

a beat**by**beat book

Teaching Musical Theatre

The Essential
Handbook



16 Ready-to-Go
Lesson Plans to
Build a Better Actor

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*All lesson plans are designed as 60-minute sessions for kids age 7-14.
The lessons do not need to be followed in order.*

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Introduction

The goal of this book is to provide you with specific tools and lesson plans to help you develop the growth of the actors in your musical theatre program.

It can be easy to get lost in the fun and games of musical theatre because, let's face it, musicals are super fun! But it's important to make sure that when teaching musical theatre, every activity is working towards building a foundation that will help your actors be successful onstage. It's incredible what young performers can accomplish when they are given the right goals and guidance.

Similar to *Teaching Drama: The Essential Handbook*, the layout of this resource is meant to recreate the experience of being "in the classroom" observing an expert teacher introduce these concepts to a beginning class of students. Text written in *italics* represents how I would specifically communicate ideas and instructions. You can implement these lessons just as they're written, or use them as a guide and combine them with your own activities.

The first 11 lessons are focused on exploring and discovering the skills necessary to be a great musical theatre actor (singing, dancing, acting). The last 5 lessons are focused on helping students integrate those skills into a fun and effective performance.

These lessons can be used in parallel with specific songs and scenes you are rehearsing (for a musical or cabaret), or they can be used as the backbone of a general musical theatre class. There are suggestions throughout this book for specific songs you can use, but you should free free to replace them with any songs that best match your students' ability and interest.

I hope you enjoy what I think are the best activities for introducing your students to the world of musical theatre!

About the Author

For nearly a decade **DENVER CASADO** has worked as an arts educator with New York City's leading theatre organizations including *Disney Theatricals*, *New York City Center* and *Young Audiences New York*. Denver's innovative approach to exploring theatre with kids has earned him invitations to speak at the national conferences of the *American Association of Community Theatre* and the *American Alliance for Theatre Education*. In 2011 he was honored with the All Stars Projects' Phyllis Hyman award, in recognition of his important contribution to the creative growth and development of over 20,000 young people in the NYC public school system. Denver is a graduate of New York University's Steinhardt School of Education.



Lesson Activity Overview

Lesson 1

Lesson 2

Confidence & Relaxation
Vocal Warm Up
Emotional Staircase
Newsies Exploration
Emotional Staircase Improv

Lesson 3

Lesson 4

Lesson 5

Lesson 6

Lesson 7

Lesson 8

Lesson 10

Lesson 11

Lesson 12

Lesson 13

Lesson 14

Lesson 15

Lesson 16

The purchased version shows every activity in every lesson =)

Music Cues Track List

When I teach these lessons, I typically jump over to the piano whenever I need to musically illustrate a point. Since I can't be in all of your classrooms, I created and compiled these music cues that you can use. It's like having a virtual accompanist! Some of the tracks are fully orchestrated examples from our catalogue of musicals, and others are piano-only created specifically for this book. Of course if you have a *real* accompanist that works with you, even better. Discuss your lesson plans beforehand so that he or she can plan examples to play.

CUE #	TITLE	DESCRIPTION
1	Song Style #1 - Jazzy	"Jazz Hands" from <i>The Grunch</i>
2	Song Style #2 - Tango	"Tangueros" from <i>Musicville</i>
3	Song Style #3 - Inspirational	"Blarg A Riptoo" from <i>Space Pirates</i>
4	Song Style #4 - Eerie	Opening of <i>The Most Epic Birthday Party Ever</i>
5	Song Style #5 - Funk	"The Subalubbles" from <i>Journey of the Noble Gnarble</i>
6	Sad & Lonely	Piano, Charlie Brown-type sad song
7	Relaxation Exercise	Piano and synth pad
8	Vocal Warm-Up: Ha Ha Ha	Piano
9	Vocal Warm-Up: Me May Mo	Piano
10	Song A: Sad	Piano
11	Song B: Curious	
12	Song C: Mellow	
13	Song D: Dark	
14	Song E: Happy	Piano
15	"My Treehouse" Vocal Track	From <i>The Most Epic Birthday Party Ever</i>
16	"My Treehouse" Accompaniment Track	From <i>The Most Epic Birthday Party Ever</i>
17	Vocal Warm-Up: M&Ms	Piano
18	Vocal Warm-Up: Bubble Gum	Piano
19	Vocal Warm-Up: Po Po Ka Ta Petal	Piano
20	Vocal Warm-Up: Bumblebee	Piano
21	Vocal Warm-Up: Vah Veh Vee Voh Voo	Piano
22	Vocal Warm-Up: Go 'Way From My...	Piano
23	Uptempo Dance Music	"My and My Screen" from <i>Giants in the Sky</i>

These song titles are clickable on the purchased version.

Click the song titles above to play the MP3s in your internet browser. (You must be connected to the internet.)

Lesson 2: Storytelling in Musicals

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn about the “emotional staircase” and how it’s the basis of storytelling in musical theatre.

