



WHIZZER

UNLIKELY
LOVERS



MENDEL

NERVOUS
WRECKS

MUSIC & LYRICS BY
William Finn

Love
Can Tell
A Million
Stories



MARVIN

A
TIGHT-KNIT
FAMILY



TRINA

SHORT
INSOMNIACS

Falsettos

BOOK BY
William Finn & James Lapine



DR. CHARLOTTE

DIRECTED BY
James Lapine



JASON

THE
LESBIANS
NEXT DOOR



CORDELIA

Teacher Resource Guide

André Bishop

Producing Artistic Director

Adam Siegel

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Development & Planningin association with **Jujamcyn Theaters**

presents

Falsettos

Music and Lyrics by **William Finn**Book by **William Finn and James Lapine**

with (in alphabetical order)

Stephanie J. Block Christian Borle Andrew Rannells**Anthony Rosenthal Tracie Thoms Brandon Uranowitz Betsy Wolfe**

Sets

David Rockwell

Costumes

Jennifer Caprio

Lighting

Jeff Croiter

Sound

Dan Moses Schreier

Music Direction

Vadim Feichtner

Orchestrations

Michael Starobin

Casting

**Tara Rubin, CSA
Eric Woodall, CSA**

Production Stage Manager

Scott Taylor RollisonMindich Chair
Musical Theater Associate Producer**Ira Weitzman**

General Manager

Jessica Niebanck

Production Manager

Paul Smithyman

Director of Marketing

Linda Mason Ross

General Press Agent

Philip Rinaldi

Choreography

Spencer Liff

Directed by

James Lapine

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The SHS Foundation • The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation
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Introduction

Welcome to the teacher’s resource guide for Lincoln Center Theater’s revival of *Falsettos*, William Finn and James Lapine’s Tony Award-winning musical exploring family, love, and loss. This seven-person musical, a combination of two previously produced Off-Broadway musicals by Finn and Lapine, broke new ground when it first premiered on Broadway in 1992. It was celebrated for its heart, humor, and poignancy. This production, directed by Lapine and featuring a stellar cast that includes Christian Borle (*Something Rotten!*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Mary Poppins*, television’s *Smash*) and Andrew Rannells (*The Book of Mormon*, television’s *Girls*) provides students with an opportunity to see this groundbreaking musical; a musical that remains as resonant and relevant today, as relationships, gender roles, and traditional family structures continue to evolve and transform.

Set in the late 1970s and early 1980s in New York City, *Falsettos* chronicles a time of change, confusion, and unrest, before and during the onset of the AIDS epidemic. As illustrated through the story of Marvin, a Jewish father who has left his wife and son to be with his male lover, *Falsettos* illuminates the hopes, fears, and attitudes that arose during this challenging time using the deeply emotional and affecting form of the musical.

Falsettos provides many learning opportunities for students in areas related to:

- the history and trajectory of the AIDS crisis and the struggle for gay rights;
- the role of theater, art, and community organizing as a tool for activism and social change;
- the musical theater form and its creative tools;
- the evolution of the modern family and gender roles in society.

How to Use This Guide

Arts experiences resonate most strongly for students when themes and ideas from the play can be aligned to your curriculum. This resource guide has been created to help prepare your students to see *Falsettos*. We also hope to direct you to resources that can further your classroom exploration of the play. We encourage you to print and share pages of this guide with your students. Throughout the guide you will find resources, including links to materials and videos available online, as well as discussion questions and suggested classroom activities that you can use before or after seeing the production.

The overall goals of this guide are to:

- connect to your curriculum with standards-based information and activities;
- reinforce and encourage your students to exercise critical and analytical thinking skills;
- and, to provide you with the tools to have an engaging and educational experience at the theater.

The Musical

The Story

Act One

It is 1979 in New York City. The main characters are introduced and provide an overview of the issues they will be dealing with as the story progresses. Marvin has recently left his wife Trina and his son Jason to be with his male lover Whizzer. Despite disrupting his wife and son's life, Marvin still dreams that they will all come together as a family. Trina goes to see Marvin's therapist Mendel and explains all that has transpired with Marvin. Meanwhile, Marvin and Whizzer are having problems of their own as they move past the passion of the early days of their relationship. Marvin returns to his therapy sessions with Mendel and tries to sort out his feelings while Mendel prods Marvin for information about Trina, whom he has developed an interest in. Stuck in the middle of all this, Jason tries to come to grips with his newly unconventional family and wonders if he will inherit his father's homosexuality.

Concerned about Jason's well-being, Trina, Marvin and Whizzer convince Jason to see a psychiatrist. Jason reluctantly agrees to see Mendel if he will make a house visit. As the act progresses, everyone is strug-



Christian Borle as Marvin and Andrew Rannells as Whizzer in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Act One song list

"Four Jews in a Room Bitching"

WHIZZER, MARVIN, JASON, MENDEL

"A Tight Knit Family"

MARVIN, MENDEL

"Love is Blind"

MARVIN, JASON, WHIZZER,
MENDEL, TRINA

"Thrill of First Love"

MARVIN, WHIZZER

**"Marvin at the Psychiatrist
(A Three-Part Mini-Opera)"**

JASON, MENDEL, WHIZZER, MARVIN

"My Father's a Homo"

JASON

**"Everyone Tells Jason to
See a Psychiatrist"**

JASON, MARVIN, TRINA, WHIZZER

**"This Had Better Come
to a Stop"**

MARVIN, WHIZZER, JASON,
TRINA, MENDEL

"I'm Breaking Down"

TRINA

"Please Come To Our House"

TRINA, MENDEL, JASON

"Jason's Therapy"

MENDEL, TRINA, WHIZZER,
MARVIN, JASON

"A Marriage Proposal"

MENDEL, TRINA, JASON

gling to keep it together. Marvin and Whizzer are at odds, Trina is breaking down, and Jason harbors a great deal of resentment toward his father. When Mendel arrives at the house for Jason’s therapy session, Jason plots to bring Trina and Mendel together. Mendel proposes, Trina agrees, and Marvin is outraged. As the act closes, Marvin and Whizzer’s relationship comes to an abrupt and angry end, Trina and Mendel begin their new life together, and Marvin reconciles with Jason.

Act Two

It is 1981 in New York City when we meet the characters again. Marvin and Trina are at odds as they try and plan Jason’s bar mitzvah. Trina, Mendel, Marvin, and Marvin’s neighbors, Cordelia and Dr. Charlotte, a lesbian couple, cheer Jason on at a baseball game. Whizzer surprises everyone by showing up at the game, and Marvin and Whizzer happily end up back together again.

During a game of racquetball with Marvin, Whizzer collapses and is taken to the hospital. Everyone arrives at the hospital and learns that Whizzer has a very serious and likely fatal disease that Dr. Charlotte has seen wreaking havoc on the gay community. In the midst of the chaos, Trina and Marvin plead with Jason to decide what he wants to do about his bar mitzvah. Each of the characters is forced to confront what Whizzer’s tragic predicament means to them, and how to move forward. Jason ultimately decides to have his bar mitzvah in Whizzer’s hospital room and make his symbolic transition from boyhood to manhood surrounded by the unique family and friends he loves and who love him.



The company in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *Falsettos*.
Photo by Joan Marcus.

