Broadway and The West End. Its use in the language classroom


Both Broadway and the West End in New York and London are the world's two most famous theatre districts. Both are synonymous with bright lights, artistic and commercial success.

THE WEST END OR THEATRE LAND.

West End theatre is usually considered to represent the highest level of commercial theatre in the English speaking world. West End district is located in the heart of the West End of central London. On stage, there are predominately musicals, classic plays and comedy performances.

Around the West End and its periphery, there are also other theatres like The Royal National Theatre.

The length of West End shows depend on ticket sales. Musicals tend to have longer runs than dramas. The longest-running musical in West End history is Les Misérables which overtook Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Cats. However the non-musical Agatha Christie play The Mousetrap is the longest-running show in the world, and has been showing since 1952.

BROADWAY

Technically Broadway is a street that runs the entire length of Manhattan, but the theatres are based in the midtown section around Times Square.

There are 40 Broadway theatres with more than 500 seats, the majority of them; more than 30 of the theatres have more than 1,000 seats. So it's a wonderful phenomenon that happens every night in New York, where more than 55,000 people come in and out of one area of New York City.

Broadway is characterised by two main types of show: plays and musicals. Plays are more common in fringe theatres, either “off Broadway”, or even “off off Broadway” because the musical has gained an important role during the last decades.

Musicals have become a great American genre. The origin of this can be found in the descendants of Russia, Italy, France and other European countries who emigrated to America. They have grown up listening to the operas of their parents and their grandparents, and when they were young men themselves, they developed what was right for them; their music, their dance, and therefore, the American musical was born into and developed what we now know as the American musical comedy.

Depending on the scholar, the origin of the musical is different. In the late 1800s, there was a first musical called The Black Crook. But some scholars consider that the first musical was Showboat in 1927. Then we move to 1943 when Rodgers and Hammerstein write, compose and have the dance to go along with a musical called Oklahoma!
Since then there have been marvellous musicals like *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Misérables*, *West Side Story*, *Chicago*, *Mamma Mia!* *Cats*, *Wicked*, *Bill Elliot*, *The Lion King*...

Most of them known by our students either because they have seen the film or they have seen one adaptation of one of these musicals in the theatres.

New tendencies go towards family-oriented musicals like *Mary Poppins* or *Matilda* so that musicals are looking for a new young audience.

In our opinion, exploring musicals of Broadway and West End is a good way to introduce students to the culture and history of the USA, the UK or even France (in the case of *Les Misérables*). The use of the songs from the musicals are really valuable because they not only fulfil different learning skills (listening, speaking, writing, reading), but they are also useful to learn new vocabulary and, as we said before, a good way to introduce history and culture.

We don't have to forget that songs always arouse the interest of students and make them learn in a funny and easy way. Furthermore, introducing this topic of the musicals may make the pupils realise that musicals are not just singing but dancing and acting as well.

But, how do we present the topic of Musicals in Broadway and in West End in the English classroom?

After a brief introduction to the story of musicals and the importance nowadays of Broadway and West End theatres, the teacher will give students the basic rules that every musical fulfils.

In every musical, normally at the beginning of it, the main characters and the plot are presented. During the musical, characters express their desires through the songs they sing. Finally there is frequently a happy ending.

Then, the teacher should divide the students in groups and ask them to choose among the different musicals on scene either in Broadway or in the West End.

The next step is searching information about the musical the students have chosen. They need to write about the author, the plot, the characters, the songs, the settings, the time, the type of clothes, the type of music...Then the students have to make an oral exposition which must include the poster of the musical. It will be fantastic to use a power point presentation to illustrate the exposition.

Depending on the level of ESO or Bachillerato, the project goes from a basic introduction of the story, characters and songs presented in a poster to a more complex elaboration of the project which includes inserting videos of the performances, the songs and an extended explanation of the musical itself.

However, it is compulsory for every level to play one or two of the most famous songs of the musical. Students can create different exercises for the songs, like fill in the blanks. They also make other comprehension exercises for the rest of the exposition like writing a short summary of the musical, activities based on the vocabulary seen...

Hereafter, it is included one sample of the project, in a power point presentation, made by the teacher to illustrate pupil's how to do it. In this case, the level of the students is 2nd Eso.

First of all there is a front page with the title OKLAHOMA and a picture of the musical. The song *Oklahoma*! is heard. Then there is an introduction which includes the information the students have to explain:
TECHNICAL INFORMATION

IMPORTANCE OF THIS MUSICAL

PLOT

CHARACTERS

SONGS

QUESTIONS

Then, the teacher will talk about the points previously mentioned.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION. It is based on “Green Grow the Lilacs” by Lynn Riggs. The composer is Richard Rodgers. Lyricist and Librettist: Oscar Hammerstein's. Its Opening Night: March 31st, 1943.

IMPORTANCE OF THIS MUSICAL The musicals in the United States reflect part of their culture, history and their way of life. Oklahoma! stated the national feeling of belonging to a land and the longing of the peaceful past. Oklahoma! is the first fully integrated musical play and its blending of song, character, plot and even dance would serve as the model for Broadway shows for decades.

Oklahoma! broke the old "musical comedy conventions", with the songs "evolving into character" and advancing the plot. Oklahoma! was the first American musical with an ethnic sound, words and music entirely in the folk idiom.

