

Arts Club Theatre Company
TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE
2017/2018 season

THE SMASH-HIT MUSICAL BASED ON THE SONGS OF ABBA

**MAMMA
MIA!**™

Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage
MAY 10–JULY 8, 2018

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Welcome

This guide was created for teachers and students. It contains an overview of the play's story, as well as class activities. The guide aims to provide background knowledge and critical perspectives on the play that will yield fruitful discussion and foster an understanding and appreciation of the theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our group sales representative at 604.687.5315, ext. 253 or groups@artsclub.com.

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About the Company

The Arts Club of Vancouver was founded in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians, and actors. It became the Arts Club Theatre in 1964 when the company opened its first stage in a converted gospel hall at Seymour and Davie Streets.

Now in its 54th season of producing professional live theatre in Vancouver, the Arts Club Theatre Company is a non-profit charitable organization that operates three theatres: the Granville Island Stage, the Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage, and the Goldcorp Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre. Its popular productions range from musicals and contemporary comedies to new works and classics.

Learning objectives

After viewing *Mamma Mia!* and working through the following activities, students will:

- Identify how real-world conflicts can drive story.
- Make personal connections and explore storytelling through music.
- Reflect on the performance and apply critique to further their theatrical skills and understanding.

Connections to the Curriculum

English/ Creative Writing 8–12

Big Ideas

- Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy
- The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world
 - Students can relate to the search for identity and the discovery that our true identity comes from within
- Writers write for authentic audiences and real-world purposes
 - Students can identify how real-world conflicts drive the story

Core Competencies

- Recognize and appreciate how various forms, structure, and features of text reflect a variety of purposes, audience, and messages
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and the world
- Respond to text in personal, creative and critical ways
 - Students will make personal connections and explore storytelling through music

Drama/Musical Theatre 8–12

Big Ideas

- Interpretation of existing work is an opportunity to represent self-identity and culture
- Drama offers dynamic ways of expressing one's identity and sense of belonging
 - The genre of musical theatre allows for self-expression often greater than regular theatre

Core Competencies

- Apply critical, creative, and reflective thinking skills in the exploration, design, creation, and refinement of performances
- Explore ways in which musical theatre impacts culture and society
 - Students will make personal connections and explore storytelling through music
 - Students can reflect on the performance and apply critique to further their theatrical skills and understanding

Summary

On a beautiful island in Greece, twenty-year-old Sophie Sheridan is about to get married. There's just one problem: she has no idea who her father is. After stumbling upon her mother's old diaries, Sophie discovers that she in fact has three possible fathers and decides to invite them all to her upcoming wedding, without telling her mother or fiancé. Three days before the wedding, Sam, Bill, and Harry (the suspected fathers) arrive, along with Sophie's two best friends and her mother Donna's friends, Tanya and Rosie. When the potential fathers learn that Donna actually didn't invite them and Donna suddenly discovers their presence on the island, mishaps start to ensue. When Sky, Sophie's fiancé, learns what she's done, he becomes upset and questions whether the wedding should continue at all. The wedding draws closer and closer and Sophie and her friends try to identify which of the three men is truly her father. Meanwhile, Donna starts melting down as all the men from her past begin to confront her about their past relationships, particularly Sam. Donna, who doesn't fully support her daughter's early marriage, eventually tries to call off the wedding, sending Sophie into a tailspin. But the two are able to reconcile and Sophie decides that it would be far better to have her mother walk her down the aisle, than a father she's never known. Finally the wedding day arrives and all three men are convinced they are the father, however, a turn of events send Donna down the aisle instead of Sophie. But all turns out happily in this fun and frothy musical about family, growing up, and love.

Who was 'ABBA'?

Members Benny Andersson, Björn Ulvaeus, Agnetha Faltskog, and Frida Lyngstad make up the band which originated in Sweden in the 1970s. They started out competing in European music festivals where some of their early songs garnered attention, but it wasn't until their third album 'ABBA' that the band hit worldwide success. The band took their simple name by combining the first letters of their first names (including Frida's proper first name, Anni-Frid). Despite their overwhelming success, the group began to run out of energy in the early '80s, especially after Benny and Frida announced their divorce. The women began to focus their attention on their solo careers and the men set their sights on composing the musical *Chess*. Eventually, at the end of 1982, they took a "temporary break," which has now lasted several decades. It was the musical *Chess* that got playwright Catherine Johnson excited about ABBA's music and began to weave a plot out their hits, with full support from all the band members. Luckily, Björn Ulvaeus was insistent that, although many of ABBA's songs already have story within them, the *Mamma Mia!* story should be at the forefront and if lyrics needed to be changed, they should. The smash-hit musical was released in London in 1999.

Activity One

(Recommended for use with drama or any subject)

Rationale: The purpose of this activity is to explore the genre of musical theatre and have students become aware of the amount of work that is required to create a musical theatre piece. Also, it is exciting to see that musical theatre can come from their favourite music as well. Students will also work on their group work skills, creating choreography and learning how to tell a story through music.

Instructions

Step One: Divide the students into groups of 5 or 6.

Step Two: Students should choose a song as a group which explicitly tells a story. Some examples: "7 Years" by Luke Graham, "Travelling Soldier" by the Dixie Chicks, or "Papa Don't Preach" by Madonna.

Step Three: Construct a musical theatre scene that will include this song. What characters are there? What are they doing? What is the conflict? Who is singing the song? What are the relationships? Where does the song happen in the scene? Remember the scene should also have a clear beginning, middle, and end, and the scene should move fluidly from speaking to singing.

Step Four: Once the students decide which character is singing the song, they should do their best to lip sync the words of the piece. All students should participate by contributing at least three choreographed moves.

Activity Two

(Recommended for use with English classes)

Rationale: In this activity students will explore using music as a form of expression. They will also see how music can be used to create story and often is driven by emotion and life experience.

Instructions

Step One: You are creating a musical about your own life. What story would you want your musical to be about? Keep in mind that a simple storyline will be most effective. Examples: breaking up with your partner, a fight with your best friend, the struggle of trying to get into university. Jot down some brief notes of what you plan your story to be.

Step Two: Choose five songs that you listen to often which will join together to further your story and make a list. Remember, you can't choose songs just because you like them, they need to bring us into the character's head (that character being YOU). Also, all song titles should be school appropriate.

Step Three: Put your songs in the most logical order to tell your story. Then next to the title, use a brief sentence to describe what the song is about in relation to your story.

Step Four: Write a plot summary of your musical. Using your song choices and descriptions as a guide, insert the songs' titles into the summary in the places where the songs would occur. Example: Below is a piece of the plot summary for *Mamma Mia!* to use as a guide.

“Donna spies them and is dumbfounded to find herself facing former lovers (“Mamma Mia!”), demanding they leave. She confides in Tanya and Rosie (“Chiquitita”) that she is uncertain which of the men fathered Sophie. Tanya and Rosie rally her spirits by getting her to dance with the female staff and islanders (“Dancing Queen”). Sophie finds the men aboard Bill's yacht, and they sail around Kalokairi (“Our Last Summer”), telling stories of Donna as a carefree girl. Sophie plans to tell her fiancé, Sky, about her ploy, but loses her nerve. Sky and Sophie sing to each other (“Lay All Your Love on Me”), but Sky is nabbed for his bachelor party.” (“Mamma Mia!”)

Works Cited

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