

Donatella Galella
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Michael Friedman Lesson Plans

Adaptation – *Love's Labour's Lost*

Primary Texts: *Love's Labour's Lost* by William Shakespeare and *Love's Labour's Lost* by Michael Friedman and Alex Timbers

Courses: Shakespeare, Adaptation, Comedy, Introduction to Literature

Learning Goal: To compare and contrast a musical adaptation with its source text.

Popcorn Exercise: In one or two words, what is the central theme of *Love's Labour's Lost* the play? Give students an opportunity to call out their answers. (ex. love, oaths, comedy, poetry)

Discussion Questions:

- What are the conventions of a comedy?
 - heteronormative romantic couples, ending with a wedding
 - witty verse
 - music
 - lower-class characters who use malapropisms and upper-class characters who speak Latin
 - disguises
 - play within plays
 - overhearing conversations
- How do these conventions manifest in *Love's Labour's Lost*?
- But to what extent does *Love's Labour's Lost* comment on or even subvert typical comedies?
- Why are Shakespeare's plays so frequently adapted? How so? Examples?

Popcorn Exercise: In one or two words, what is the central theme of *Love's Labour's Lost* the musical? Students can call out their answers and reflect on similarities and differences from their answers at the top of class.

Follow-up Questions:

- Where and when do Michael Friedman and Alex Timbers set the musical? How does that setting shape the storytelling?
- How do the gender dynamics differ in the musical versus the play? Consider to what extent the musical is about developing a feminist approach to masculinity. Do the women characters play greater or smaller roles in the musical version?

Group Work:

- Put students into groups and assign each group one song from *Love's Labour's Lost* to analyze. The students will address the following and share their findings:
 - Identify the part of the play that the musical theater artists adapted
 - ⇒ Why would the artists choose to musicalize this part?
 - Articulate the overall meaning of the scene and song

- Compare and contrast the passages (ex. Elizabethan and contemporary American diction)
- Who sings the song, and in what style? Why?
- What opportunities does the musicalization avail?
- Suggested songs:
 - “Brabant Song, Part 1”
 - “Dumaine’s Sonnet”
 - “Are You a Man?”
 - “Not a Good Idea”
 - “The Owl and the Cuckoo”

Final Questions:

- How do the play and the musical end? How do the conclusions leave you feeling?
- Why would Shakespeare, Friedman, and Timbers end this way?
- Consider a meta-theatrical critique of comedies, and how a musical theater adaptation can emphasize this point (ex. “Love’s a Gun”).

Climate Change – *The Great Immensity*

Primary Texts: *The Great Immensity* and Steve Cosson and Michael Friedman’s panel at the Princeton Environmental Institute on March 8, 2013

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8wpWIZ8wjo&list=PLQx4vBgrHw9we3TGmv8lmKVoCa4yPNtxp&index=33>

Courses: Climate Change, Theater for Social Change, Eco Theater

Learning Goal: To understand the potentials and limits of musical theater representing and acting on climate change.

Think-Pair-Share: At the Princeton Environmental Institute in 2013, Michael Friedman and Steve Cossan discussed the balance between scientific information and narrative storytelling in *The Great Immensity*. To what extent do you think that they succeeded?

Discussion Questions:

- What makes theater unique in comparison to television news or scientific journal articles?
- How can musicals address societal challenges like climate change?
- What do you think that Michael Friedman and Steve Cossan were trying to accomplish with *The Great Immensity*?
- What is the significance of the musical’s title?
- How does the musical relate to the Sunrise Movement, Greta Thunberg, Autumn Peltier, and other young climate activists today?
- Which song in *The Great Immensity* moved you most, and why?

Group Work:

- Put students into groups and assign each group one song from *The Great Immensity* to analyze. The students will answer the following questions and present their responses:
 - What is the song about?

- How is the song structured? Put another way, how does the song start and end? Is there a part that sounded different from the rest of the song? Why do you think that is?
- Who is singing this song? How does the song relate to their character?
- Identify the style of the song (ex. tango). Is it fast or slow? How does the music interact with the lyrics?
- What is the main point of this song? Cite the lyrics, consider the music, and articulate the emotional resonance to back up your answer.
- Suggested songs:
 - “The Hot World”
 - “We Are All Panamanian”
 - “Climate Summit Suite”
 - “Martha, the Last Pigeon/The Golden Lemur”
 - “The Dene Village”

Follow-up Questions:

- *The Great Immensity* offers various strategies to educate and inspire action on climate change. Which strategy in the musical do you find most effective? Why? How can we measure audience impact?
- At the same time, *The Great Immensity* points out the futility of these measures in prompting mass mobilization and structural change (“The Next Forever”). And yet, the artists express their thoughts in the very form of a musical, suggesting hope in the power of art. What would you do to motivate others to act on climate change?

