

CURVE

WEST SIDE STORY

LEARNING PACK

WEST SIDE STORY

Based on a conception of **JEROME ROBBINS**
Book by **ARTHUR LAURENTS** Music by **LEONARD BERNSTEIN**
Lyrics by **STEPHEN SONDHEIM**

Entire Original Production Directed and Choreographed by
JEROME ROBBINS

Originally produced on Broadway by Robert E. Griffith and Harold S. Prince by arrangement with Roger L. Stevens. Performed by arrangement with Music Theatre International (Europe) Limited



SECTION ONE

WEST SIDE STORY

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Learning Pack that supports the new **Made at Curve** production of *West Side Story*. Inside you will find a range of resources from classroom activities to interviews with the creative team. It's arguable that *West Side Story* might hold the title as the most famous musical ever. Certainly its major themes of love and identity will never go out of fashion – but it also has a score that drives the action in a way that is essentially visceral and timeless. Many young people continue to discover the piece through their own school productions, and with this in mind you will find ideas in this pack that support a school play as well as enhance enjoyment of a show visit.

West Side Story will always have a curious, small part in my own interest in theatre. I remember hearing the soundtrack album, aged about 11, while at friend's house. I was completely captivated by the snatches of in-song dialogue, the exciting narrative, and the way the music told that story – the only thing was, I had no idea at all what I was listening to! I'd never seen a musical, never heard of the film, never listened to a soundtrack album before. We weren't an artistic family and I just had no frame of reference for it at all. So my response to it was totally driven by the music, the story, and the pictures it created in my head.

I wonder if any of the young people that will connect with our exciting new production will have a similar first-time experience? If so, they are sure to find plenty within this pack to help develop their understanding of a genuine contemporary theatre classic.

If you do have any queries, or would like to know more about the range of workshops we have to support this and other Made at Curve productions, please do get in touch with me via email: a.reeves@curvetheatre.co.uk

Happy reading!

Andy Reeves

Head of Learning

SECTION TWO

SHOW SYNOPSIS

West Side Story tells of two rival gangs, the Sharks and the Jets, on the upper west side of New York in the 1950s. Tony and Maria meet at a dance one night and fall in love instantly. Tony is best friends with Riff, leader of the Jets, and a former member of the gang himself. Maria's brother Bernardo is leader of the Sharks. In lots of ways they are a million miles apart and the gang culture in the neighbourhood conspires to keep them that way. Bernardo sees Maria dancing with Tony and orders her home. Tony follows and they meet on the fire escape outside Maria's bedroom and pledge their love.

The Jets challenge the Sharks to a rumble under the bridge, and they agree to fight for control of the neighbourhood. Maria persuades Tony to go along to stop the fight, as she can't bear the thought of her brother getting hurt, and begs Tony to broker peace between the two factions. Tony goes along but instead of breaking the fight up he arrives in time to see Bernardo stab and kill Riff. In a haze of rage and grief Tony then kills Bernardo with Bernardo's own knife. Both sides are horrified and leave the scene, scattering to avoid the police.

Meanwhile, Maria and her best friend (Bernardo's girlfriend) Anita discuss and sing about life for Puerto Ricans in America, and compare fantasy with reality. Anita knows that Maria and Tony are in love, and supports Maria although she is scared for her. When Maria and Anita discover that Tony has killed Bernardo, Anita still agrees to take a message to Tony and help the lovers escape New York to start a new life together away from the gangs. However, the Jets brutally attack and rape Anita, and she then tells them that Maria is dead. When Tony hears this he tracks down the Shark that Anita alleged has killed Maria but ends up being shot himself. Maria arrives before he dies and they share a last few loving moments together with Jets and Sharks looking on in horror. The show ends with a faint hope that, despite (or maybe because of) the events that have led to this moment of tragedy, maybe peace can be found between the rival gangs.

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VIDEO

Click here to see the
behind-the-scenes
photoshoot for
West Side Story.