PLOT. There is a sub-plot but here we only focus on the main plot. The musical is divided in two acts. In the First Act:

Cowboy Curly McLain wanders into farm girl Laurey Williams's yard and he invites her to a box social dance to raise funds for the building a new school. This box social includes an auction of lunch baskets prepared by the local girls. Laurey refuses Curly and she accepts going with Judy Farm his employer, who is obsessed with her. She is afraid of Jud although she did not confess it to Curly. In a dream, Laurey realises that she really loves Curly but it is too late because Jud is waiting for her for the dance.

In the Second Act: Laurey is upset because Curly has gone to the dance with another girl. The auction starts: Curly and Jud engage in a ferocious bidding war. Curly sells his saddle, horse and gun to win the auction. Jud tries to kiss Laurey but she fires him. Before leaving, he threatens her. Curly proposes Laurey and they get married but Jud appears and try to kill Curly but he dies in the fight. Curly is declared not guilty in the trial. Laurey and Curly depart on their honey moon.

CHARACTERS In the musical there are more characters, But here we talk about the main ones.

Curly McLain. A cowboy in love with Laurey.

Laurey Williams. Aunt Ellen's niece, an independent young woman.

Jud Fry. A hired hand on Aunt Eller's ranch, a mysterious and dangerous loner.
**Aunt Eller.** Laurel’s aunt, a respected community leader.

**SONGS.** The musical *Oklahoma!* has got seventeen songs but the most famous are:

*Oh What a Beautiful morning!* *The Surrey with the Fridge on Top. Oklahoma!*

The students will listen to *Oh What a Beautiful morning!* And *Oklahoma!* Here are the lyrics and the exercises propose to be done go from fill in the blanks, to search vocabulary related with the agricultural world which is underlined or to find the rhymes in the song.

**OH WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MORNING!**

Curly:

There’s a bright, golden haze on the meadow.  
There’s a bright, golden haze on the meadow.  
The corn is as high as an elephant’s eye  
And it looks like it’s climbing clear up to the sky.

Oh, what a beautiful Mornin’  
Oh, what a beautiful day.  
I’ve got a beautiful feelin’  
Everything’s goin’ my way.

All the cattle are standin’ like statues  
All the cattle are standin’ like statues  
They don’t turn their heads as they see me ride by  
But a little brown mav’rick is wakin’ her eye.

Oh, what a beautiful Mornin’  
Oh, what a beautiful day.  
I’ve got a beautiful feelin’  
Everything’s goin’ my way.

All the sounds of the earth are like music  
All the sounds of the earth are like music  
The breeze is so busy it don’t miss a tree  
An’ a ol’ weepin’ willer is laughin’ at me.

Oh, what a beautiful Mornin’  
Oh, what a beautiful day.  
I’ve got a beautiful feelin’  
Everything’s goin’ my way.  
Oh, what a beautiful day!
OKLAHOMA!

Eller:
They couldn't pick a better time as that in life

Andrew:
It ain't too early and it ain't too late

Laurey:
Startin' as a farmer with a brand new wife

Curley:
Soon'll be livin' in a brand new state

Company:
Brand new state!
Brand new state, gonna treat you great!
Gonna give you barley, carrots and pertaters,
Pasture fer the cattle,
Spinach and termayters!
Flowers on the prairie where the June bugs zoom,
Plen'y of air and plen'y of room,
Plen'y of room to swing a rope!
Plen'y of heart and plen'y of hope.

Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweepin' down the plain
And the wavin' wheat can sure smell sweet
When the wind comes right behind the rain.
Oklahoma, Ev'ry night my honey lamb and I
Sit alone and talk and watch a hawk
Makin' lazy circles in the sky.

We know we belong to the land
And the land we belong to is grand!
And when we say
Yeeow! Ayipioeeyay!
We're only sayin'
You're doin' fine, Oklahoma!
Oklahoma O.K.

Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweepin' down the plain
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Okla-okla-Okla-Okla-Okla-Okla
Okla-okla-Okla-Okla-Okla-Okla...

We know we belong to the land
And the land we belong to is grand!
And when we say
Yeeow! Ayipioeeay!
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You’re doin’ fine, Oklahoma!
Oklahoma O.K.
L - A - H - O - M - A
OKLAHOMA!
Yeeow!

QUESTIONS. Finally, there is a sample of questions to ask students about the project and what they have learnt. They should also search information for the first three questions at home in order to answer them.

Where is Oklahoma?
What is the main economic activity in this state?
When did it become a state?
Who are the authors of the musical?
Who is Curly?
What is a box social?
What happened with Laurel's basket?
Why was a trial celebrated against Curly?
What is a Surrey?
Why is this Musical important in the History of Musicals?
When all the groups have finished their oral exposition, the teacher hand students a questionnaire to value their opinion on the project. I here include some sample questions:

**Did you like the project? Why? Why not?**

**Was it difficult to search the information about the musical? Why? Why not?**

**What was it like to work with other people?**

**Did you have problems in doing the power point? Why? Why not?**

**What have you learnt during the project about the musical chosen and about your colleagues?**

Write a short critic of your experience including your personal opinion about the whole process of doing the project and the final oral exposition.

The answers to these questions may be very different depending on the groups but in general, the students' attitude can be at the beginning of the project a little bit reluctant because they may see musicals as something for adults and not related with them. However, they are more used to them that they think as most of them have seen a wide selection of Disney pictures and the classical films are pure musical!

By the end of the project the aim to arouse interest in this genre is completely achieved. We should not forget that these project are entertaining, different from every day activities at the classroom, educative and a good source to introduce culture in a diverse manner. But about all, we have achieved to combine music, art, culture with the English language.

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