.

8.4 - Assess the socialcultural and economic impact of theatre art on society. – Students will evaluate how the specific musicals chosen may have impacted how Americans viewed freedom during that point in history.

Figure 2: Audio Activator/Warm-up Questions

What does the person in this story want/need? How does this song sound (fast/slow, loud/soft, lots of drums/flutes, etc.) and what does that tell you about how the character feels/thinks? What images come to mind when you listen to this song? What musical do you think this song is from? What year do you think this musical was produced? What do you think was happening historically when this musical was made? Who is this song/scene written for? What is the freedom this person/these people are trying to express? If there are two songs, how are these songs similar/different?

Figure 3: Suggested List of Songs to Pair for Audio Activator/Warm-up

-"America," *West Side Story* / "Not for the Life of Me," *Thoroughly Modern Millie /* "Oklahoma," *Oklahoma!*: Freedom to a better life, Freedom from an imperfect past

-"Jet Song," *West Side Story* / "Brotherhood of Man," *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying:* Freedom to community, belonging.

-"Rent," *Rent* / "Ain't Got No," *Hair*: freedom from an authority (beware cursing)

-"Seasons of Love," *Rent* / "Easy to be Hard," *Hair*: freedom to love, freedom from cruelty

-"Hooverville," *Annie* / "Privilege to Pee" *Urinetown* / "Act I Finale," *Urinetown*: freedom from poverty, irresponsible capitalism

-"The Company Way," *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* / "Run, Freedom, Run" *Urinetown*: freedom to autonomy

Figure 4: End-of-Class Create-a-Character Basic Worksheet Headings

Freedom: Character NeedsWho/What Might Prevent Character from Getting these NeedsSituation where the two characters might come into conflict:

Figure 5: Playbill Assignment

Often when musicals are created, there is additional marketing that theaters develop to let the audience know more about the show. One of the primary ways that musicals communicate important information about the creation of the show is through a program or Playbill. As a group, you will create you own Playbill including the following information (Be sure to answer ALL of the questions in each section):

1. Director's Note: Consider yourselves the directors of the show. As a group, write a director's note about what freedom you chose to explore, and tell audiences why you think this freedom is important to the lives of modern Americans. What freedoms do

Americans lack that you think they should fight for? Why did you choose your song, and how does it contribute to your intentions? Finally, cite examples of at least one other musical that you consider an influence for your musical and explain how it influenced your musical.

2. Character Biography: Each performer should write a biography for their character. What are your character's needs? What is his/her relationship with other characters. What do their relationships and actions tell audiences about how they experience freedom? Provide a personal history that explains significant events in his/her life and how these events affected the character.

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