INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the educator resource guide for Triad Stage's production of SOUTH PACIFIC. We are excited to share this classical musical with students during our student matinee performances. This script and score significantly changed the history of American musical theatre, and this show is the largest production in Triad Stage's history.

Our goals for this guide include:
- Noting historical and artistic context about the show that you can share with your students.
- Providing practical instructional activities that you can use in your classroom that make connections between the production and curricular standards in areas including English/Language Arts, Social Studies, and Drama/Theatre.
- Offering opportunities for students to make personal connections between the production and their own experiences, as well as sparking dialogue about the play's central themes and big ideas.

In the guide, you will find dramaturgical information about the show and Triad Stage's production of the play, as well as a number of links to additional resources, videos, and information. There is also a section of classroom activities that are aligned with secondary English/Language Arts and Social Studies standards, are designed to meet curricular goals, and seek to support students’ exploration of the play's themes.

If you have any questions about the guide or how to use it, please don’t hesitate to reach out to Learning Director Lauren Smith at lauren@triadstage.org.

KEY:

- Questions for Dialogue
- Interesting Facts
- Classroom Activity
ABOUT THE STORY

SOUTH PACIFIC explores collisions of cultures and adventures in the face of danger. During WWII, Ensign Nellie Forbush, along with her Naval nursing corps, has arrived on an island in the South Pacific, accompanying a number of American servicemen who have been stationed there. She meets and falls in love with Frenchman Emile de Becque, but struggles throughout the story to accept the fact that his children's mother was Polynesian. A secondary love story plays out as Lieutenant Joseph Cable falls in love with Liat, a young Tonkinese woman, and grapples with the cultural ramifications of a possible marriage. These love stories take place against a backdrop of a hurry-up-and-wait of the military during wartime; the soldiers and nurses are constantly waiting for orders, simultaneously bored and fearful of their next missions.

ADAPTATION

SOUTH PACIFIC, created by legendary musical theater duo Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II, along with co-creator Joshua Logan used author James Michener's Tales of the South Pacific as inspiration. The book chronicles stories of the time the author spent on islands in the South Pacific, specifically the Solomon Islands. Many of the characters in the musical are similar to those Michener wrote about in the book, although some of the details have been simplified or adjusted.

- What other artistic pieces (movies, TV shows, etc.) can you think of that were adapted from different types of source material (books, letters, etc.)?
- Between the original material and the adaptation, which elements remained similar? Which ones differed? Why do you think the adaptors made those choices?
- Have you ever experienced “culture shock” (being in a situation that is completely different from anything else you have ever experienced)? How did you cope with that situation? What did you learn from it?
ABOUT THE PLAY

SOUTH PACIFIC is one of the most ground-breaking shows in musical theater history. Prior to this script and score, many American musicals showcased pop songs that were strung together rather than having a cohesive story line.

You can learn more about the inaugural production of SOUTH PACIFIC here.

RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN

“It may be that we can sing what we often cannot say, whether it be from shyness, fear, lack of the right words or the passion or dramatic gift to express them. More souls have rallied to more causes by the strains of music than by straining rhetoric.”

- Richard Rodgers

“I know the world is filled with troubles and many injustices. But reality is as beautiful as it is ugly. I think it is just as important to sing about beautiful mornings as it is to talk about slums. I just couldn’t write anything without hope in it.”

-Oscar Hammerstein II

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II complete one of the most celebrated creative teams in American history. Their works, in addition to SOUTH PACIFIC, include SHOW BOAT, THE KING AND I, OKLAHOMA! and CAROUSEL. Rodgers composed the music for these masterpieces, while Hammerstein wrote the “book” or dialogue. Joshua Logan, who directed the premiere production of SOUTH PACIFIC, also worked on writing the “book” (or the text that is not sung) with Hammerstein, bringing especially his own knowledge and experience in the military to the process.