Act One song list, continued

“A Tight Knit Family (Reprise)”

MARVIN, MENDEL

“Trina’s Song”

TRINA

“March of the Falsettos”

MENDEL, MARVIN, JASON, WHIZZER

“Trina’s Song (Reprise)”

TRINA

“The Chess Game”

MARVIN, WHIZZER

“Making a Home”

MENDEL, JASON, TRINA, WHIZZER

“The Games I Play”

WHIZZER

“Marvin Goes Crazy”

MARVIN, MENDEL, JASON,
TRINA, WHIZZER

“I Never Wanted to Love You”

MARVIN, MENDEL, JASON,
TRINA, WHIZZER

“Father to Son”

MARVIN, JASON

Act Two song list

“Welcome to Falsettoland”/

“It’s About Time”

THE COMPANY/MARVIN

“The Year of the Child”

THE COMPANY

“Miracle of Judaism”

THE COMPANY

“The Baseball Game”

THE COMPANY



The Characters

Marvin: Trina’s ex-husband and Jason’s father

Trina: Marvin’s ex-wife and Jason’s mother

Jason: Marvin and Trina’s pre-adolescent son

Whizzer: Marvin’s lover

Mendel: Marvin’s therapist, who also becomes Trina and Jason’s therapist, and later Trina’s husband

Dr. Charlotte: Marvin’s neighbor; a doctor

Cordelia: Marvin’s neighbor and Charlotte’s partner; a caterer



Act Two song list, continued

“A Day in Falsettoland”

THE COMPANY

“Racquetball I”

WHIZZER, MARVIN

“The Fight”

JASON, TRINA, MARVIN, MENDEL

“Everyone Hates His Parents”

MENDEL, JASON, MARVIN, TRINA

“What More Can I Say”

MARVIN, WHIZZER

“Something Bad Is Happening”

CHARLOTTE, CORDELIA

“Racquetball II”

WHIZZER, MARVIN

“Holding to the Ground”

TRINA

“Days Like This”

THE COMPANY

“Cancelling the Bar Mitzvah”

JASON, MENDEL, TRINA

“Unlikely Lovers”

MARVIN, WHIZZER,
CHARLOTTE, CORDELIA

“Another Miracle of Judaism”

JASON

“You Gotta Die Sometime”

WHIZZER

“Jason’s Bar Mitzvah”

THE COMPANY

“What Would I Do?”

MARVIN, WHIZZER

Top Left: Christian Borle as Marvin and Andrew Rannells as Whizzer in Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Matthew Murphy. Top Right: Anthony Rosenthal as Jason and Stephanie J. Block as Trina in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Joan Marcus. Bottom: Tracie Thoms as Dr. Charlotte and Betsy Wolfe as Cordelia in Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Matthew Murphy.

The Writers

William Finn

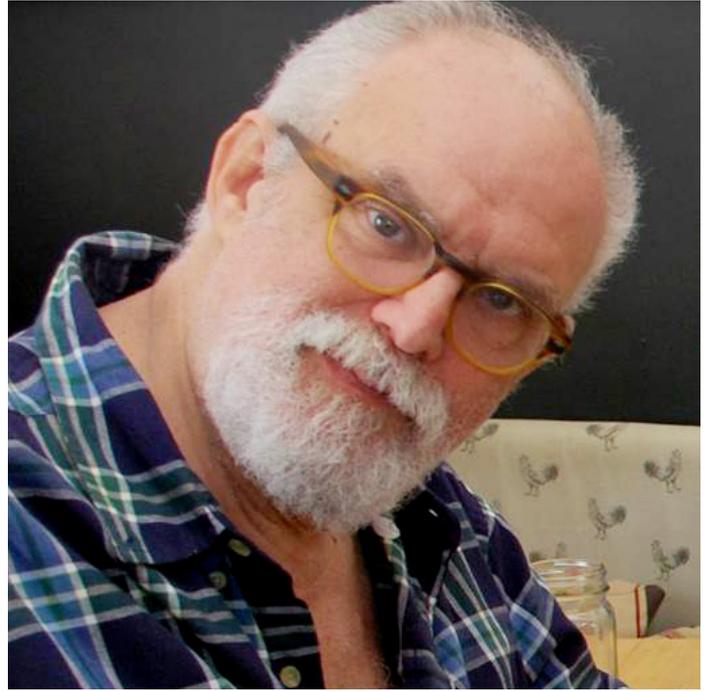
William Finn is the award-winning composer and lyricist of *Falsettos*. He grew up the oldest of three children in Natick, Massachusetts and began composing music on a guitar he received for his bar mitzvah. He attended Williams College, where he studied literature and American Studies, and wrote and performed in musicals for fun. He was awarded the Hutchinson Fellowship in Musical Composition by the college. After college he moved to New York City where he became involved in the musical theater scene and met many of the collaborators he continues to work with today.

He has written/composed *In Trousers* (L.A. Drama Critics Award); *Falsettos* (two Tony Awards: Best Book [with James Lapine] and Best Original Score); *March of the Falsettos* (Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Musical, L.A. Drama Critics Award);

Falsettoland (two Drama Desk Awards and Lucille Lortel Award for Best Musical); *Romance in Hard Times* (The Public Theater); and *A New Brain* (Lincoln Center Theater/Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Musical), a musical based on his experience being mis-diagnosed with what was believed to be an inoperable brain tumor, but which turned out to be a treatable vascular disorder.

His most recent projects include *Little Miss Sunshine* (book by James Lapine; La Jolla Playhouse, Playwrights Horizon); *Elegies, A Song Cycle* (Lincoln Center Theater); and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, which took New York by storm, winning two Tony Awards and running for more than 1,000 performances on Broadway. *Spelling Bee* has been produced nationally and internationally and is currently one of the most performed musicals in the United States according to Theatre Communications Group (TCG).

In addition to his work as a writer, he is the Artistic Producer of the Barrington Stage Company's acclaimed Musical Theater Lab, a program dedicated to mentoring emerging writers and developing new musicals. He is also on the faculty of New York University's Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program.



William Finn. Photo by Harry Roseman.

James Lapine

As a longtime collaborator of William Finn's, James Lapine co-wrote and directed the early Off-Broadway productions *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*, and the original Broadway production of *Falsettos*. Other collaborations with Finn include: *A New Brain*, *Muscle*, and *Little Miss Sunshine* Off-Broadway, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* on Broadway.

Lapine was born Mansfield, Ohio and lived there until his early teens when his family moved to Stamford, Connecticut. He began his career as a designer, earning an MFA in Design from the California Institute of the Arts.

After graduate school, he moved to New York City where he worked a variety of part-time and freelance jobs. One of his freelance jobs was at the Yale School of Drama, designing the school magazine and teaching a course in advertising design. While at Yale, his students urged him to direct a play during the annual January period when both faculty and students undertake a project outside of their area of study or expertise. At their suggestion Lapine directed the Gertrude Stein play *Photograph* in New Haven, where it came to the attention of the avant-garde theater director Lee Breuer. Breuer helped arrange for a small production in New York City. The production was enthusiastically received and won Lapine an Obie Award.

Following this success, Lapine became a sought after director. He eventually left the visual arts profession for a career in the theater where he has written and directed numerous plays and musicals, including *Act One*; *Twelve Dreams*; *A New Brain* (book) at Lincoln Center Theater and *Table Settings*; *Luck, Pluck and Virtue*; *The Moment When*; *Fran's Bed*; *Mrs. Miller Does Her Thing*; Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, and *Passion*; the multi-media revue *Sondheim on Sondheim*; and *Merrily We Roll Along* as part of Encores! at New York City Center. On Broadway, he directed David Henry Hwang's *Golden Child*; *The Diary of Anne Frank*; Michel Legrand's *Amour* and the 2012 Broadway revival of *Annie*. In addition, he co-produced and directed the HBO documentary *Six by Sondheim*, and has directed three films. He is the recipient of three Tony Awards, five Drama Desk Awards and the Pulitzer Prize. In 2011, he was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame.