Photography: **Ellie Kurtz**

SECTION TWO

WEST SIDE STORY

HISTORY OF THE SHOW

In 1947, choreographer **Jerome Robbins** approached the composer **Leonard Bernstein** and writer **Arthur Laurents** about collaborating on a contemporary musical adaptation of *Romeo & Juliet*. He proposed that the plot focus on the conflict between an Irish Catholic family and a Jewish family living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, during the Easter Passover season. It was to be called *East Side Story*. Bernstein wanted an operatic style of material but was persuaded otherwise by his colleagues who suggested the work should be framed as 'lyric-theatre'. Through various unsuccessful attempts to conceive a plausible story to build the show from, the project lost momentum. It was not until 1955 when an article in a Los Angeles newspaper, describing a fight between two Hispanic men, resulting in the death of one of them, prompted Laurents to write the story. The story would centre around a Puerto Rican gang in the west side of New York and its conflicts with a rival American gang. At heart, it was to be a love-story but would be deeply layered with the difficult sociological and cultural climate faced by immigrant minorities in 1950s New York City.

Laurents had met and asked **Stephen Sondheim** to write the lyrics for *West Side Story*, initially to be completed by Bernstein who had decided to work solely on the music. Sondheim was convinced to take up the task by his mentor **Oscar Hammerstein**. It was orchestrated by **Sid Ramin** and **Irwin Kostal** with a thirty-one-piece orchestra to play the lavishly intricate yet daunting score. The music was an amalgamation of various styles from latin, jazz, opera and traditional musical theatre.

The shows book is largely based on **William Shakespeare's** play *Romeo & Juliet* but with some adaptations to the characters and plot. By 1956 the show was reaching completion however the main creative team were all tied to prior projects. After a failed attempt to raise money for the show, the producer **Cheryl Crawford** pulled out. No other producers were willing to take on the project. Sondheim later contacted his friend and producer **Harold Prince** and asked him to join. Prince cut the budget and raised money simultaneously and gave Robbins a longer rehearsal period, after he threatened to quit the project.

Dance was to be a focus of *West Side Story* and therefore it needed performers capable of Robbins' choreography. **Larry Kent** and **Chita Rivera** were chosen for the roles of Tony and Anita. Many well-known actors had been considered including **James Dean** before the actor's untimely death. A handful of the shows original cast went on to star in the 1961 film adaptation. To initiate the feeling of hatred between the two rival gangs, reflecting the real-life stories depicted in the newspapers at the time, Robbins insisted that the casts of each gang be kept apart. Rehearsals were full of difficulties between the main creatives. Bernstein was frequently asked to cut down his score, the designs by **Oliver Smith** were deemed too stylised and disagreements and with Robbins demanding a "Conceived by" credit without consulting the others, leading to none of his collaborators talking to Robbins on opening night.

Despite Columbia records initially refusing to record the cast album due the score being too difficult and depressing; the original Broadway production opened at the Winter Garden Theatre on 26th September 1957, to both critical and public acclaim. The production won three Tony awards including Best Choreography for Robbins. It closed on 27th June 1959, after 732 performances with a national tour and subsequent revivals both on Broadway and internationally.

Photography: **Ellie Kurtz**

SECTION TWO

ORIGINAL CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

JEROME ROBBINS

Jerome Robbins is world renowned for his work as a choreographer of ballets as well as his work as a director and choreographer in theatre, movies and television.

Although he began as a modern dancer, his start on Broadway was as a chorus dancer before joining the corps de ballet of American Ballet Theatre in 1939, where he went on to dance principal roles in the works of Balanchine and de Mille.

While embarking on his career in the theatre, Jerome Robbins simultaneously created ballets for New York City Ballet, which he joined in 1949, and became an Associate Artistic Director with George Balanchine. Robbins directed for television and film as well, with his co-direction and choreography of *West Side Story* film adaptation in 1961, winning him two Academy Awards. After his Broadway triumph with *Fiddler On the Roof* in 1964, Jerome Robbins continued creating ballets for New York City Ballet. He shared the position of Ballet-Master-in-Chief with Peter Martins until 1989. He created more than 60 ballets, including *Les Noces* (1965), *Dances At a Gathering* (1969), *In G Major* (1975) and *Glass Pieces* (1983) which are in the repertoires of the New York City Ballet, the Ballet de l'Opera de Paris and major dance companies throughout the world. His ballets include *A Suite of Dances* with Mikhail Baryshnikov (1994), *West Side Story Suite* (1995) and *Brandenburg* (1996) all of which premiered at New York City Ballet.