You can read more about Rodgers and Hammerstein here.
CULTURAL IMPACT

According to dramaturg Kamilah Bush, “South Pacific became sort of the 1949 version of HAMILTON in terms of its cultural impact. It became one of the first shows that offered souvenirs—selling ties, lipsticks, scarves, dolls, music boxes—even fake ticket stubs so people could pretend they’d seen the show. Women cut their hair to match Mary Martin’s short “wash and go” style and products to manage that style skyrocketed. The music also became a part of American life, playing on the radio and appearing as #1 on the Billboard charts.” While this kind of massive cultural impact is less common for theater productions now, HAMILTON is an excellent example of a production, like SOUTH PACIFIC in the late ‘40s and early ’50s, that has become well-known by theater enthusiasts and the general public alike.

YOU’VE GOT TO BE CAREFULLY TAUGHT

You’ve got to be taught
To hate and fear,
You’ve got to be taught
From year to year,
It’s got to be drummed
In your dear little ear
You’ve got to be carefully taught.

You’ve got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade,
You’ve got to be carefully taught.

You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You’ve got to be carefully taught!

This song, sung by Lieutenant Joseph Cable, is one of the most important pieces of SOUTH PACIFIC. Cable sings this song after noting that “racism is not born in you! It happens after you’re born,” and the song raised a significant amount of scrutiny and pushback across the United States when the musical first premiered. A number of theaters refused to host the touring production unless the song was cut; Rogers and Hammerstein refused to let the play tour to theaters unless the musical included this song, and the musical was so popular that the theaters dropped their argument and produced the show complete with the song. James Michener noted that “[Rodgers and Hammerstein] replied stubbornly that this number represented why they had wanted to do this play, and that even if it meant the failure of the production, it was going to stay in.”

*For more insight about "You've Got To Be Carefully Taught," refer to dramaturg Kamilah Bush's dramaturgy note on page 9.

Based on what you know about the time period when SOUTH PACIFIC premiered (1949), what might have influenced this pushback to this particular song?
• How does this song resonate with what’s happening in our world today, if at all?
• How has racism in America changed since this time period? In what ways has it stayed the same?
• What other pieces of art (books, television, music, movies, etc.) can you think of that aimed to challenge social norms or address societal problems such as racism?
ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

NORTH CAROLINA CONNECTIONS
At Triad Stage, we prioritize playing a leading role in the North Carolina arts community, and actively work to create an artistic home for North Carolina artists and those with North Carolina connections. A number of the actors in SOUTH PACIFIC have North Carolina connections, either in the past or currently.

- **Kristin Weatherington (Ensign Nellie Forbush)** earned her BFA from Eastern Carolina University.
- **Dan Callaway (Emile de Becque)** earned his Master’s degree from UNCG and is on faculty at his alma mater, Elon University.
- **William Branner (Lieutenant Joseph Cable)** grew up in the Charlotte area.
- **Michael Tourek (Captain Brackett)** earned his MFA from UNCG and lives in Greensboro.
- **Taylor Murphy Hale (Commander William Harbison)** earned his MFA from UNCG.
- **Jeff Aguiar (Henry)** currently teaches at UNCG and lives in Greensboro.
- Many of the ensemble members (nurses and soldiers) are current students at the University of North Carolina Greensboro.

In addition to the performers, a number of people on the artistic team also have North Carolina Roots:
- Triad Stage’s Artistic Director (and director of this production) Preston Lane grew up near Boone, North Carolina.
- Music Director Justin P. Cowan is a doctoral candidate at UNCG.
- Scenic Designer Robin Vest teaches design at Guilford College.
- Costume Designer Bill Brewer teaches design at University of North Carolina School of the Arts.
WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO SEE?

Scenic Designer Robin Vest used the inspiration of a number of iconic items from WWII and islands in the South Pacific to inform her design. This photo contains the scenic model, a miniature representation of her vision of the set that helps the technical director and carpenters build the set. You will notice that the overall design includes an quonset hut (one of the temporary buildings that was a major feature of the US war effort of the South Pacific front during WWII) and a banana tree.

Designers conduct extensive visual research, especially for shows that are set in different time from our world today. These images show several of the research images that costume designer Bill Brewer used as inspiration and information for Nellie Forbush and the nurses, as well as the Seabees and other military personnel.

