

Lesson Plan – Comparing the musical *Big River* and Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Concept: Compare and Contrast (Musical Adaptation of a Novel)

**Developed by:
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Suggested Grade Level: High School- Interdisciplinary Unit for English, Drama, and Music classes

Time Frame: 3 weeks

Objectives: Students will identify similarities and differences in terms of setting, character analysis, and dialogue/plot of *Big River* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with 80% accuracy in an authentic performance (scoring guide provided).

State Standards: In Communication Arts, students in Missouri public schools will acquire a solid foundation which includes knowledge of and proficiency in:

1. speaking and writing standard English.
2. reading and evaluating fiction, poetry and drama.
4. writing formally and informally.
5. comprehending and evaluating the content and artistic aspects of oral and visual presentations.
6. participating in formal and informal presentations and discussions of issues and ideas.
7. identifying and evaluating relationships between language and culture.

In Fine Arts, students in Missouri public schools will acquire a solid foundation which includes knowledge of:

1. process and techniques for the production, exhibition or performance of one or more of the visual or performed arts.
2. the principles and elements of different art forms.
3. the vocabulary to explain perceptions about and evaluations of works in dance, music, theater and visual arts.
4. interrelationships of visual and performing arts and the relationship of the arts to other disciplines.
5. visual and performing arts in historical and cultural contexts.

In Social Studies, students of Missouri public schools will acquire a solid foundation which includes knowledge of:

3. continuity and change in the history of Missouri, the United States and the world.
5. the major elements of geographical study and analysis (such as location, place, movement, regions) and their relationships to change in society and environment.
6. relationships of the individual and groups to institutions and cultural traditions.
7. the use of tools of social science inquiry (such as surveys, statistics, maps, documents).

Assessment/Evaluation: Students will perform musical selections of *Big River*. Students will perform as characters of the musical and novel using information from both interpretations to create dialogue for their characters. A scoring guide is provided.

Language/Vocabulary: Musical, Character, Intention, Motivation, Compare, Contrast

Integrated Curriculum: The drama and music departments work with the English teacher to compare/ contrast the musical to the novel.

Background Information: Information about the times, culture, Mark Twain, slavery, controversy, carpetbaggers, abolitionists, folk music of the pre-civil war era, and bluegrass music.

Materials: Copies of the musical, music with lyrics.

Technology Support:

- Video: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from 1939 company Metro Goldwyn Mayer 89 minutes not rated.
- <http://www.teachwithmovies.org>,
- http://www.duboasic.org/MissouriBlacks/p01_slavery.html, "The Role of the Negro in Missouri History 1719-1970"
- Twain Quotes <http://www.twainquotes.com>
- *Big River* lyrics: <http://www.stlyrics.com/b/bigriver.htm>
- *Big River* CD: http://www.amazon.com/Big-River-Adventures-Huckleberry-Original/dp/B000002O4T/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1216422822&sr=8-1

Related Twain Quotes/Other Readings: "Man is the only slave and he is the only animal that enslaves". – "The Lowest Animal"

"... It shows that that strange thing, conscience—the unerring monitor—can be trained to approve any wild thing you want it to approve if you begin its education early and stick to it."-notebook #35 (reprinted in *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*, Univ. of California Press, 2003)
www.twainquotes.com

Lesson Plan Format –

Introduction: Welcome letter to students and parents explaining the intent of the compare and contrast unit using the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (students will have read this novel in English class) and the musical *Big River*.

B. Lesson: 1. Musical Theatre discussion - What are the elements of musical theatre? What role does music play within a musical? What are some stumbling blocks that might occur when transferring information from a novel to a musical script?

2. Read the musical dialogue. Listen to the lyrics of the songs included in the musical. Discuss the lyrics and the connection to the novel.

3. Ask students to choose a scene from the musical to focus on for their presentation. Students will self-select their group members. Group members will select their own scene to present by discussing and making choices for blocking, costuming, casting parts for students in the group and other spectacle decision.