James Lapine. Photo by Monica Simoes.

Classroom Activities

Character Investigation: Post-visit Activity

Investigate

Have each student choose a character to observe and analyze during the performance. They should take note of the following:

- Their physicality (how they dress, move, and present themselves).
- What they say they want throughout the musical.
- Three personality traits.
- The character they experience the most conflict with.
- The character they experience the most harmony with. (It may be the same!)

Write

After the performance, have them write a character biography of their chosen character, making sure to include all the relevant information they observed.

Discuss

Now that they have seen the show, discuss the visual choices that were made for the current graphic/poster design. In addition, have them compare the revival poster design with the original Broadway poster design, <http://www.playbill.com/production/falsettos-john-golden-theatre-vault-0000008390>, which used artwork by Keith Haring.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

The Backdrop: Welcome to Falsettoland

“ For my generation of American gay men, the AIDS epidemic was a second Vietnam War. It reached us as a rumor and soon revealed itself as a killing field. Just as the war had divided the country, so did AIDS. From initial public reports in 1981, through the end of the Reagan presidency in 1989, many people at risk saw the threat as threefold: from the disease itself, from rampant homophobia and from a government that simultaneously withheld help and initiated campaigns of fear.

In those years, combating the enemy was a D.I.Y. mix of community organizing, medical volunteerism and direct action. Art was very much in the picture, because artists were hard hit by the epidemic, but also because art is (or can be) strategically useful. It can broadcast or insinuate messages into the larger culture, embody complex truths, absorb fear, preserve memory. ”

Holland Cotter, 2016; *Art of the AIDS Years: What Took Museums So Long?* The New York Times

Glossary

Judaism: the religion of the Israelites of the Bible and the Jews of today, based on the teachings of the Torah.

Torah: the law and teachings on which Judaism is founded, as recorded in the first five books of the Bible.

Bar Mitzvah: the religious initiation ceremony of a Jewish boy who has reached the age of 13 and is considered ready to take part in religious customs reserved for adult males, such as saying certain prayers



Beth Yaacov Torah, Wikimedia Commons.

and reading from the Torah. Traditionally the boy will perform these prayers and read from the Torah at his local synagogue in the presence of friends and family. Following the synagogue portion, there is usually a big party and meal to celebrate.

Yiddish: a language used by Jews in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust that is still spoken in the US, Israel, and Russia today.

Some Yiddish Words from *Falsettos*

Dreck: something cheap or trashy.

Kosher: foods that conform to the requirements of Jewish law.

Schmo: an ignorant or dull person.

Schpiel: a long speech or argument.

Trayf: not kosher.

Tsouris: trouble and aggravation.

A Sampling of Kosher Cuisine

Canadelach/Kneidlach: aka Matzah balls; soup dumplings made of a mixture of matzah meal, eggs, water and fat.

Gefilte fish: a mixture of poached ground fish, onions, starch, and eggs.

Knish: a filling covered with dough that is baked, grilled, or deep-fried.

Rugelach: a crescent-shaped pastry.

Other References

Neurotic: chronically anxious or worried.

Ronald Reagan: the 40th President of the United States (1981–89). Prior to that, he was the 33rd Governor of California (1967–75), and a radio, film, and television actor. Reagan was known for his conservatism, both in his political platform and social views.

Nancy Reagan: President Reagan’s wife, a former actress, who was known for her fondness for fashion, glamour and her anti-drug campaign, “Just Say No.”

Carl Jung: a famous Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology, an approach to understanding human behavior that focuses on the psyche, dreams, archetypes, and the conscious and unconscious components of the mind.



Top: Yonah Schimmel’s Knish Bakery, Wikimedia Commons. Bottom: President and Mrs. Reagan pose in the Blue Room for their official portrait, 1981, Wikimedia Commons.

Sigmund Freud: an Austrian neurologist who became known as the founding father of psychoanalysis, an approach to understanding human behavior that involves examining the repressed thoughts, emotions, and motivations that shape the human personality.

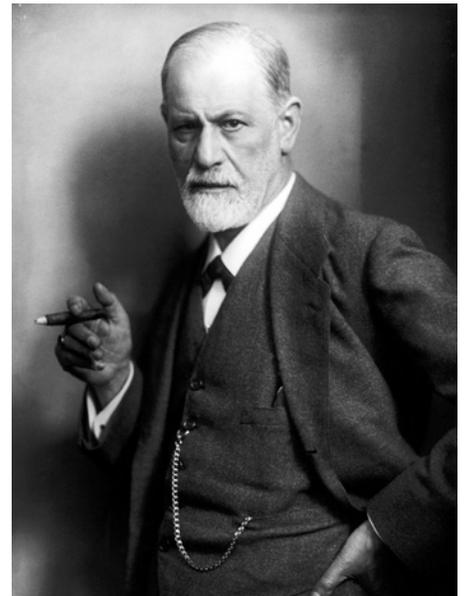
Fortissimo: a musical term meaning very loud.

Hank Greenberg: a premiere hitter for the Detroit Tigers (1930-1946) and the Pittsburgh Pirates (1946-1947), and the first Jewish superstar in American professional baseball.

Sandy Koufax: a left-handed pitcher for the Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers (1955-1966) remembered as one of the outstanding Jewish athletes in American sports.

Hepatitis: a swelling and inflammation of the liver.

Syphilis: a sexually transmitted infection and the most prevalent sexually transmitted disease before the rise of AIDS.



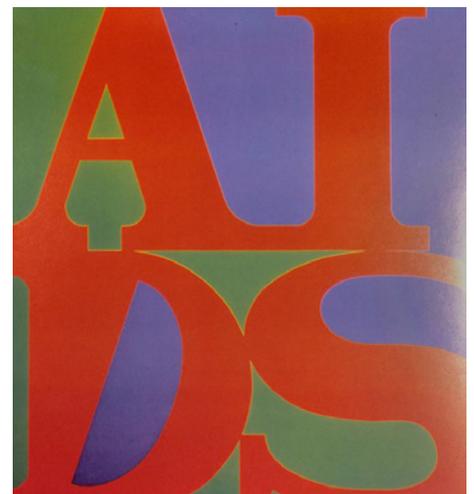
Sigmund Freud by Max Halberstadt, 1921

Understanding the AIDS Crisis

Crisis: a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention.

[Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com)

Fear. Confusion. Devastation. In 1980, inexplicable cases of two rare and fatal diseases afflicting young gay males began cropping up in major cities across the country. Men who were perfectly healthy one day were succumbing to death days or weeks after being diagnosed. One of the diseases was a skin cancer called Kaposi's Sarcoma, and the other was a form of pneumonia called Pneumocystis Pneumonia Carinii (PPC). In the past, both these diseases had commonly affected people who were much older or who had compromised immune systems. By 1981, this disease with no name had taken the lives of 121 men, and five to six new cases of it were being reported weekly. Still, no one could understand exactly what it was, how it was spreading, or what was causing it. Throughout this horrific crisis, artists and activists were at the forefront, using grassroots efforts and their art to unify the community, educate the public, and process their grief. Among those brave pioneers was William Finn.