In addition to his two Academy Awards, Jerome Robbins's awards and citations include four Tony Awards, five Donaldson Awards, two Emmy Awards, the Screen Directors' Guild Award and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Some of his famed Broadway shows include *On the Town* adapted from his ballet *Fancy Free* (1944), *West Side Story* (1957), *The King and I* (1951), *Gypsy* (1959), and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964).

In 1989, Jerome Robbins won six Tony Awards including Best Musical and Best Director for *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* – revue a production celebrating his own works. His last project was *Les Noces* for City ballet in May 1998 and died later that same year.

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ORIGINAL CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES continued

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LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Leonard Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1918. He took piano lessons as a boy and attended the Garrison and Boston Latin Schools. At Harvard University before graduating in 1939, he made an unofficial conducting debut with his own incidental music to *The Birds*. In 1945 he was appointed Music Director of the New York City Symphony Orchestra, a post he held until 1947. Bernstein became Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in 1958.

Bernstein was a leading advocate of American composers, particularly Aaron Copland. The two remained close friends for life. While Bernstein's conducting repertoire encompassed the standard literature, he may be best remembered for his performances and recordings of Beethoven, Schumann, and Mahler. Inspired by his Jewish heritage, Bernstein completed his first large-scale work: *Symphony No. 1: Jeremiah*. (1943). Other major compositions by Bernstein include *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* for solo clarinet and jazz ensemble (1949); *Serenade* for violin, strings and percussion, (1954); *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story* (1960).

Bernstein contributed substantially to the Broadway musical stage. In 1957 collaborated with Jerome Robbins, Stephen Sondheim, and Arthur Laurents, on the landmark musical *West Side Story*, also made into the Academy Award-winning film. He won eleven Emmy Awards in his career. His televised concert and lecture series started with the *Omnibus* program in 1954, followed by the extraordinary *Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic*, in 1958 that extended over fourteen seasons. His writings were published in *The Joy of Music* (1959), *Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts* (1961) and *The Infinite Variety of Music* (1966). Each has been widely translated. Bernstein always rejoiced in opportunities to teach young musicians. His master classes at Tanglewood were famous. He was instrumental in founding the Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute in 1982. He helped create a world class training orchestra at the Schleswig Holstein Music Festival. In 1987 the London Symphony Orchestra named him Honorary President.

Bernstein received many honours. He was elected in 1981 to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which gave him a Gold Medal. The National Fellowship Award in 1985 applauded his life-long support of humanitarian causes. He received medals from the Beethoven Society and the Handel Medallion, New York City's highest honour for the arts; a Tony award (1969) for Distinguished Achievement in the Theater; and dozens of honorary degrees and awards from colleges and universities. Annual festivals of Bernstein's music have been produced throughout the world.

World peace was a particular concern of Bernstein. He supported Amnesty International from its inception. To benefit the effort in 1987, he established the Felicia Montealegre Fund in memory of his wife who died in 1978. He established The Bernstein Education Through the Arts (BETA) Fund, Inc. before his death on October 14, 1990.

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ORIGINAL CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES continued

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STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Stephen Sondheim is an American composer and lyricist known for more than a half-century of contributions to musical theatre. Sondheim has been described by Cameron Mackintosh as 'possibly the greatest lyricist ever'. He was born to a Jewish family in New York City in 1930. Sondheim's father manufactured dresses designed by his mother. He grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and, after his parents divorced, on a farm near Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Sondheim is described in Meryle Secrest's biography *Stephen Sondheim: A Life* as 'an isolated, emotionally neglected child'.