MATERIALS:

- Handheld Mirror
- Newsies YouTube Clip (https://youtu.be/GmKUI_RzfR8)
 - Clip Title: *Newsies - Tony Awards 2012*
- Large writing surface

GREETING:

- Ask the class to recall what 3 things are used to tell stories in musicals (dialogue, song, dance).
- Ask a few students to share their drama journal “Show Card” assignments from the last class.
- *Does anyone know what we call someone who can sing, act and dance? A triple threat.*
- *Our goal is for everyone in this class to become a triple-threat. That’s why as we continue to explore and learn about musical theatre, we’ll begin every class with a movement and voice warm-up.*

MOVEMENT WARM-UP: Confidence & Relaxation

- Gather the class into a standing circle.
- Take out a pocket mirror.
- Tell the class you will be passing around the mirror. When they receive it, they must strike a strong pose, look into the mirror, say 2 factual things they notice about themselves, and end with “...and that is good!”. The whole class will then repeat “That is good!”.
- Give a demonstration: (looking into the mirror) *I have short brown hair, and green eyes... and that is good!* Class repeats: *That is good!*
- Pass the mirror around the circle.
- Tell the class you will give them 1-minute to turn to their neighbors and say 2 things they like about him/her...go! (*i.e. I like your shoes, I like that you’re funny, etc.*)
- *To be great musical actors, we must be confident in ourselves. We must not worry what other people think because we will often be doing things that seem silly! Musical theatre is an exaggerated art form, so we must feel strong and safe and always be willing to take big risks.*
- Lead the class through a series of stretching/relaxation exercises:
 - *Quietly take a strong breath in, and then slowly let it out in 5 seconds. Repeat 2x.*

- *Stretch your hands way up to the sky, as far as you can reach. Drop your hands down and touch your toes.*
- *Stand up straight, drop your head and roll it around in a circle. Switch directions.*
- *Roll your shoulders back. Roll your shoulders forward.*
- *Take a big breath in. Now let it out shaking out your whole body while buzzing your lips. Ask the class how they feel. Great!*

Play [Music Cue #7](#) during the relaxation exercise, or any calming instrumental music.

VOCAL WARM-UP:

- Tell the class to take a seat. *We're now going to warm-up our voices.*
- Explain proper singing position: Sitting at the edge of the seat, with their back up straight. Have everyone give it a try. Walk around positively evaluating their posture. Tell them from now on whenever you call out "*Ready to Sing!*" this is the position they should take.
- Make a quick game out of this: Tell the class to sit like they are lazy on the couch at home watching TV. Then say *Ready to Sing!* and watch as they pop up into position. Repeat a few times between "*lazy on the couch*" and "*Ready to Sing!*"
- Compliment them on how professional they look!
- Instruct the class: *When I say "go", using the sound "Ahh", I want you to sing from your highest note all the way down to your lowest note in 10 seconds. Ready...go!* Do it with them, counting down with your fingers 10 to 1.
- You can joke they sort of sound like a robot powering down =)
- Tell them we're going to do it again, but this time in only 5 seconds.
- Then 3 seconds.
- Have the students place their hands on their stomachs and shout "Ha!".
- Explain that this is where the "good air" for singing comes from. They should feel their bellies bounce.
- Introduce Vocal Warm-Up #1 below, an arpeggio on the word "Ha!" [[Music Cue #8](#)]

Throughout this book I will be introducing and repeating a variety of vocal warm-ups. Feel free to mix and match as desired based on the age-level of your students and what they respond to. And of course you can add your own as well! You can see all the vocal warm-ups on Pages 60-61 in the bonus section.

We will go more in depth with proper singing technique in Lessons 5 & 6.

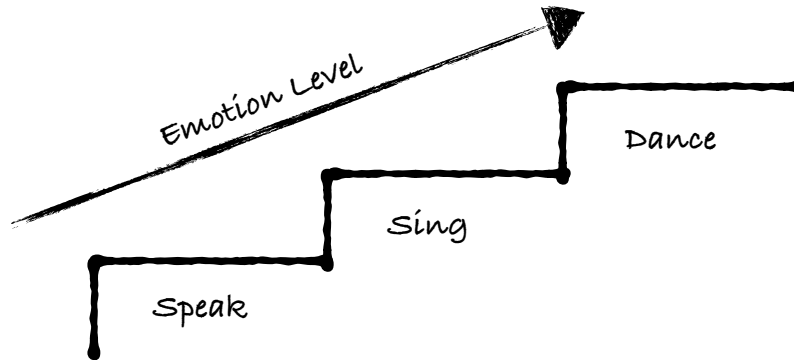
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.

Keep repeating a half-step higher, 4 or 5 more times.

- *Now our bodies and voices are warmed up and we're ready to learn.*

EXPLORE: Musical Theatre Emotional Staircase

- In the last lesson, we explored how music has this amazing way of conveying feelings. Today we're going to explore this a little further.
- In musicals there is an "emotional staircase" that exists. It has 3 steps, and characters move up the steps as their emotion heightens.
- Draw the following on the board and explain each step in detail:



Step 1: Speak*

Just as in a regular play (or TV show or movie), characters have wants and intentions and they use dialogue and speech as a way to convey those wants.