Gran Fury AIDS Awareness Sticker, New York Public Library Digital Connections.

The following timeline explores Finn’s *Falsettos* within the context of the first decade of the AIDS crisis.

***Falsettos* Timeline: The Musical in Context**

1979 William Finn’s *In Trousers*, the first of his musicals to explore the character of Marvin, is presented Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizon with Finn starring as Marvin.

1980 Ronald Reagan is elected President of the United States on a platform that vows to control federal spending by cutting funding for any non-military programs and policies.

1981 William Finn’s one-act musical *March of the Falsettos*, about a man (Marvin) who leaves his wife and son for a male lover, is presented Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizons.

The New York Times runs its first article about a deadly disease that is affecting the gay community. What is referred to as “gay cancer,” and later called GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency) is reported to have claimed 121 lives.

1982 The Center for Disease Control adopts the acronym AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) for the new disease and determines that it can be transmitted through anal sex and infected blood.

The U.S. begins the formal tracking of AIDS cases.

A group of gay men in New York City form the Gay Men’s Health Crisis to educate both the gay community and the public about the disease, and to support those affected by it.

There are 447 reported AIDS-related deaths in the United States.

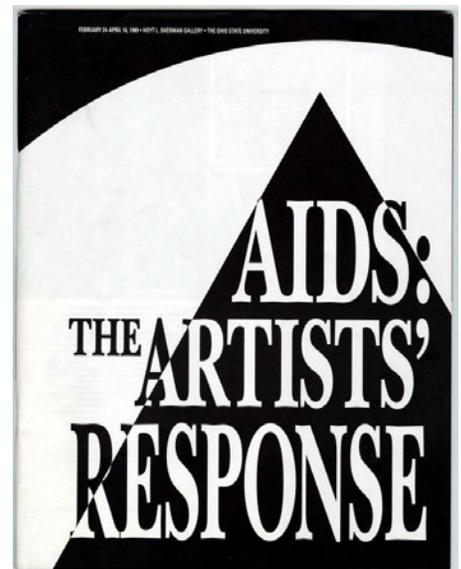
1983 It is discovered that AIDS can be transmitted through vaginal sex.

French scientist Luc Montagnier and his team at the Pasteur Institute isolate a virus in AIDS patients that will later become known as HIV and the cause of AIDS. They name it “lymphadenopathy-associated virus,” or LAV and publish their findings in the journal *Science*.

Larry Kramer publishes the article “1,112 and Counting” outlining the devastating toll the AIDS crisis has taken on the gay community, appealing to the government for help, and urging gay men to stop having sex.

Despite the facts, there is a widespread belief that AIDS can be transmitted through casual contact. Discrimination against those infected is pervasive.

There are 1,476 reported AIDS-related deaths.



Gran Fury publication, New York Public Library Digital Connections.

1984 Building on Luc Montagnier's research, American scientist Robert Gallo reports that his lab has isolated the virus that causes AIDS. After additional research, scientists name the virus HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus).

President Ronald Reagan is re-elected in a landslide victory. He has yet to speak publicly about the AIDS crisis or take action to support the fight against the disease.

There are 3,454 reported AIDS-related deaths.



President Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan posing with actor Rock Hudson at a White House State Dinner for President De La Madrid of Mexico, 1984. Wikimedia Commons.

1985 The federal government licenses an HIV antibody test, and screening of the U.S. blood supply begins.

Larry Kramer's largely autobiographical play *The Normal Heart* about the rise of the AIDS crisis premieres Off-Broadway at The Public Theater.

President Ronald Reagan publicly mentions AIDS for the first time at a press conference.

Ryan White, a 13-year-old hemophiliac with AIDS is barred from school in Indiana.

Hollywood actor Rock Hudson dies of AIDS and the resulting publicity greatly increases AIDS awareness.

Congress allocates \$70 million for AIDS awareness.

There are 6,854 reported AIDS-related deaths.

1986 In the first comprehensive report on AIDS, the U.S. Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine) states that \$2 billion is needed annually for AIDS research and care.

The first panel of the AIDS Memorial Quilt is created in San Francisco.

There are 11,932 reported AIDS-related deaths.

1987 The FDA approves AZT, a potent new AIDS drug that prolongs the life of some patients by reducing infections.

President Ronald Regan gives his first speech addressing the AIDS crisis.

And the Band Played On, a history of the AIDS crisis by reporter Randy Shilts, is published.

There are 16,908 reported AIDS-related deaths.



The AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power. Colour lithograph, 1987. Wikimedia Commons.

1988 The World Health Organization designates December 1st as World AIDS Day to focus attention on fighting the disease.

In New York City, new AIDS cases that result from shared needles exceed those from sexual contact, and the city's Health Department begins an experimental needle exchange program.

There are 20,786 reported AIDS-related deaths.



BECAUSE THEY ARE GAY, BLACK, HISPANIC OR POOR. BY JULY 4, 1989 OVER 55 THOUSAND WILL BE DEAD. TAKE DIRECT ACTION NOW. FIGHT BACK. FIGHT AIDS.

American flag, ACT UP New York. New York Public Library Digital Connections.

1990 William Finn and James Lapine's musical *Falsettoland*, the third in the "Marvin Trilogy", opens at Playwrights Horizon. The plot centers around Marvin and his lover, who is afflicted with AIDS.

Visual artist Keith Haring dies of AIDS.

There are 31,120 AIDS-related deaths.

1991 Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, which will go on to win the 1993 Pulitzer Prize, premieres in San Francisco.

Professional basketball player Magic Johnson announces that he is HIV positive.

10 million people worldwide are estimated to be HIV positive, including 1 million in the U.S.

1992 William Finn and James Lapine's musical *Falsettos*, which combines *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*, premieres on Broadway. It wins Tony Awards for Best Book and Best Score of a Musical.

By the end of 1992, a total of 254,157 Americans have been diagnosed with AIDS and 194,476 people have died from the disease in the U.S.

Since the beginning of the epidemic, more than 70 million people have been infected with the HIV virus and about 35 million people have died of AIDS-related illnesses. Globally, over 36 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2015. No effective cure for HIV currently exists, but with proper treatment and medical care, HIV can now be controlled. Today, a person who is diagnosed with HIV, and who is treated before the disease is advanced, can live nearly as long as someone who does not have HIV.

AIDS statistics sources:

1979- 1990 <https://partners.nytimes.com/library/national/science/aids/timeline91-93.html>

1991-present <http://www.amfar.org/thirty-years-of-hiv/aids-snapshots-of-an-epidemic/>

Classroom Activities

Reagan and the AIDS Crisis: Reflection Activity

Read

Using the close reading strategies outlined here <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/modeling-close-reading-videos-webinars-janice-dole> or your own, have students read and analyze the speech <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/aids/docs/amfar.html> Ronald Reagan gave in 1987 at the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) addressing the AIDS crisis.

Contextualize

Project or provide the class with copies of the timeline and discuss the following:

- What events precede Reagan’s delivery of this speech on the timeline? What events follow it?
- How many people had AIDS by the time this speech was delivered?

Research

Have students conduct research about the Reagan administration, defining the following: Reaganomics, the Recession of the early 1980s, conservatism, deregulation, the Hostage Crisis, the Economic Tax Recovery Act, and “Morning in America.”

Reflect

Have students integrate their research and reflect on the following questions in a short essay.