4. Presentations will include dialogue between characters that the students have selected from the novel and a musical selection from the musical interpretation.

5. Student groups will set up a compare and contrast worksheet between the novel and the musical. The worksheet needs to address setting, plot, characters, themes, and mood.

6. Groups will rehearse, pull costumes and props, practice blocking, run lines, and practice the musical number including dance moves that may move the plotline along.

7. Provide class time for full rehearsal allowing students to work with costumes, props, and music accompaniment.

C. Closure: Complete the compare and contrast worksheet. Present scene for the class and/or other classes which might be available.

Scheduled Use of Time:

Time	Teacher Activity/Questions to be asked	Student Activity
Day 1 15 min.	Hook: View video Adventures of Huckleberry Finn What would be your ideal road trip? Where would you go? Who would you take with you? When would you leave? How would you travel? WHY?	Listen and respond
15 min.	Musical theatre discussion- elements of the musical. What is the role of music in a musical? Discuss the influence of folk/river, blue-grass, blues and gospel music to the culture of Mark Twain's era.	Listen and respond
10 min.	Begin reading the dialogue of <i>Big River</i> and include the music and lyrics.	Listen and respond
Day 2,3,4 40 min.	Complete reading <i>Big River</i> script. Discuss comparisons between the musical script and the novel <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> .	Listen and respond
Day 5,6 40 min.	Students select a scene including a musical selection from <i>Big River</i> to present as a group. Students group themselves and create a compare and contrast worksheet. "How do you make your script accommodate your group of actors?"	Student group discussion and create worksheet
Day 7,8,9 40 min.	Students will pull information from both interpretations and their compare and contrast worksheet for their own adaptation of the Huckleberry Finn story. "How do the compare and contrast choices you group selected impact the scene?" "Were there any obstacles during the process that need to be considered?" Make sure to include suggested blocking.	Student group discussion and writing assignment
Day 10,11 40 min.	Groups cast parts, pull costumes and props, and begin rehearsal process including blocking of dialogue and musical number.	Students must agree on all parts of the process.
Day 12,13 40 min.	Rehearsal	All members of the group must be actively involved and decide if extra rehearsal time is necessary. (homework)
Day 14, 15 40 min.	Performance day Teacher scoring guide	Students perform

Strategies/accommodations to support students with exceptionalities:

- A CD of the music with lyrics will be given to students for rehearsal purposes, which will provide guided practice for all students.
- Students may volunteer for specific jobs and parts within the group, however ALL students are required to perform.

Possible Follow-up Activities:

- Invite parents to a possible evening performance or during class time.
- Perform additional performances for other schools within the district.

Possible Guest Speakers/Other Resources:

- Professors from surrounding colleges and universities to discuss adaptation of a novel to the stage.
- Amateur performers will discuss performing in dialect.
- Social Studies teachers may discuss life and culture of the era.

Performance Scoring Guide

Group members: Parts:

Scene chosen:
(brief synopsis)

Script - appropriateness and adherence to the spirit of the original:

Musical number chosen: (purpose of the number)

Characterization:

Are the characters believable?

Are the characters pertinent to the action of the scene?

Were the characters dressed appropriately for the time period?

Music:

Does the song belong in the scene?

Did the actors know the music?

Did the actions enhance the musical selection?

Blocking:

Did the actors suggest the setting with the blocking?

Were there any obstacles in the blocking? How were they addressed?

Did the actors remember to use the whole stage, levels and to keep open during dialogues and dancing?

Voice:

Were dialects attempted and consistent?

Did the actors enunciate and project in an appropriate manner?

Were the actors in balance vocally?

Ensemble:

Did the actors work well as a group?

Were rehearsal and a sense of organization apparent?

Were all of the members involved?

(Note to teachers: Provide scoring guide to students at the beginning so they will be aware of how they will be evaluated. Add points to the scale based on your personal preference.)