



The Fantasticks: Exploring the longest running musical in history

Overview

This series of lessons was designed to meet the needs of gifted children for extension beyond the standard curriculum with the greatest ease of use for the educator. The lessons may be given to the students for individual self-guided work, or they may be taught in a classroom or a home-school setting. This particular lesson plan is primarily effective in a classroom setting. Assessment strategies and rubrics are included. The lessons were developed by Lisa Van Gemert, M.Ed.T., the Mensa Foundation's Gifted Children Specialist.

Introduction While plays by authors such as Ibsen and Shakespeare are often taught in schools, challenging gifted youth to read plays that are less well known benefits them by extending their academic reach. *The Fantasticks* is the longest running musical in history, yet most students are unfamiliar with it. An examination of the play allows students to explore it in both a scholarly and artistic way, and it builds their cultural awareness.

Common Core State Standards Addressed

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Learning Objectives

After completing this project, students will be able to:

- Draft a play synopsis using a clear rhyme scheme
 - Analyze the use of controversial language, reversal, and character
 - Connect the play's characters to their own experience
 - Craft an essay using critical analysis
 - Create two artistic projects reflecting their understanding of the play
- Students should carefully review the rubrics prior to completing the assignments.



Lesson 1: Background information (3 required assignments)

Assignment One: Read the history of the play at bit.ly/fanhistory. Create a 10-question scavenger hunt quiz based on the information in the history. A scavenger hunt quiz is one in which you phrase the questions as you would clues in a scavenger hunt. For example, "Can you find four other plays the writers created together?" Then write an open-ended question over it. You do not need to write an answer for the open-ended question, but you should provide an answer key for the scavenger hunt questions.



CATEGORY	Scholar Points Available	Excellent (9-10)	Strong (7-8)	Acceptable (4-6)	Emerging (0-3)
Scavenger Hunt	Creative presentation with visual element.	Correct number of questions that extend beyond the expected knowledge and comprehension levels. At least two items have some sort of allusion or other literary device.	Correct number of questions of depth and quality. At least one item has some sort of allusion or other literary device.	Correct number of questions of reasonable depth and quality.	May have fewer than the correct number of questions and/or the questions may be of poor quality.
Answer Key	Answers include additional, insightful extension.	All questions are answered completely and thoroughly.	All questions are answered completely.	All questions are answered.	Not all questions are answered completely or there were too few questions to answer.
Opened-ended Question		High level thinking question that offers opportunity for full discussion.	High level thinking question that offers opportunity for discussion.	Moderate level thinking question that offers opportunity insufficient for discussion.	Low level thinking question or question missing altogether.
SCORE: _____ / 30					



Assignment Two: Read the synopsis of the play found at bit.ly/fansynopsis. Write your own synopsis in 10-15 lines that have a clear rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme may be ABAB or AABBCC or any other scheme you choose.

CATEGORY	Scholar Points Available	Excellent (9-10)	Strong (7-8)	Acceptable (4-6)	Emerging (0-3)
Synopsis Content	Synopsis includes at least five quirky words.	Synopsis covers all elements and includes 10-15 lines.	Synopsis covers several key elements and includes 10-15 lines.	Synopsis covers a few key elements and includes 10-15 lines.	Synopsis lacks key elements and includes fewer than 10 lines.
Rhyme Scheme	Rhyme scheme is clever and well-suited to the material.	Rhyme scheme is clear and follows pattern faithfully. It is more complex than ABAB.	Rhyme scheme is clear and follows pattern faithfully.	Rhyme scheme is fairly clear and follows pattern mostly faithfully.	Rhyme scheme lacks clarity or does not follow pattern faithfully.
					SCORE: _____ / 20



Assignment Three: Read about the controversial language in the play at bit.ly/fanlanguage and respond to the questions below using complete sentences.

1. Look up “denotation” and “connotation.” Write a short description of the difference between them.
2. What is the etymological history of the word “rape?”
3. What are two other instances of the use of this word with the same connotation as is used in *The Fantasticks* in literature or art?
4. Think of two other words with strong negative connotations and look them up in the dictionary. Write the denotation and the connotation of both words and discuss which use is more common.
5. Write two paragraphs, one arguing for the use of the word and one against it.

CATEGORY	Scholar Points Available	Excellent (9-10)	Strong (7-8)	Acceptable (4-6)	Emerging (0-3)
Analysis	Analysis extends beyond the standard, expected words.	Analysis thoroughly and thoughtfully evaluates the use of the word.	Analysis fairly thoroughly and thoughtfully evaluates the use of the word.	Analysis evaluates the use of the word.	Analysis does not adequately evaluate the use of the word.
Elements		All 5 elements of the assignment are completed in a manner that exceeds the expectation.	All 5 elements of the assignment are completed in a manner that meets the expectation.	All 5 elements of the assignment are completed in a manner that does not quite meet the expectation.	One or more elements are missing from the assignment or are completed in an unsatisfactory manner.
					SCORE: _____ / 20



Lesson 2: Read the play

After reading the play, answer the following questions in full, complete responses.