Dramaturgy – *The Fortress of Solitude*

Primary Texts: *The Fortress of Solitude* and Donatella Galella, “‘Superman/Sidekick’: White Storytellers and Black Lives in *The Fortress of Solitude*”

(https://www.macmillanihe.com/resources/sample-chapters/9781352004397_sample.pdf)

Courses: Introduction to Dramaturgy, Race and the American Musical, Introduction to Critical Whiteness Studies

Learning Goal: To identify the dramaturgical functions and racial politics of songs in a contemporary book musical.

Watch: “The Song Makes A Space: Michael Friedman at TEDxEast”

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQ3KdEoPts0>)

Follow-up Questions:

- First, what are your main takeaways watching Friedman’s TED talk? (Encourage the students to drive the conversation.)
- What are the questions that Friedman asks of himself when writing musicals? Why are these questions important?
- How does Friedman define pop songs versus musical theater songs?
 - Discuss pop songs as linked to personal memories, assonance instead of perfect rhymes

- What differences did you notice between the versions of the songs performed in the video and the songs recorded on the Off-Broadway cast album? Why do you think those changes were made?
- For Friedman, how do the songs in *The Fortress of Solitude* work?

Close Reading: Donatella Galella, “‘Superman/Sidekick’: White Storytellers and Black Lives in *The Fortress of Solitude*”

- Having read the chapter prior to class, students will work in pairs or trios to clarify their comprehension of musical theater scholarship by writing down and then sharing their answers:
 - Identify Galella’s thesis.
 - “*The Fortress of Solitude* highlights the unequal socio-political life chances for white and black Americans and imagines interracial friendship through music and a magic ring. But for that to be possible, the musical must rest upon whiteness. By pointing out the white frame itself, or reframing the frame, this musical shows clearly how white is also a race and how whiteness mediates storytelling.” (p. 4-5)
 - How does Galella prove her thesis?
 - How does Galella structure the chapter?
 - Create working definitions of race, racism, and white privilege based on the chapter.
 - What questions do you have about the chapter?

Group Work:

- Use black boards, white boards, or large pieces of paper around the classroom to write down the titles of key songs from *The Fortress of Solitude*, so there is a separate space for each song.
 - “The One I Remember”
 - “Superman/Sidekick”
 - “Who’s Calling Me?”
 - “The Ballad of Mingus Rude”
 - “Middle Spaces”
- Put students into groups assigned to one song. They will conduct dramaturgical analyses of their song and write on the board/paper.
 - Who sings this song?
 - At which point(s) does this song appear in the musical?
 - How does the music relate to character? To the historic period?
 - What are the racial dynamics of this song?
 - What did Friedman and/or Galella say about this song?
 - What is the purpose of this song? (ex. history of pop music, role pop music plays in our everyday lives, advancing the narrative, showing relationship between characters, Dylan singing through others, fantasy of music bringing different racial groups together)
- After 10-15 minutes, the students will travel across the room to see what other groups have written about their songs. Maybe they realize that parts of their song are repeated in

another song. At the end of class, they will return to their assigned song and refine their articulation of that song's function in *The Fortress of Solitude*.

Historiography – *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*

Primary Text: *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*

Courses: U.S. History, History of American Musical Theater

Learning Goal: To recognize the telling of history as embedded in the social construction of nation, race, and hierarchy.

Research: Ask students to take out their electronic devices and run a search on “Andrew Jackson” or do this in real time and project the search engine results. [On 1/1/20, Google yields in my search results the Andrew Jackson Wikipedia page (“an American soldier and statesman”), the suggested answer to the question what was he best known for is “founding the Democratic Party and for his support of individual liberty,” the White House’s website (“More nearly than any of his predecessors, *Andrew Jackson* was elected by popular vote”), and *Smithsonian Magazine* calling Jackson “America’s Original Anti-Establishment Candidate.”]

Follow-up Questions:

- What did students find?
- What was left out of these histories of Jackson?
- What are the consequences of historicizing Jackson in these ways?
- In *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, how do Michael Friedman, Alex Timbers, and Benjamin Walker represent Andrew Jackson? Invite students to give specific examples from the musical. Perhaps play “I’m Not That Guy.”
 - Sexy rock star
 - Immature emo boy
 - Populist
 - White savior
 - White supremacist
- How does the storyteller / historian treat Jackson? How does Jackson treat her? What role does she play in the narrative?
- How do the musical artists represent Native Americans? Stereotypically, and with redface? Sympathetically, and with critiques of settler colonialism? Ask students to define key terms like “redface” and “settler colonialism.” See Michelle Raheja, Philip Deloria, *Native Studies Keywords* (<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/39810>) and <https://digitalgallery.bgsu.edu/student/exhibits/show/race-in-us/native-americans/redface> for guidance.