Wanting more?
We invite you to visit the dramaturgy website for SOUTH PACIFIC for more information about historical context of the 1940’s and WWII, as well as to get a feel for the kinds of research the actors and designers use throughout the creative process.
DIRECTOR’S NOTE

Since the founding of Triad Stage, much of our work has been focused on re-exploring the great American plays. And since the beginning there is a play that I have very much wanted to make a part of the re-exploration process. Finances and logistics kept pushing it back, but I am thrilled that you are here today and that you are going to join with all of us to revisit one of the greatest of all American dramas. It is a war play, a love story and a revolutionary masterpiece that could only have been created in the U.S. at the particular time in which it arrived. But it has proven to have life long after 1949 and to speak to audiences around the world.

The first time I approached South Pacific, I was skeptical. I’m a great fan of Sondheim, Jerry Herman, Kander and Ebb, but I considered Rodgers and Hammerstein old fashioned. Having seen countless productions of Oklahoma!, The King and I, and Sound of Music, I assumed I knew what was in the play I barely remembered from watching a rerun of the movie as a child. I was shocked to discover, I was completely wrong. I was dramaturg on this particular production at the Dallas Theater Center in the 90s (and also pigeon trainer—but that’s another story) and as I delved into the history of the war, read Michener’s stories that served as the source material, and realized the powerful anti-racist message that spoke loud and clear in a piece of theater designed for a commercial theater that rarely leads in battling our national ills, I knew I was lucky to be working on an American masterpiece.

Soon after this production closed, I travelled to London. On my way back, I shared a row of seats with a couple from Kansas. When I mentioned I had just worked on a production of South Pacific, the husband started to speak about James Michener, Nellie, Cable, Bloody Mary and the island as if he knew them. And he did. He had been stationed with Michener and knew the folks who served as the inspiration for many of these characters. As he spoke, I began to understand that this play I had come to love was so much more. It was a testament to the courage and sacrifice of a generation.

At the time, the man on the plane seemed so old to me, but as he spoke, I was overwhelmed with a sense of the young man he must have been—frightened at times, lucky to be alive—but just a young man, like so many, many young men who left the world they knew and travelled half way around the world. I was talking to a survivor, but he told me stories of friends who never came back. As he did, I realized that as the young soldiers and nurses in South Pacific board a ship they are heading to battle, Many of them won’t return. Is it no wonder they exit singing a song about the love and romance they may never know.

I think a great American play reveals so much about the time in which it was written, but it must also reveal something about who we are today. As we watch invigorated far right wing forces try to divide us, I hope that South Pacific will remind us that our nation is at our best when we are united and that how we have learned to hate and discriminate can be rejected.

Preston Lane | Triad Stage Artistic Director and Director of SOUTH PACIFIC
When the lights came up on the stage at the Majestic Theater on April 7, 1949, the world had just undergone one of its greatest cultural and political shifts in history. The conflicts of the Second World War were not distant memories, anecdotes and sensationalized entertainment – they were real, immediate recollections, the effects of which were still being discovered and realized. President Truman was promising the American people a “Fair Deal” and just three days prior to open, the NATO treaty had been signed in Washington. Outside the Majestic, the world was establishing a new normal. Inside, a cultural phenomenon was being born. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s South Pacific was giving an artistic voice to the hopes, fears and memories of those who had survived the War and demanding that the new world being built outside was one of inclusion and freedom.

South Pacific captivated a culture in a way that musical theater had not done before. Even before opening, critics were calling the play “just about perfect” and “South Terrific.” During previews ticket presales reached $500,000 – the highest of any Broadway show until that time. Rodgers and Hammerstein, who were not fond of celebrating their work, planned an elaborate party for the cast and crew on opening night. Perhaps, however, the greatest indications of the impact of South Pacific were not ticket sales and reviews – it was that people all over America, not just those in NY, were participating in the phenomena. Music from the show played on their radios, record sales reached the #1 spot on the Billboard Top 100 and remained there for 69 weeks. Having seen the show became such a symbol of status that fake ticket stubs were available for purchase. Ladies bought South Pacific lipstick and scarves, little girls played with Nellie dolls, and men sported show inspired neckties. The show’s star Mary Martin’s iconic cropped hair, which she washed on stage every night for over 1000 performances, became a fashion must. South Pacific was more than a hit, it was a movement.