He is best known for comprising the lyrics for *A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to The Forum* (1962), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in The Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987) and *Passion* (1994) as well as lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957) and *Gypsy* (1959). Anthologies of his work include *Side by Side by Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me A Little* (1981), *You're Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983), *Putting It Together* (1993/99) and *Sondheim On Sondheim* (2010). He is noted for complex polyphony in his vocals, such as the five minor characters who make up a Greek chorus in 1973's *A Little Night Music*. Sondheim uses angular harmonies and intricate melodies. His musical influences are varied; although he has said that he "loves Bach", his favourite musical period is from Brahms to Stravinsky.

He composed the scores of the films *Stavisky* (1974) and *Reds* (1981) and songs for *Dick Tracy* (1990) and the television production *Evening Primrose* (1966). His collected lyrics with attendant essays have been published in two volumes: *Finishing the Hat* (2010) and *Look, I Made a Hat* (2011). In 2010 the Broadway theatre formerly known as Henry Miller's Theatre was renamed in his honour.

Sondheim has an Academy award for Best Song: *Sooner or Later (I Always Get My Man)* from *Dick Tracy* (1990). His other awards include several Grammy, Olivier and Tony awards including a Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre (2008) and the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for *Sunday in the Park with George* (1985). In November 2015, Sondheim was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama.

ARTHUR LAURENTS

An award-winning playwright, screenwriter, librettist, director and producer, Arthur Laurents has been responsible for creating the librettos of many Broadway shows including *Gypsy*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Do I Hear A Waltz?*, *Hallelujah, Baby!* and *Nick & Nora*. He wrote the screenplays for *The Snake Pit*, *Anna Lucasta*, *Anastasia*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *The Way We Were* and *The Turning Point*. He also wrote the plays *Home Of The Brave*, *The Time Of The Cuckoo* and *A Clearing in The Woods*. He directed *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Gypsy*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *Birds Of Paradise* and *Nick & Nora*.

SECTION TWO

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TEACHER'S CLASSROOM DISCUSSION SUBJECTS

- What does cultural identity mean to you and how does place affect your sense of self?
- Exploring gangs and gang culture – what role/s do the women in *West Side Story* play in both the Sharks and the Jets. How does this affect their character and allegiance to other women?
- What significant similarities do the plot in *West Side Story* and *Romeo & Juliet* share? Can you match the characters from both stories?
- Focusing on the theme of tragedy and the idea of fate – what moments could've changed the course of the story? How did each character contribute to the end? Was it inevitable?



Photography: **Ellie Kurttz**

SECTION THREE

WEST SIDE STORY

LIFE IN THE WEST SIDE

◆ YOUTH GANGS OF EAST HARLEM 1950S

When one thinks of *West Side Story* and its beautiful film adaptation, it is easy to forget that at one time in New York City there were youth gangs that battled each other over territory. Although the Jets and Sharks are fictional, they represent real gangs that roamed the streets and parks of New York City in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Violence was a part of the gang life and homicides took place with frequent regularity at that time.

In the 1950s New York City experienced massive cultural changes that transformed entire neighbourhoods from one cultural enclave to a totally new one, sometimes within a decade. Residents who had been living in these transforming neighbourhoods for their entire lives were resistant to newcomers. Most of the new residents were African Americans from the Deep South and Puerto Ricans looking for the American Dream.

Throughout the 1950s, these East Harlem gangs battled each other, with fights sometimes ending in death for young victims, both gang and non-gang related. East Harlem and city-wide youth gangs were not the idealistic gangs represented in *West Side Story*. Murders such as this were very real and all too tragic.

Many of the songs in *West Side Story* demonstrate to the audience the appeal of life in a gang and the causes for their formation. Officer Krupke is a prime example. Though a light and comedic song, its lyrics are layered with reasons why the members act the way they do – lack of educational opportunities, bad parenting and drug and alcohol abuse among other things.

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LIFE IN THE WEST SIDE continued

1950S AMERICA – YOUTH CULTURE, RULES AND REBELLION

The 1950s are often seen as a time of conformity, conservatism and materialism but it was also a time of rebellion for teenagers – a recently identified new social group. Major events in that decade included the Korean War, the Red Scare and McCarthy era, and the launch of Sputnik satellite by the USSR, marking a milestone in the Cold War. If there was a national priority in America in the 1950s, it was to create a safe, secure, calm and orderly community in which millions of post-war Americans could start a family.