- Why do you think the Reagan administration stayed silent about the AIDS crisis for so long?
- What impact do you think this had on managing the crisis and the morale of the gay community?
- What do you think the responsibility of the national government is during crises such as this?

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6

Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Classroom Activities

The Fight for Equality: Timeline Activity

Research

The timeline provided in this guide covers a small segment of the overall struggle for gay rights in American history. Provide students with the following list of milestones, and have them conduct research to identify and contextualize these milestones within the larger struggle for gay rights.

- Executive Order 10450
- One, Inc. v. Olesen
- Harvey Milk elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors
- Ryan White Care Act
- “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Policy
- Defense of Marriage Act
- Proposition 8
- The Matthew Shepard Act
- Gay Marriage Legalized in the US

Create

Have students work in small groups to share and refine their research. Have each group create a master timeline with the theme “The Fight For Equality” that integrates these milestones, as well as key events from the *Falsettos* timeline they feel reflect that theme.

Expand

The *Falsettos* timeline ends the year that the musical first appeared on Broadway in 1992. Divide the class into groups and have them research the impact of AIDS from 1992 to the current day.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.



Barbara Gittings picketing the White House in 1965, photo taken by Kay Tobin Lahusen. Wikimedia Commons.

Classroom Activities

AIDS and the Media: Media Literacy Activity

View

As a class, read the 1981 *New York Times* article “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals,” <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/03/us/rare-cancer-seen-in-41-homosexuals.html> and view the 1982 NBC news clip, “Cancer Study” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LKJ5ZzL0w&feature=related> explaining that this was the first media coverage (newspaper article and television news report) addressing what later would be named AIDS.

Discuss

Identify where these reports would fall on the *Falsettos* timeline and discuss the following with the class:

- What information are these media outlets reporting to the public?
- How do they report it? What is the tone? What language do they use?
- How do you think the public reacted to this news coverage?
- How might the media help to raise awareness about a health crisis such as AIDS?
- How might the media hinder awareness or perpetuate fear about health crises?
- What is the responsibility of the media in relation to educating the public and raising awareness about public health issues?



Ignorance = fear: silence = death by Keith Haring, 1989. US National Library of Medicine Digital Collections.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Classroom Activities

Speaking Out: Reflective Activity

Read

Distribute the following text from playwright and AIDS activist Larry Kramer's historic 1983 article "1,112 and Counting:"

If this article doesn't scare the shit out of you, we're in real trouble. If this article doesn't rouse you to anger, fury, rage, and action, gay men may have no future on this earth. Our continued existence depends on just how angry you can get.

I am writing this as Larry Kramer, and I am speaking for myself, and my views are not to be attributed to Gay Men's Health Crisis.

I repeat: Our continued existence as gay men upon the face of this earth is at stake. Unless we fight for our lives, we shall die. In all the history of homosexuality we have never before been so close to death and extinction. Many of us are dying or already dead.

Before I tell you what we must do, let me tell you what is happening to us. There are now 1,112 cases of serious Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. When we first became worried, there were only 41. In only 28 days, from January 13th to February 9th there were 164 new cases, and 73 more dead. The total death tally is now 418. Twenty percent of all cases were registered this January alone. There have been 195 dead in New York City from among 526 victims. Of all serious AIDS cases, 47.3 percent are in the New York metropolitan area.

These are the serious cases of AIDS, which means Kaposi's sarcoma, Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia, and other deadly infections. These numbers do not include the thousands of us walking around with what is also being called AIDS: various forms of swollen lymph glands and fatigues that doctors don't know what to label or what they might portend.

The rise in these numbers is terrifying. Whatever is spreading is now spreading faster as more and more people come down with AIDS.

And, for the first time in this epidemic, leading doctors and researchers are finally admitting they don't know what's going on. I find this terrifying too, as terrifying as the alarming rise in numbers. For the first time, doctors are saying out loud and up front, "I don't know."



Police arresting ACT UP activists. New York Public Library Digital Connections.

Discuss

As a class, outline the main ideas and discuss the content of this article.

Research

Have students research basic biographical information about Larry Kramer– who he is and what he has contributed to the fight against AIDS and for gay rights.

Reflect

For homework, have students read the insert provided in the Playbill (or passed out by Kramer himself) during the 2011 Broadway revival of his play *The Normal Heart* <http://www.playbill.com/article/letter-from-larry-kramer-distributed-following-normal-heart-performances-com-178544> , read The New Yorker article “What Young Gay Men Don’t Understand About AIDS:” <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/what-young-gay-men-dont-know-about-aids> , and write a reflective essay examining the question, “Where are we now?”

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.



Left: ACT UP New York takes over Grand Central Station as part of “Day of Desperation,” a day of coordinated protests organized city-wide on January 23, 1991. Right; Larry Kramer. Photo by David Shankbone.

Classroom Activities

Art as Activism: Research Activity

Brainstorm

Label three pieces of large paper with the focus words: ART, COMMUNITY, and ACTIVISM, one focus word on each paper. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group to one of the three papers. Working with their group, have students brainstorm and list words and ideas associated with their focus word on the large paper.

Discuss

Display the three brainstorming lists and discuss how they intersect by circling words that are similar across the three lists.

Plan

Ask students to pair up and come up with a list of five ways art, community, and activism could be used to educate the public, protest government policies and actions (or inaction), raise awareness, and support those affected by the AIDS crisis.

Research

Have students research and write a report on one of the following (or identify their own figure, organization, or event) that was pivotal in using art, community, and activism during the AIDS crisis:

- ACT UP
- Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)
- World AIDS Day
- Keith Haring
- NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt
- Gran Fury
- Alison Gertz: Love Heals
- The Red Ribbon Project
- Day Without Art
- amFAR
- Housing Works

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

WITH 47,524 DEAD, ART IS NOT ENOUGH

Our culture gives artists permission to name oppression, a permission denied those oppressed.

Outside the pages of this catalogue, permission is being seized by many communities to save their own lives.

WE URGE YOU TO TAKE COLLECTIVE DIRECT ACTION TO END THE AIDS CRISIS



Top: Art is not enough, Gran Fury Collection. New York Public Library Digital Connections. Bottom: NAMES Projects AIDS Memorial Quilt by National Institutes of Health via Wikimedia Commons.

The Form: Sing, Sing, Sing!

The Sung-through Musical

What it is

The sung-through musical is similar to opera in that it tells its story almost solely through music and lyrics with little or no spoken dialogue. In opera, the music takes precedence. In a sung-through musical, there is a delicate balance between the music, lyrics, staging, and choreography that is crucial to the storytelling. The lyrics and music can't simply entertain, they must encapsulate the story and the themes, dramatize pivotal moments in the plot, move the story forward, and reveal the character's inner thoughts, feelings, and motivations.



Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber pioneered the genre with *Jesus Christ Superstar* and then popularized it with many of his other shows such as *Cats* and *Evita*. The rock musical *Rent* and the hip-hop inspired musical *Hamilton* are also examples of sung-through musicals.

What to Expect

The characters are going to sing, and sing, and sing. They will sing about their problems and triumphs, express their inner feelings through song, and sing to each other when they are interacting, fighting, falling in and out of love, celebrating, and saying good-bye. Every plot moment and just about every human emotion will be expressed through music and lyrics.



Top: Betsy Wolfe as Cordelia and Tracie Thoms as Dr. Charlotte in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Joan Marcus. Bottom: The score for "Four Jews in A Room Bitching" from Lincoln Center Theater's production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Jay Mack.