Group Work: Put students into groups and assign each group one article to read and summarize in order to demonstrate how different critics and artists responded to *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*.

- Articles
 - Charles McNulty, “‘Bloody’ goofy musical,” <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-jan-23-et-bloody23-story.html>
 - Ben Brantley, “Ideal President: A Rock Star Just Like Me,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/14/theater/reviews/14bloody.html>

- Elisabeth Vincentelli, “Bloody brighter,” <https://nypost.com/2010/10/14/bloody-brighter/>
- Rhiana Yazzie, “New Native Theatre protests ‘Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson,’” <http://www.startribune.com/new-native-theatre-protests-bloody-bloody-andrew-jackson/261888441/>

Follow-up Questions:

- Given these examples, how do identity and privilege shape reception of history and of theater?
- Michael Friedman and Alex Timbers have discussed that when they originally conceived the musical, they were thinking of the George W. Bush administration, but when the show opened, they made connections with Barack Obama and with the Tea Party. How would the musical resonate if staged today?
- Why do producers revive and revise musicals?

Debate: Divide students into one team supporting the resolution, one team opposing, and one odd-numbered jury.

- Resolved: *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* merits a revival without any changes. (Note that the opposing team can decide to support a revival with changes and offer suggestions like involving indigenous artists, or they can decide to oppose any production whatsoever.)
- The teams will have 7-8 minutes to prepare:
 - An opening statement
 - Arguments
 - Counter-arguments
- The jury will prepare:
 - One critical question for each team
- The moderator will signal the teams to offer their opening statements, go back and forth between the teams’ points, invite the jury to ask their questions and the teams to respond, and permit the teams to deliver closing statements. Finally, the jury will discuss and vote among themselves to decide which side made a stronger case.

Songwriting – *The State of the Union Songbook*

Assigned Text: *The State of the Union Songbook*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8myfajkbXM&list=PLUQrcRVuC9YL912bQK0-gbX6v9NLUgZD>)

Courses: Musical Theater Writing, Docudrama

Learning Goals: To study the construction of interview-based songs and to construct such songs.

Opening Discussion Question: Michael Friedman interviewed people all over the United States in the lead up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election and then set their words to music. What is special about musicalizing Americans in this context? Consider how the song cycle conveys stories differently from voter demographic data: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>

3-1-1 Exercise: Pair up students who will discuss which song from *The State of the Union Songbook* struck them most and why. Student A will have 3 minutes to talk, while Student B listens without interruption. Then Student B will recap what they heard from Student A in 1 minute. Student A will have 1 minute to clarify and add to their thoughts. Finally, the students switch roles and share with the class what their partner had said.

Close Reading: Watch Friedman perform “Undocumented” from *The State of the Union Songbook*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxeuc9FjpLc>

Follow-up Questions:

- How does this song make you feel? How does Friedman accomplish this?
- Which lyrics stand out to you and why? Note any repetition.
- Does the music change over the course of the song?
- How would you describe the musical style?
- How does Friedman capture this character and his story?
- What does it mean for a non-Latinx Anglo white man to perform this song?

Close Reading: Listen to “Whatever” from *This Beautiful City* by The Civilians, who interviewed, musicalized, and performed an array of people related to Ted Haggard’s New Life megachurch in Colorado Springs circa 2006.

Follow-up Questions:

- How does having a professional performer whose identity more closely aligns with the interviewee subject/character shape the storytelling and interpretation of the song?
- What is the significance of preserving “um”s and “like”s in the lyrics?
- What do you observe of the musical ostinato, refrain, and bridge in conveying the arc of the song?

Close Reading: Listen to “Waiting for Wood” from *Pretty Filthy* by The Civilians, who studied the porn industry in the San Fernando Valley circa 2010.

Follow-up Questions:

- Describe the song structure.
- How does Friedman incorporate multiple interviews in this single song?
- Do you notice patterns in how Friedman adapts interviews into songs?
- The Civilians conduct what they call “investigative theater.” What are some similarities and differences in their approach compared with other theater makers who create docudramas? (ex. Anna Deavere Smith, Tectonic Theater Project)

Assignment: Assign a filmed interview to the students who will then compose a song based on that interview. Students can create individually, in pairs, or in groups before, during, or after this class. They will share their work and then compare their songs, processes, and decisions as they approached musicalizing this interview.