Sandwiched in between the generations of new post-war families and their boom of babies was a generation of teenagers. Teens were marginalized by the adults, who didn't want to be bothered with the very different values of teenagers. There were a few television shows aimed at young children, nothing for teenagers, and nothing on the radio speaking to teen life.

Then the teens started to hear music about their world – songs about high school sweethearts, wild parties and fast cars, sung by other teens. They were hungry for some recognition of their generation, some validation, and when it came, they embraced it.

There have always been inter-family conflicts between parents and their adolescent children, but this cultural division was larger. A significant proportion of the adult generation disapproved of the values and lifestyle of the teens, and were doing something about it, including setting new rules, restrictions and prohibitions. For example, dancing to rock'n'roll music was often banned, with school and teen dances shut down.



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TIMELINE OF 1950s AMERICA

1950

- First modern credit card introduced.
- **Korean War** begins.
- **Senator Joseph McCarthy** gains power and McCarthyism begins – a witch hunt proceeds, blacklisting Americans as communists.
- Two Puerto Rican nationalists, **Griselio Torresola** and **Oscar Collazo**, attempt to assassinate **President Harry S. Truman**.
- 77% of households purchase their first television.

1951

- Colour TV is introduced.
- Truman signs peace treaty with Japan, officially ending WWII.
- Rock & Roll is born.
- The beauty competition Miss World begins.

1952

- Seat belts are introduced to vehicles.
- The **Immigration and Nationality Act**, solidifying more restrictive immigration into the country, is introduced.
- Vaccine for Polio is discovered.
- The CIA overthrows the Guatemalan government.

1953

- **Korean Armistice Agreement** signed, ending the Korean War.
- **President Dwight D. Eisenhower** elected as President.

1954

- US Supreme Court rule segregation as illegal in **Brown vs Board of Education** case.
- The Senate Subcommittee discuss **Juvenile Delinquency**, focusing on graphic crime and horror comic books.
- **Comics Code Authority** instated which is still used today, censoring the language and images of comics.
- The **Geneva Agreements** end fighting between France and Vietnam but lay foundations for America's war with the country.

1955

- **Disneyland** opens in Anaheim California.
- The murder of **Emmett Till** and the **Montgomery Bus Boycott** starts the **Civil Rights Movement**.
- Cultural American icon James Dean is killed in a car accident.

1956

- TV remote is invented.
- Velcro is used on products.
- **Federal Aid Highway Act** sets up construction of 41,000 miles of interstate roads.
- **Elvis Presley** becomes a world acclaimed star with the film **Love Me Tender**.
- Film star **Grace Kelly** marries **Prince Rainier III of Monaco**

1957

- Soviet Union launches the Soviet satellite, **Sputnik**, starting the space race and age.
- **The Cat in the Hat** is published.
- **European Economic Community** established.
- The **Little Rock Nine**, a group of nine African American students, is enrolled into the **Central High School**, a stepping stone in ending segregation in schools.
- The oral contraceptive pill is prescribed for the first time.

1958

- **NASA** is founded as a result of the Space Race with the Soviet Union.
- **Boris Pasternak** refuses the **Noble Prize** for his poetry, as Pasternak faced pressure from the Soviet Union.
- The Peace symbol was created.
- **Lego** toy bricks are created and sold worldwide.

1959

- **The Sound of Music** opens on Broadway.
- The **Barbie** doll is invented.
- The Microchip is invented.
- **Fidel Castro** becomes President of Cuba and brings communism to Caribbean countries.
- The **Vietnam War** begins.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUERTO RICO

1493

Explorer **Christopher Columbus** claims **Puerto Rico** for Spain.

1898

The Treaty of Paris leads to the Spanish surrendering Puerto Rico to the USA at the end of the **Spanish American War**.

1900

A civil government is instituted in Puerto Rico under **The Foraker Act**.