Musical Tools: The Basics

Musical: a form of theatrical performance that uses a combination of music, dance, and text to tell a story.

Score: the written melodies and musical notations that are sung by the performers and played by the orchestra. The style and variety of the music conveys the mood, provides information about the character's emotional state and personality.

Composer: the person who writes the score and decides how to tell the story through music.

Lyrics: the words of the songs that are used to move the story forward; they often provide insight into a character's actions, motivations, and emotions.

Lyricist: the person who writes the lyrics.

Libretto: what is referred to as the “book”; the full text of a musical, which includes all of the action, dialogue, and lyrics.

Librettist: the writer of the libretto/book.

Musical Tools: The Specifics

Accompaniment: the instrumentation supporting and underscoring the singing. While many musicals have large orchestras, the accompaniment in *Falsettos* is played by a small group of musicians, referred to by the characters in the play as a “teeny tiny band.”

Opening number: the very first musical number that sets the tone for the rest of the musical. The up-tempo song “Four Jews in a Room Bitching” that starts *Falsettos* off not only introduces the characters, but also sets the lively, irreverent, and humorous tone the writers are going to use to tell their musical story.

Up-tempo: a fast-paced and/or rhythmic song.

Reprise: when either a whole song or part of a song is repeated at a later point in a musical. Reprises of full or partial songs are used throughout *Falsettos* in

ways that allow the audience to reflect on words they have heard before in a new context. When Dr. Cordelia first sings her song “Something Bad Is Happening” she is speaking generally of the many AIDS cases she has been seeing in her work. When she reprises the song, she is singing to Marvin about one case in particular, Whizzer's case, bringing new meaning and importance to the words we have heard before.

Finale: the musical number that concludes the show and leaves the audience with an emotional final impression. *Falsettos* completes its emotional journey with Marvin and Whizzer singing the moving, heartfelt **ballad** “What Would I Do?” as well as a brief **reprise** of selected lyrics from the Act 2 opening song “Welcome to Falsettoland”.



Costume design sketches by Jennifer Caprio for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *Falsettos*.

Ballad: a slow song in which characters express strong emotions such as love.

“I Want” Song: a song usually sung by one character close to the beginning of the musical, in which they explain to the audience what they desire or what motivates them. Despite the fact that most of the *Falsettos* characters are struggling to figure out what they want throughout the musical, Marvin lays out his desire for “A Tight-Knit Family” early on in the first act.

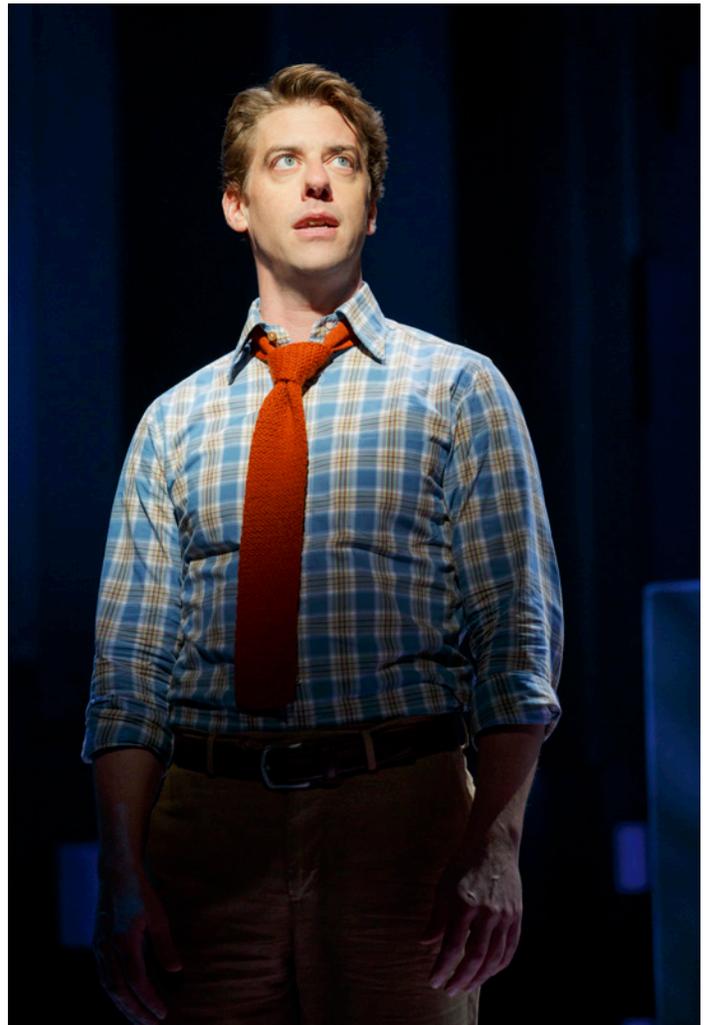
Falsetto: a high, artificial voice used for notes that lie above the normal male register.

March: a form of music written for marching, such as in a parade or a military procession. The song “March of the Falsettos” is literally that, a march with a steady beat that the four male characters sing in **falsetto**, subverting and drawing attention to the characters’ attempts to embody and make sense of society’s masculine stereotypes.

Duet: a song sung by two singers at the same time. The humorous song and dance number “Everyone Hates His Parents” that Jason and Mendel sing is a playful example of a duet.

Unison: when two or more performers sing the *same* notes and/or lyrics simultaneously. At the end of “Unlikely Lovers” there is power in numbers as Whizzer, Marvin, Cordelia, and Dr. Charlotte sing lyrics in unison about supporting each other through Whizzer’s difficult prognosis.

Counterpoint: when two or more characters sing *different* notes and/or lyrics simultaneously. The characters in *Falsettos* are often at odds with each other and tend to talk over one another and argue. The use of counterpoint, such as in the song “Everyone Tells Jason to See a Psychiatrist” allows Jason, Trina, and Marvin to express their conflicting ideas at the same time.



Top: Christian Borle as Marvin. Bottom: Christian Borle, Anthony Rosenthal and Stephanie J. Block in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *Falsettos*. Photos by Joan Marcus.

Classroom Activities

American Musical Primer: Introductory Activity

Discuss

Ask students to share what they know about the following: visual albums, music videos, opera, and musicals.

View

As a class, watch the first six minutes of Episode 1 of PBS' *Broadway: The American Musical* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNgE085IJZU> and have students take notes about what they see, hear, learn, and have questions about.

Discuss

- Why have musicals been so popular throughout American history?
- What do they reflect about our country? Whose stories do they tell?
- In what ways is storytelling in a musical different from a play?
- What styles of music and dance do they incorporate?

Research

Conduct a musical theater “scavenger hunt” in which students are assigned to a decade between 1910 and 2010, and must use the internet to do the following:

- Identify a popular musical from their assigned decade.
- Identify basic biographical information about the writers of their musical.
- Identify a popular song from their musical.
- Listen to and/or watch a video performance of a song from their musical (if available).

Expand

Have students interview an older family member or community member about their favorite musical or song from a musical.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Classroom Activities

Identifying Tools: Expert Activity

Review

As a class, review the list of musical theater tools in this section. Have students identify popular songs they listen to that feature some of these theater tools.

Assess

After the performance of *Falsettos*, go through the list of tools again and have students identify songs and/or lyric examples from the musical (different from the ones given in this guide) that exemplify these tools.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Storytelling Through Song: Introductory Activity

View

Show the *Falsettos* performance from the 1992 Tony Awards, found here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpzbuoLcDbk>, explaining that these are excerpts from three of the songs in the show. As students are watching, have them take notes about what they **see**, **hear**, **learn**, and **have questions** about.