If commercial and cultural success were not enough, South Pacific also achieved great critical success. Michener’s Tales from the South Pacific became the first collection of short stories to win the Pulitzer and South Pacific became only the second musical to win the prize. The original production swept the Tony’s, taking home ten of the coveted awards, including all four of the musical acting awards – the first and only time this has ever occurred.

“I meant every word in that song.” – Oscar Hammerstein II

The triumph of this play, however, is not just its popularity and longevity. Despite the fact that the world had just waged a war in which one of the major rallying cries was that all men were created equal, and despite the commercial and cultural success of the show, a deep controversy stirred in American audiences. Lt. Cable’s “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught” charged theatergoers to explore the idea that not only did prejudice exist even in “good” people, but that it was not natural and innate – it was an institutional knowledge that many of them had gained, that many of them were spreading – a systemic educational experience in which they were all participating. After seeing it in preview performances, many of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s friends encouraged them to cut the song, thinking that it would harm their chances for success. Rightly, the pair refused.

As the show began to tour the country, the play’s themes continued to cause controversy. In Wilmington, Delaware the play was set to be performed before a segregated audience until Rodgers and Hammerstein intervened. Rather than cancel the show, which would surely be a money maker, the theater reversed its policies. In Georgia, legislators called “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught” propaganda on the congress floor. The show’s creators remained steadfast, asserting that this message was the reason they’d written the show.

That this play is still be produced all over the world is a testament not only to the honesty of James Michener’s stories, nor the brilliance of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s music, nor the honor in memorializing of the brave men and women who served our country – but, perhaps most importantly, it is a reminder that we continue to participate in the careful teaching of prejudice. The goal of Rodgers and Hammerstein has not changed in all these years: to give us the great hope that just as easily as we can learn to hate and fear, we can determine to love and embrace.

Kamilah Bush | Triad Stage Artistic Apprentice and Dramaturg for SOUTH PACIFIC
COLOR-CONSCIOUS CASTING

Because much of the story of SOUTH PACIFIC centers around race and racial prejudice (specifically white Americans and their prejudices regarding the Polynesian people that they meet on the island), it is important to consider the races of the actors cast in the various roles within the production. At some points during American theater history, many productions have been cast “color blind,” or without regard to an actor’s race. The difficulty with this approach is that, regardless of whether or not the director/producer/actors are considering race, the audience WILL read meaning into the race of the actors playing the characters, even if this process happens subconsciously.

Conversely, according to the Penn State University Civic Issues Blog, color-conscious casting “stems from the belief that actors and actresses in major motion pictures, television series, and onstage performances of the theater ought to be cast in a manner which intentionally considers their race and ethnicity in order to prevent the continuation of the racist traditions of show business that were once completely acceptable.”

As this explanation notes, artists of color in the entertainment industry have been historically marginalized, as they have in much of American society. This happens in a number of ways, including not casting (or hiring in other areas, such as crew or administrative positions) actors of color, casting them only in specific roles (i.e. consistently casting black actors in roles as servants, maids, etc.), or casting white actors in roles specifically written for actors of color (see this article for an example from a production of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s In the Heights). Additionally, there is a lack of complex representation of communities of color in mass media and American theater.

For these reasons, Triad Stage carefully considered race when casting SOUTH PACIFIC, intentionally seeking Asian actors to play the roles of Bloody Mary, Liat, Emile de Becque’s children, and his assistant, Henry.

Visit these links for additional resources regarding color-conscious casting:

- Color-Conscious Casting: Three Questions to Ask
- Diversity Onstage: Who’s Afraid of Color-Blind Casting?
- Representation: Ethics Unwrapped (Video)
- How Diversity Could Save the Future of Theater
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: STORY OF MY NAME

This activity serves as a way for students to consider the importance of representation and the gravity and responsibility of telling others’ stories.