1917

Puerto Ricans are granted US citizenship under **The Jones Act**.

1946

The US appoints **Jesus T Pinero** as the first governor.

1947

Puerto Ricans are granted a partial self government, allowing them to elect their own governor.

1948

First elected governor, **Luis Muñoz Marín**, serves four terms.

1950

President Truman signs the **Puerto Rico Commonwealth Bill**.

1952

Puerto Rico's constitution is declared.

1954

Puerto Rican nationalists open fire in the US House of Representatives, injuring five congressmen.

1993

Spanish and English declared as the nation's official languages.

1998

Puerto Rico declared a disaster zone, after **Hurricane George** causes serious damage.

2000

First female Governor, **Sila María Calderón**, is elected.

2005

Voters in a referendum back the notion of replacing the island's Senate and House of Representatives with a one-house legislature.

FBI agents shoot and kill rebel leader Filberto Ojeda Ríos in an operation to arrest him, igniting the country's independence movement.

2006

Thousands of people protest after US Supreme Court rejects the appeal for Puerto Ricans to have the right to vote in US presidential elections.

Puerto Rico establishes first sales tax, aiming to address major budget deficits.

2012

US Congress consider the status of Puerto Rico as voters back a non-binding referendum for Puerto Rico to become a full US state, which requires US Congressional approval.

2013

Puerto Rico faces a debt crisis, raising the possibility that the nation needs federal assistance.

2017

Puerto Rico declares bankruptcy – the largest ever by a local US government.

Puerto Rico votes in favor of becoming America's 51st state, only 23% of voters take part.

Two hurricanes devastate the island and generate a political debate over failing US relief efforts.

2019

Resignation of **Governor Ricardo Rosselló**, after street protest concerning a group text message scandal involving offensive comments.

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CURRICULUM LINKS – DANCE A-LEVEL

DISCUSSION

What does cultural identity mean to you and how does place affect your sense of self?

ACTIVITY

Looking at the lyrics of Officer Krupke and/or America dancers can pick two contrasting lyrics and interpret the text through a movement sequence, e.g. 2 counts of 8. (approximately 16 seconds). The intension behind the choreography should be clear to the audience. Dancers should consider their expression from one feeling to another.

E.g. Dear Officer Krupke –
*'Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke
Ya gotta understand
It's just our bringin' upke
That gets us outta hand
Our mothers all are junkies
Our fathers all are drunks
Golly Moses natcherly we're punks'*

These lyrics give an insight into the type of background that the Jets have had. Providing the student with visual images i.e. 'drunks'. Which they might interpret in a literal sense through their facial expression, style and tempo of the choreography. Music is optional.

There is also opportunity for students to show the progression of their character's emotions throughout the song; a realisation of how much their up-bringing has affected them. This could be done by speaking the lyrics aloud like a script and or/poem to help the students understand the emotional intention behind them.

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CURRICULUM LINKS – DRAMA KS4

DISCUSSION

Exploring gangs and gang culture – what role/s do the women in *West Side Story* play in both the Sharks and the Jets. How does this affect their character and allegiance to other women?

ACTIVITY

In groups, students can create a freeze frame that displays what a gang looks like to them, then more specifically, how they imagine the gangs of *West Side Story* to be. Once this is formed, teachers can direct students to think about each individual member's place in the gang, and then bring the image to life through improvisation.

E.g. Anita – Bernardo's Girlfriend from the Sharks.

Anita is a bold and out-spoken woman. She is consistently passionate and head-strong living in the conservative culture of the 1950s. Students could consider how a woman within Puerto Rican and American culture fitted into gang life and how this can be reflected in the freeze frame: are they at the front of the freeze frame? Hidden at the back? Alone, or close to the others? Students should consider the key characteristics of their role to project to an audience.



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CURRICULUM LINKS – DRAMA GCSE

DISCUSSION

What significant similarities do the plot in *West Side Story* and *Romeo & Juliet* share?

ACTIVITY

After comparing the two stories, students can explore character through hot seating.