Discuss

Have students share their notes with the class, and discuss the following questions:

- The setting: When does it take place? What do you know about 1981? What information do we need to know about 1981 to understand the musical?
- The people: Who do we meet? What do we learn about them?
- The style: How do we get information about the characters and the story? What is happening that wouldn't happen in ordinary life?

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Exploring the Issues

Thematic Elements

Below you will find excerpts from the text, thematic elements, discussion questions, and suggested activities that can be used to launch a classroom exploration of *Falsettos*. In addition, many of the discussion questions can be used in debate activities or essay writing assignments.

Coming of Age

Activity: Have students choose a “coming of age” novel or film they have read/seen and compare the growth of the protagonist in it to one of the *Falsettos* characters.

It’s about time, don’t you think?

It’s about time to grow up,

Don’t you think?

It’s about time to grow up

And face the music.

It’s about time.

- What does it mean to be a “grown-up?” Are you a grown-up when you reach a certain age or have a certain amount of life experience? How do you know when you or someone else has grown up?
- What types of events or circumstances help the characters mature?
- How are each of the characters struggling with the idea of growing up? Who seems to be the most mature?
- What types of actions, behaviors or realizations indicate they have matured by the end of the musical?

Marvin



A scene from Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Joan Marcus

Love, Loss, and Acceptance

Activity: Have students write a personal essay reflecting on a time when they had to let go and accept the loss of something or someone they loved.

Love is blind.

Love can tell a million stories.

Love's unkind.

Spiteful in a million ways.

Marvin & Whizzer

- How does *Falsettos* expand the notion of love beyond that of romantic love?
- What are some of the different love stories explored in *Falsettos*, and the different views about love that are expressed by the characters?
- How do the characters show their love for each other?
- How does Whizzer's illness change Marvin? How does it change the other characters? How does it change Whizzer?

The Modern Family

Activity: The following articles discuss how representations of the modern family and those who identify as LGBTQ have changed in television and pop culture and, in turn, have influenced the way society views them. Choose one article to read and reflect on as a class, and compare to *Falsettos*.

Just what I wanted at a Little League game—
My ex-husband's ex-lover.

Isn't that what every mother dreams about having
At a Little League game?

Trina

- How do you define family? In your opinion, is it defined by genetics, ancestry, or something else?
- What does the modern family look like today? How do the characters and relationships in *Falsettos* fit that image?
- What do you think the idea of a typical modern family was in the years in which *Falsettos* is set (1979-1981)?
- What challenges do each of the characters face as they try to define family for themselves?



A scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of *Falsettos*.
Photo by Joan Marcus.

The New York Times: "Gay on TV: It's All in the Family"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/09/business/media/gay-on-tv-its-all-in-the-family.html>

The Atlantic: "The Modern Family Effect: Pop Culture's Role in the Gay Marriage Revolution"

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/06/gay-marriage-legalized-modern-family-pop-culture/397013/>

NPR: "How TV Brought Gay People into our Homes"

<http://www.npr.org/2012/05/12/152578740/how-tv-brought-gay-people-into-our-homes>

Playing Games

Activity: Have students identify a sport or game that reflects a particular relationship in their lives.

It hurts not to love him.

It hurts when love fades.

It's hard when part of him

Is off playing charades.

Ask me if I need him.

Get him out of my way:

These are

These are the games

These are the games

These are the only games

I play.

Whizzer

- How is the metaphor of “the game” and “game playing” illustrated in *Falsettos*?
- Which songs in the show bring this metaphor to life?
- What are some of the different games, both literal and figurative that the characters play with each other throughout the musical?
- What motivates us to “play games” with the people we love in our lives?

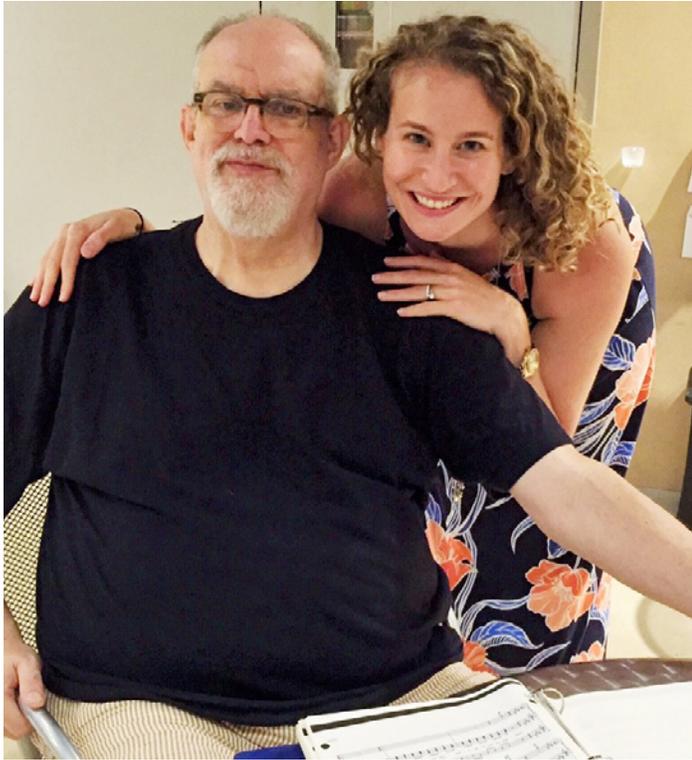


Christian Borle as Marvin and Andrew Rannells as Whizzer in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Joan Marcus.

*Many of these themes overlap. Have students choose two of the themes above and create a Venn diagram that displays the ways the themes interact with each other throughout the musical.

Behind the Scenes

Composer and Lincoln Center Theater teaching artist Anna K. Jacobs interviewed her former New York University professor and *Falsettos* creator William Finn to speak about the process of creating the show.



William Finn and Anna K. Jacobs in the rehearsal room of Lincoln Center Theater.

A: I didn't know that *Falsettos* actually consists of two of a trilogy of three one-act musicals, the first musical in this trilogy being *In Trousers*. Where did your idea for the story and characters of *In Trousers* come from?

W: I was calling myself a writer, but I wasn't writing and nobody was producing my stuff, so I felt I had to take it upon myself to do it. I needed a calling card to introduce myself to the world. So I called up Alison Fraser and Mary Testa, who have both since been nominated for two Tonys, and Kate Pesak, who's since left show business, and the three ladies and I developed this show that turned into *In Trousers*, which is for one man and three women.

A: And you directed it, right?

W: I was in it - I was originally Marvin. I wrote it for myself.

A: Like Lin-Manuel Miranda?

W: Well, I wrote it for myself. But I lost my voice and I also didn't like performing. The show had been in the small, upstairs theater at Playwrights Horizons, and I'd decided to use the biggest orchestra I've almost ever had - Michael Starobin's orchestrations included two trumpets and saxophone - and we had no mics, and so I wrecked my voice just trying to sing over it. When the show moved downstairs to the bigger theater at Playwrights Horizons, André Bishop (Playwrights Horizons' Artistic Director at the time) said I could either be in it or direct it, and I said I'll direct it.

A: Do you remember what the first song you wrote for *Falsettos* was?

W: The first song I wrote for *Falsettos* was [the opening number] "Four Jews In A Room Bitching."

A: Really?