Content Area: English/Language Arts  
Approximate Time: 25-30 minutes

Directions:
Have students partner up and ask them to tell their partner the “story of their name.” This could be a first name, middle name, last name, or nickname. If desired, you can also give students the opportunity to make up the story. It might be advantageous to tell a story about your own name as an example; the story should be no longer than a minute or two long.

Ask students to listen carefully to their partner’s story, as they will need to remember enough details to share it with someone else later. They can take notes if helpful.

Have each pair find another pair (to create groups of four students). One by one, have each student tell the story of their partner’s name; make sure they know they can ask questions or clarifications during their re-telling if they need to. [NOTE: Depending on the size of your class, you might also have students tell their partner’s story to the entire class.]

Reflection Questions:
• How did it feel to share your story with your partner? How did it feel to listen to their story?
• How did you feel while you were re-telling your partner’s story? How did it feel to listen to someone else tell the story of your name?
• What themes did you notice about our stories? Where do names tend to come to?
• If we are going to tell stories related to personal elements of others’ lives or identities, what might we need to consider in order to make sure we tell their stories responsibly?

When should I use this activity?
This activity could be used either before or after viewing the play. If you choose to use it after students attend the production, you might add a reflection question regarding the importance of names and representation in the production.

Extension:
Have students write down their story (or their partner’s story) and expand it into a personal essay.

Standards:
English/Language Arts: Speaking and Listening
• 1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: DATA PROCESSING

Content Area: Social Studies
Approximate Time: 20-30 minutes

Directions:
Ahead of time, prep index cards with major events of WWII, or more specifically, the events of the Pacific front of the war (this timeline is a good place to start), one event per index card.

Let students know that you have a challenge for them at the beginning of class. Their task is to SILENTLY (no talking, or they have to start over) arrange themselves in a line from tallest person to shortest person (note which end of space should be the tallest and which should be the shortest). If desired, you can time this process. Remind them about the no-talking rule as necessary. Ask students to raise their hands when they think they have completed the task.

Once they complete the task, give them another task: this time, they will arrange themselves by birthday (month and day only). Note where January 1st and December 31st are in the space. Again, this task is nonverbal; time their progress if necessary. Once students have agreed they are in the right places, have them state their birthday aloud to check for accuracy.

After the first two rounds, ask the following reflection questions:
• What were some of the challenges you faced in this activity? How did you overcome them?
• How did you communicate with your neighbors without using words? What other strategies did you develop?

Hand out one index card with a historical event to each student (students can also play in pairs in larger classes). Ask them to do the same thing, arranging themselves chronologically based on the event on their card. You can attempt to do this without talking, or you can give students the opportunity to talk, negotiate, and use reference materials if necessary.

Once they are in the correct order, read the events off in order to check for accuracy. Lead a discussion about the causes and effects of each of the events and how they are connected, both to each other and to the events they saw onstage in SOUTH PACIFIC.

When should I use this activity?
This activity is ideally used as a review of the chronology of WWII. Depending on when the production falls in your instructional cycle, you could go review the dates before seeing the production or afterward.

Standards:
World History: WH.H.8.1
• Evaluate global wars in terms of how they challenged political and economic power structures and gave rise to new balances of power.

American History: AH2.H.1.1
• Use chronological thinking to (1) identify the structures of a historical narrative or story (its beginning, middle, and end) and (2) interpret data presented in timelines and create timelines.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: POSTER DIALOGUE

Content Area: Any
Approximate Time: 25-35 minutes

Directions:

Ahead of time, write the following questions on posters or different sections of whiteboard/chalkboard:

- A moment I remember from SOUTH PACIFIC is…
- One word I would use to describe the story of the play is…
- A major theme of SOUTH PACIFIC is…
- A question I have about SOUTH PACIFIC is…

Pass out markers to students and ask them to rotate around to the posters, writing their responses to each of the questions in single words or short phrases (if space is a challenge, you can also seat students in groups and rotate the papers around to them instead of having them move around the room). Encourage them to engage in this activity silently (you can play music in the background if you want to; instrumental tracks work best for this activity). Let them know that if they have the same thought as someone else, they can put a checkmark next to that thought to express their agreement.