Hot Seating is game where a student answers questions, whilst in-character, by their peers. The student should answer how they think their character would reply. E.g. 'Juliet' is asked who she thinks began the feud between the Montagues and Capulets? The student should consider what Juliet has experienced throughout the play which would inform their reply. This is an improvisational task but could feature pre-prepared answers.

Teachers should encourage students to play and experiment with their own understanding of chosen character.



SECTION THREE

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CURRICULUM LINKS – ENGLISH LITERATURE

DISCUSSION

Focusing on the theme of tragedy and the idea of fate – what moments could've changed the course of the story? How did each character contribute to the end? Was it inevitable?

ACTIVITY

A continuum line – A task where teachers can ask questions concerning the key events or moral dilemmas which students debate whether they agree or disagree on. Students exemplify this by standing on an imaginary line demonstrating the spectrum of opinion. Teachers can ask the students for an explanation on their choices.

E.g. If Mercutio had not been killed, how would this have changed the storyline? Would the feud between the houses have escalated to such a violent extent?



SECTION FOUR

WEST SIDE STORY – CHOREOGRAPHY

WEST SIDE STORY CHOREOGRAPHER ELLEN KANE EXPLAINS THE THOUGHTS BEHIND CURVE'S CHRISTMAS MUSICAL.

West Side Story at Curve has been a year in the making for me, and it has been a delight! When Nikolai first asked me to do it, there was this huge wave of 'oh my god! It's *West Side Story*, can we really go near that production?'. Intimidation quickly turned to excitement as the more I thought about it, I'm incredibly attracted to the themes of the story. Every character involved in the production is wanting to be recognised and wanting to be valued, and that's extremely powerful.

Alongside human validation, conflict too is prominent throughout, and I'm enticed by conflict. When I listened to the score and studied the script, I rediscovered how interesting the content and the subject matter is. It's incredibly dark and relevant, yet the score is so magnificently beautiful – it's overwhelming!

It's only this year that licencing rights have allowed us to introduce brand-new choreography, and I can't wait to show off this spectacular and heart-wrenching narrative in all its glory. The story is timeless and has held an iconic place in everybody's hearts for so long. But like anything, when there is a valuable story at the heart of something like that, it's always good to re-explore it so it's accessible to new audiences. Ultimately, the core material can relate to us now, it's not like it's aged and I'm grateful that I've been able to investigate and capture that through dance and movement.

Even today, the same behaviour and tone from New York City's West Side in 1957 is still relevant across the country. I have completed huge amounts of research on gangs in both in New York and actually in modern society here. Nikolai Foster and I want to make something that honours the tradition of this piece, yet somehow retells it from a slightly different point of view. That's what makes choreographing this production of *West Side Story* so remarkable because it has all the right ingredients to create something new: the spectacular score, the iconic story, the strong characters, the design and tonnes of choreography!

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Click here to hear all about the creative process behind *West Side Story*.

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WEST SIDE STORY – CHOREOGRAPHY continued

There's a huge amount of variety throughout *West Side Story*. Despite the anguish and emotion, there's a lot of playfulness in the songs like *I Feel Pretty*. *America* also brings a very bold take on the women in the story which I think is important. I choreograph everything from the story, so I always justify the work that I'm making by the story because instinctively it's born out of those things. I am not particularly interested that it looks perfect or pretty, I like to feel the story coming off the stage. Without the gangs and the individuals and the characters, there is no choreography.

We are blessed with the people that we have in our company, they have a lot of choreography to perfect! They are some of the most incredibly powerful, young actors coming through and it's the most perfect concoction to tell this story in a relevant and emotional way. Everything comes from their gut and that's what I am really excited by. I love power, I love passion and I love story telling, and that is where all of it stems from for me.

Ellen Kane



Photography: **Ellie Kurttz**

SECTION FOUR

WEST SIDE STORY – THE DESIGN

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SECTION FOUR

WEST SIDE STORY – THE DESIGN

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WEST SIDE STORY – THE TV ADVERT

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VIDEO: CROSSCUT MEDIA
PHOTOGRAPHY: CURVE