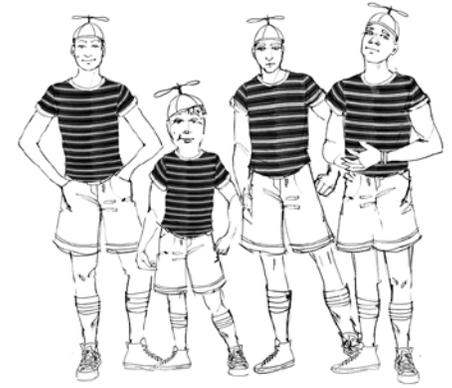
W: Yeah - and the second song was "March of the Falsettos."

A: So that's interesting to me because I feel like something I learned at NYU is that usually you write your opening numbers last, and you wrote yours first.

W: Well, I didn't know it was my opening number - I didn't know what it was - I just thought it was an interesting way to begin a show.

A: What gave you the idea to use a falsetto - a man who sings in his upper register - as a metaphor in the show?

W: Falsettos sing outside the normal range and I felt this family was, at the time, outside the normal range (though of course, now, they're well within the normal range). I was also talking about manliness and my idea of what a man is. When people used to say, "be a man," I would say, "well, I have a feeling what I think a man is, is different from what you think a man is." I started with just the idea of the song, "March of the Falsettos." I thought it was very funny that falsettos would be marching instead of men singing.



Costume design sketches by Jennifer Caprio for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *Falsettos*.

A: So is your definition of what a man is still the same now as it was when you started writing the show?

W: Well I think the world has come around to my way of seeing things - that it has nothing to do with stolidity. It's more about decency and humanity, which is what Marvin comes to learn.



A scene from the 1990 Playwrights Horizons off-Broadway production of *Falsettoland*. Photo courtesy of Gerry Goodstein.

A: Is Marvin the most like you of all the characters?

W: The events of Marvin's life are not mine, but I had a teacher at Williams College who used to say when we'd look at characters, "Look how ugly this writer made him, how fascinating - if you're ever writing, don't be afraid to make your characters ugly and show all their warts because it makes them more interesting." I think that's what I was thinking about mostly when I was writing Marvin. I tried to make him a little unsympathetic so he'd have some place to go. At the end of the first act his redemption is with his son, and at the end of the second act it's with Whizzer and his family.

A: What was the process of collaborating with James Lapine like?

W: I wrote every word of the show, but Lapine's input was major. A lot of the action was based on his suggestions. He was essential to the development of *March of the Falsettos*, but *Falsettoland* I kind of dreamt. I had a dream where Jason is having a bar mitzvah, Whizzer gets sick, and then they have the bar mitzvah in the hospital room, and that's kind of the outline of that show, except I didn't know how to make it into a show. Lapine knew what was missing.

A: How would you and James collaborate on those moments?

W: Sometimes he would write things down – phrases I might be interested in using – and I would use them or not. I remember specifically the song, “Holding To The Ground;” he just wrote “holding to the ground,” and I added, “when the ground keeps shifting.” That’s a song I had to write in one night, but because he gave me “holding to the ground,” I could do it.

A: How many years after writing the first half of *Falsettos* did you write the second half?

W: Eight years.

A: That’s a long time.

W: Yes, I worked on other stuff during that time; *Romance in Hard Times* and a bunch of other stuff.

A: Do you notice differences in your writing of the first and second halves of *Falsettos*?

W: I think the second half is much more in control.

A: What do you mean by “in control”?

W: I think it’s that the writer knows what he’s doing more. I’d never known the ending of a show of mine before writing this one.

A: It’s interesting that your process was different when writing the two halves, and that you knew how you wanted the second half to end, but not the first half.

W: The first half is much more discursive, so it’s very satisfying I think in the end when it’s just Marvin and his son, but I’m not sure you know where it’s heading. I feel you do know where the second half is heading.

A: How do you want the audience to feel when they see one of your musicals?

W: I want them to be swept away; thrilled in a way or moved in a way. I hope *Falsettos* is both difficult at times and moving.

A: Is there anything you learned about yourself as a result of writing *Falsettos*?

W: I was surprised I could write for people other than myself, like Chip Zien, Alison Fraser, and Mary Testa.

A: What is your songwriting process like?

W: I always start with one opening line, and then I write dummy lyrics and add the music, but I always need an opening line to begin with. My dummies are very good, so sometimes my dummies stay.

A: The songs in *Falsettos* are pretty sophisticated, structurally. How did you write them?

W: I’d write them in chunks. Take for example the section of *Falsettos* where “Love Is Blind” goes into “Thrill of First Love.” That section, I love. I wrote “Love Is Blind” and “Thrill of First Love” each apart, and then Lapine said, “you have to write another song and end it with ‘I want it all’,” and I said, “no, I want

to write a song about a tight knit family,” so I wrote, “A Tight Knit Family” and ended the chorus with “I want it all,” which goes into “Love Is Blind,” which goes into “Thrill of First Love,” and I just find that’s a thrilling part of the show. Then with “Love Is Blind,” I did something I didn’t know that I could do: I wrote a lot of action into the lyric, so I could kind of see it staged in my mind, even though I knew the director would do something completely different (but better!).

A: Are you much of an outlier?

W: Not at all, but Lapine and I wrote all the songs we had on index cards, and then we put them up on a board at Playwrights Horizons. We just shifted them around every day and saw what we had and what we needed and what we were looking to have to tell the story. I wrote a lot of that first show (*March of the Falsettos*) while we were in rehearsal.

A: Do you like sitting in on rehearsals?

W: Not really. It gets me nervous. I’d rather just see it and Lapine prefers that too.

A: Is there anything else you’d like to mention about *Falsettos*?

W: When André Bishop (Producing Artistic Director of Lincoln Center Theater) and Ira (Weitzman, Minidich Musical Theater Associate Producer) were at Playwrights Horizons, they wanted to do for composers and lyricists what they’d previously done for playwrights, which was to develop and produce their work, and I was the first composer-lyricist that they did that with, and *In Trousers* was their first musical. So that we’re ending up here at Lincoln Center Theater, I find very satisfying.



From left, André Bishop, James Lapine, Ira Weitzman and William Finn in 1990. Photo by Eddie Hausner/The New York Times/Redux.



William Finn, Andrew Rannells, Stephanie J. Block, Christian Borle and James Lapine in the rehearsal room for Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *Falsettos*. Photo by Monica Simoes.

A: How did you form a relationship with André Bishop and Ira Weitzman before doing *In Trousers* at Playwrights Horizons?

W: I used to put on shows in the living room of my apartment on West 98th Street which they attended, because nobody else would produce my shows. I borrowed chairs from the Temple across the street!

Classroom Activities

Musical Moments: Writing Activity

Identify

Have students choose a novel, play, film or short story they like and follow the steps outlined below:

- Choose three moments they would musicalize if they were adapting it into a musical.
- Decide what types of songs they would use in those moments (fast, slow, romantic, dramatic, comic, etc.).
- Decide which characters in the story would sing the songs.
- Decide if there would be dancing in the songs, and if so, what style of dance.

Write

After students have gone through this process, have them choose one musical moment and experiment with writing a song. This can be done by:

- Using a song they already know and rewriting the lyrics to fit their story's musicalized moment.
- Creating a spoken word piece that connects to their musicalized moment.

Share

Have students share their musical moments with the class.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Resources/Bibliography

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Angels in America <http://www.hbo.com/movies/angels-in-america>

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