After about five minutes, bring the posters to the front of the room. Starting with the first prompt, read each student response out loud and ask students the following questions (or other questions you generate to help them synthesize the big ideas that emerge):

- What themes or big ideas do you note in our responses?
- What do these moments have in common?
- Why do you think those moments stuck out particularly?

Moving on to the second poster, use the themes the students noted as a way to spark discussion about the big ideas from the play. Connect the descriptions to the themes.

Answer and discuss questions students express regarding their experience with the play. These questions might also serve as the spark for further research or exploration.

When should I use this activity?

This activity is a great discussion-starter for a class period following your field trip to Triad Stage. It can serve as an assessment for you to know which parts of the production they connected with and what parts it might be useful to revisit in class. The questions and discussion generated within this activity can also serve as useful processing for students’ experiences of the production.

NOTE: Feel free to adapt the questions as necessary to fit your curriculum; it is important that the questions be open-ended (without having concrete right and wrong answers), but their content is flexible.

Standards

English/Language Arts: Reading

- 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: ROLE ON THE WALL/WRITING IN ROLE

Content Area: English/Language Arts and Social Studies
Approximate Time: 25-35 minutes plus time for writing

Directions:
Draw a figure on the board (could be a fully body outline or just a head-and-shoulders outline) with enough room to write both inside the figure and outside of it.

Explain that you are going to move through an activity to think about the way some of the soldiers may have been experiencing the events we saw onstage. Note that the figure is going to represent Emile before he decides to join Cable on the mission. Review what has happened prior to that decision (including that Nellie has insisted that she cannot be with him because of his late wife's race). Ask students the following question:

• What are some of the messages that Emile is receiving from other characters or society as he is making his decision to go on this mission? Who is telling him (or otherwise communicating) those things?

Note students’ responses on the OUTSIDE of the figure of Emile. Make sure to take multiple answers and discuss the societal implications and pressures. Ask students to respond with specific lines of text or lyrics if desired. Once you have a significant list, ask students the following questions:

• How might all of these messages be affecting Emile at this moment?
• How do you think he is feeling?
• Why do you think he decided to join Cable on the mission?

Note students’ responses on the INSIDE of the figure of Emile. Draw arrows to directly connect messages from the outside to feelings or actions on the inside.

Once you have considerable information on the Role on the Wall figure, ask students to write a journal entry from Emile’s perspective the night before he plans to leave for this mission with Lieutenant Cable. Encourage them to use specific details from the story as well as their own creative thinking to generate a complete piece of writing. You can add any parameters (length, number of textual references, etc.) to this assignment that serve your curricular objectives.

NOTE: You might also decide to pass out copies of the outline to students to fill in along with you as you move through the activity.

EXTENSION: After moving through this activity once, have students choose a character and a moment in the play to use as the basis for their own Role on the Wall activity and their own letter home. Moments they might choose to explore:

• Nellie as she is running away from Emile after meeting his children.
• Emile's response when Nellie runs away from him after meeting his children.
• Liat's response when Cable tells her he cannot marry her.
• Cable as he is preparing to leave for the mission.

Standards
English/Language Arts: Reading
• 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
• 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.*

English/Language Arts: Writing
• 3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences
• 9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
REFERENCES

1940’s Timeline. http://1940s.org/history/1940s-timeline

Color-Conscious Casting: Three Questions to Ask

Diversity Onstage: Who’s Afraid of Color-Blind Casting?

The Drama-Based Instruction Network. http://dbp.theaterdance.utexas.edu/

How Diversity Could Save the Future of Theater

Justin Cowan (Music Director) Presentation.

Penn State University Civic Issues Blog. https://sites.psu.edu/cragercivicissue/2017/02/01/color-conscious-casting/comment-page-1/

Representation: Ethics Unwrapped (Video)


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