

# WEST SIDE STORY

Based on a conception of **Jerome Robbins** | Book by **Arthur Laurents**  
Music by **Leonard Bernstein** | Lyrics by **Stephen Sondheim** | Directed by **Mark Clements**  
**September 17 - October 27, 2019 | Quadracci Powerhouse**

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

Written by **Lindsey Hoel-Neds**, *Content Writer*  
Edited by **Jenny Toutant**, *Education Director*  
**Auburn Matson**, *Education Administrator*

### SUGGESTED TEACHING & CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Modernizing Classic Stories
2. Internal Migration
3. Dance and Movement as Storytelling

This Teacher's Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with The Rep's PlayGuide for *West Side Story*. These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The PlayGuide is available online at <https://www.milwaukeeep.com/Tickets--Events/201920-Season/West-Side-Story/West-Side-Story-Playguide/>

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe love at first sight is a possible foundation for a lasting relationship? Why or why not?
2. What tensions between different social or racial/ethnic groups do you see in your own community?
3. Do you believe a "generation gap" in understanding is inevitable between different generations? Share examples to support your opinion.
4. In what ways do you experience peer pressure in your life? Is it always a negative force or can it also be positive?
5. What causes members of one group to dislike or distrust those of another? What happens when this hate is officially sanctioned or reinforced by those in power?

### CLASSIC ROOTS OF A CLASSIC MUSICAL

*West Side Story* uses Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as source material. Have students compare and contrast the two plays either through reading *Romeo and Juliet* or watching a film adaptation of the play. In groups, students can select various elements of the two pieces to compare and share with the class. Some ideas to get them started: individual characters, star-crossed lovers, tensions between feuding gangs, arranged marriages vs. love, the importance of a social dance, how violence impacts the community, etc. Students may share their findings with the class through charts, venn diagrams, or other visual aids.

### INTERNAL MIGRATION IN THE U.S.

The Puerto Ricans in the musical are seen as foreigners even though they are also Americans. Waves of internal migration in the U.S. of particular groups of people have happened many times in our nation's history. Have students research internal migration movements during U.S. history, or have them tell their own family's internal migration story, depending on which option works for them. If possible, have students mark on a large U.S. map the different migrations they have studied and share their findings with the class through an oral or multimedia presentation.

### DANCE AS A FORM OF STORYTELLING

In *West Side Story*, dance is an integral part of the storytelling. Discuss with students how dance and movement are used in the musical. Also discuss with students other contemporary examples from popular culture or their own lives where dance and movement are an essential part of the story. In small groups, have students develop short movement pieces that tell a story of their choosing. If they have trouble thinking of a scenario, have them start with an emotion or a situation from their own lives. After students have developed and rehearsed their piece, they should share it with the class.

### VIOLENCE AND ASSAULT IN OUR CULTURE

The violence that pervades the musical, including the sexual assault of Anita by the Jets, is a problem that has not changed in the sixty years since the musical's inception. Have students discuss the role of violence in our society and popular culture. How does violence impact their lives? Where do they feel safe? Is it possible to move towards a more peaceful society?

The assault of Anita is a part of the musical that is often forgotten by critics or audiences when discussing *West Side Story*. Sexual assault and harassment have come to the forefront of discussions in the past several years with the #MeToo movement and the reckoning that followed. Have students discuss ways to make consent culture more prevalent in their schools and communities. Encourage students to devise ways to promote anti-violence and pro-consent initiatives and implement them amongst their peers, then allow students to create those programs or seek out the resources to make them happen.

## MODERNIZING A CLASSIC TALE

As *West Side Story* is a modernization of *Romeo and Juliet*, have students modernize another classic story of their choosing, perhaps a fairy tale or a classic that you have read in class. Students may create the modern version through a written version of the story or create a play to perform for the class. Help students to think about how to update the plot, characters, and themes of whichever story they have chosen.

## BOUNDARIES AND CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS

In *West Side Story*, the conflict over “turf” is strong, as the neighborhood of Lincoln Square/San Juan Hill brings in more ethnic groups. Milwaukee is known as one of the most segregated cities in the nation, but which groups occupy different areas of Milwaukee has changed over time. Have students research the evolving neighborhoods of Milwaukee and the ethnic groups within the community. A great place to start is [www.themakingofmilwaukee.com](http://www.themakingofmilwaukee.com). Also have students investigate incidents of bias or discrimination in our community. Students should share their findings either “science fair” style, in small groups, or for the whole class.

## PROBLEMATIC HISTORY OF THE CLASSICS

*West Side Story* was created in a different time, and as such, has a history that has made it problematic for modern audiences. As theaters such as The Rep produce classic shows, it is our imperative to update the pieces for modern times. Have students think of a film or television show they know that “has not aged well” due to changing attitudes or realities. Students should create a proposal for how, if possible, they could update the show to make it more palatable for modern audiences. In their proposal, they should also include some research about how the show or film they have chosen is reflective of the times in which it was created.

If you utilize any of the activities above, please share them with us at The Rep! We would love to see your students' work. Email Auburn Matson at [amatson@milwaukeeep.com](mailto:amatson@milwaukeeep.com) with any work samples you would love for us to see.



### MILWAUKEE REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The Education Department offers backstage tours, pre- and post-show workshops and classroom residencies.

#### Contact Us:

Milwaukee Repertory Theater  
Education Department  
108 E. Wells Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

#### For questions or to schedule a workshop, please contact:

Auburn Matson, *Education Administrator*  
414-290-5393 • [amatson@milwaukeeep.com](mailto:amatson@milwaukeeep.com)  
[www.MilwaukeeRep.com](http://www.MilwaukeeRep.com) | 414-224-9490

### Standards

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9** Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

**WI TP.Cr.18.h:** Text/Script Devise an original or adapt an existing work that incorporates dramatic structure.

**WI TP.R.12.h:** View Performance Demonstrate developmentally appropriate audience etiquette at a professional performance.

**WI TP.Cn.13.h:** Cultural Social Context Compare and contrast how two or more cultural and/or historical traditions impact production, text, or script.

**WI SEL SA.9.h** Learners will be able to reflect on their own beliefs relative to different familial and societal norms.

**WI SEL SA.12.h** Learners will be able to identify positive ways to express understanding of differing perspectives.

**WI SEL SA.13.h** Learners will be able to support the rights of individuals to reflect their family, culture, and community within the school setting.

**WI SEL SA.14.h** Learners will be able to assess for personal bias and evaluate strategies to oppose stereotyping.

**WI SEL RS.18.h** Learners will be able to formulate group goals and work through an agreed upon plan.

**WI DM.SA.RS.24.h** Learners will be able to independently create an action plan that addresses real needs in the classroom, school, and community.

## PROGRAMS IN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT RECEIVE GENEROUS FUNDING FROM:

Bader Philanthropies  
Patty & Jay Baker Foundation  
Clarice S. Turer Charitable Fund  
Mae E. Demmer Charitable Trust

The Einhorn Family Foundation  
Ralph Evinrude Foundation  
Gardner Foundation  
Greater Milwaukee Foundation  
GMAR Youth Foundation

The Harley-Davidson Foundation  
The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation  
Frieda & William Hunt Memorial Trust  
Dorothy Watkins Inbusch Foundation  
Johnson Controls Foundation

Herb Kohl Philanthropies  
Kohl's Foundation  
Lubar Family Foundation  
MPS Community  
Grant Program

MPS Partnership for the Arts & Humanities  
Northwestern Mutual Foundation  
Jane Bradley Pettit Foundation  
Townsend Foundation  
Wisconsin Energy Corporation Foundation