Step 2: Sing

In a musical, characters move up the stairs to the next step, singing, when speaking isn't enough. Characters in a musical "break into song" because something happens that heightens the dramatic moment, and they are in a place of *more*: *more* intensity, *more* action, *more* wants, *more* needs. In some cases there are *more* obstacles working against them, *more* problems to solve, *more* resistance to overcome. (You can give examples from any of their favorite Disney movies.)

Step 3: Dance

This third step is when words fail the characters completely, and they must dance. The wordless, physical explosion of dance is a final attempt to communicate using every fiber of one's body. It's not enough to talk about something; it's not enough to sing about it. Now the character must try to embody the thing itself. (i.e. The scene where Beauty and the Beast dance together.)

* The above descriptions are adapted from Tracey Moore's *Acting the Song: Performance Skills for the Musical Theatre*.

EXPLORE: Newsies Clip

- *Let's take a look at this in action. I'm going to play a short clip from the Broadway production of Newsies.*
- Ask if anyone knows what the show is about. *Newsies tells the story of a group of young boys, mostly orphans and from poor families, who make ends meet by delivering newspapers in New York City in 1899. When they realize they are being taken advantage of by the large publisher, they decide to band together and do something about it: strike!* Play the clip.
- *What did you think about the performance?*
- *Did you see the characters move up the emotional staircase? Why do you think they began dancing?*
- *What qualities did the actors have that made the performance so entertaining?*
- Draw a stick figure on the board and list all the qualities with arrows coming from the stick figure.
- *These are skills we'll be working on as we train to be great musical actors.*

You can play any clip you'd like here that shows an energetic performance, but I highly recommend Newsies because the music and characters are relatable to young actors, and it will get even the "coolest" boys excited about singing and dancing.

If you happen to be using chart paper, save this sheet. It will come in handy for creating the performance rubric in Lesson 12.

The story of Newsies is based on true events. If you'd like to go in more detail with your students about the strike, I've included a newspaper article excerpt on Page 66 in the bonus section.

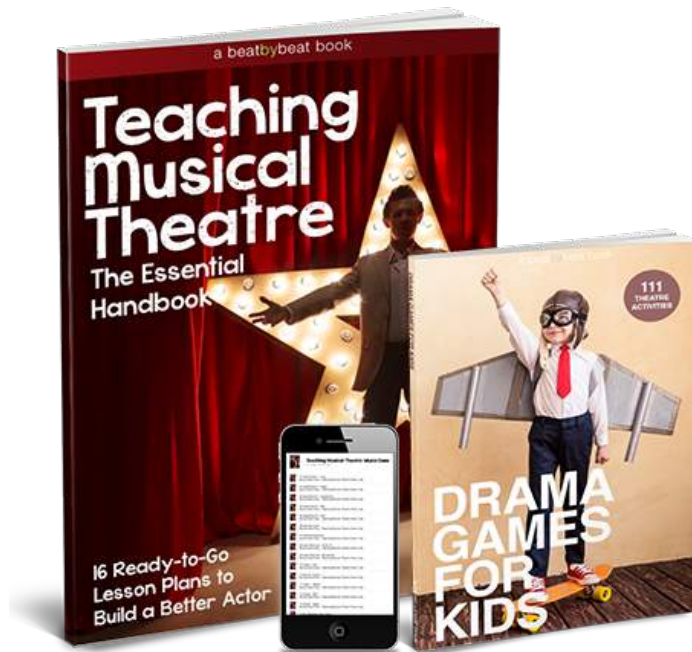
ACTIVITY: Emotional Staircase Improv

- Give a funny improv example of moving up the emotional staircase: talking, then singing, then dancing. For example, you're watching TV with your friend to see if you've won the lottery (speech), the numbers are being drawn and you sing that this could finally be your chance (sing), you win the jackpot (dance!)
- Ask for volunteers, 2 at a time, to come up and improv their own progression up the staircase. Provide them with specific conflicts or ask the class for suggestions (i.e. Class starts in 5 minutes and your homework is due but you haven't even started yet. They should begin by talking, then singing, then dancing as the emotional level rises.
- Optional: You can use **[Music Cues #1-5]** as underscoring.
- *How did it feel as an actor? As an audience member?*

REFLECTION

- *Drama Journal: Draw a picture of the emotional staircase.*
- *Newsies is a musical about a real historical event. Can you imagine an event from history that could inspire a musical? What would be the title of the hit song? Write it in your journal.*

Teaching Musical Theatre: The Essential Handbook



- ✓ 70-page eBook with 16 Lesson Plans (\$20 Value)
- ✓ BONUS #1: 23 Professional Music Cues (\$20 Value)
- ✓ BONUS #2: "My Treehouse" Sheet Music & Tracks (\$15 Value)
- ✓ BONUS #3: Drama Games for Kids eBook (\$14.95 Value)
- ✓ Instant download
- ✓ A lifetime license to print/copy for personal classroom use
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