1. In plot terms, a “reversal” refers to a moment in a play where the audience’s understanding is turned around. With this in mind, what was your first impression of the two fathers? Were you surprised to find the fathers had planned their children’s attraction to each other, or did you suspect this from the start?
2. Select five lines from the play that strike you as memorable. Explain the context of the lines, and then write a brief explanation of why you think these lines stand out.
3. In which characters of the play do you see yourself? How did your perception of yourself or someone else change after having seen the play?
4. Which character in the play would you say starts out with the most illusions? How does he or she lose those illusions? Is this something that everybody has to experience in life?
5. The play ends with El Gallo warning the other character they should not tear down the wall between their properties again, since “you must always leave the wall.” What do you think El Gallo means by this statement? Do you agree with him?
6. What is The Boy looking for in his journey into the world in Act II? What does he find?
7. What is The Girl looking for in her relationship with El Gallo? What does she find?
8. What is the significance, or purpose, of having all the characters have a universal name (such as “The Boy”), as well as a personal name? If you were to give the people in your extended family universal names, what would they be?

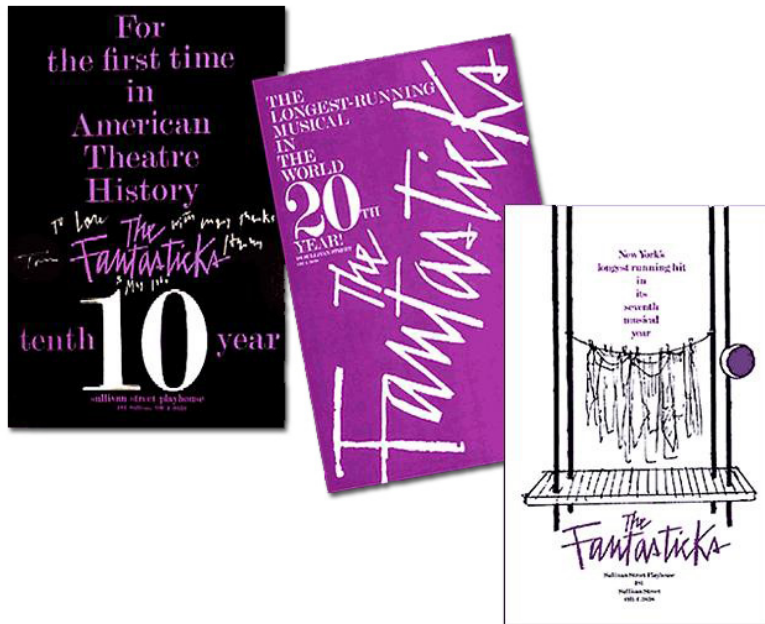
CATEGORY	Scholar Points Available	Excellent (9-10)	Strong (7-8)	Acceptable (4-6)	Emerging (0-3)
Response	Responses extend beyond the standard, expected words.	Responses are thorough and thoughtful.	Responses are fairly thorough and thoughtful.	Responses are complete but may lack thoroughness or depth of thought.	Responses are incomplete or lack any depth of thought.
Elements		All 8 elements of the assignment are completed in a manner that exceeds the expectation.	All 8 elements of the assignment are completed in a manner that meets the expectation.	All 8 elements of the assignment are completed in a manner that doesn’t meet expectations.	One or more elements are missing or are completed in an unsatisfactory manner.
Connection	Connection is made to prior learning.	Responses display a clear and persuasive examination of the reader’s mind and are personal with strong voice.	Responses display a clear examination of the reader’s mind and are personal with voice.	Responses display an examination of the reader’s mind.	Responses display little or no personal connection or voice.
SCORE: _____ / 30					



Lesson 3: Essay assignment

Write a two-page essay (double-spaced) that responds to one of the following prompts:

- Compare and contrast *The Fantasticks* with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. How are the plays similar? How are they different? Are the differences most pronounced in characterization? Plot? Theme? What are the different views of love in the plays?
- Read about Commedia dell'arte at bit.ly/comediadellarte or in other books or reputable sites. Explore the elements of Commedia dell'arte in *The Fantasticks*. Include at least three key elements. Discuss any features of Commedia dell'arte that you feel are missing from the musical.
- Snow falls as Matt and Luisa reignite their romance. Discuss this trope (frequently occurring literary device) as it is used in at least three other plays, movies or television shows. Why do you think this is effective? How would it be different if it were raining? Why isn't sunshine as romantic as snow?





CATEGORY	Scholar Points Available	Excellent (9-10)	Strong (7-8)	Acceptable (4-6)	Emerging (0-3)
Responsiveness	The purpose is addressed in a manner that is positively qualitatively different from the expectation.	The purpose is clearly responsive to the chosen prompt. There is full and in-depth discussion of the elements of the prompt.	The purpose is responsive to the chosen prompt. There is discussion of the elements of the prompt.	The purpose is somewhat responsive to the chosen prompt. There is discussion of many of the elements of the prompt.	The purpose is somewhat responsive elusive, and the discussion is lacking in quality or quantity.
Voice		The writer's voice is strong, with deliberative choice of words and sentence structure. The phrasing reads easily and is not stilted or artificial.	The writer's voice is clear. In general, the phrasing reads easily and is not stilted or artificial.	The writer's voice is only somewhat clear. The phrasing reads as stilted or artificial at times.	The writer's voice is generic, with phrasing that reads as stilted or artificial. Word choice is weak.
Grammatics		Grammar and syntax are error free.	Very few grammatical or syntactical errors.	Some grammatical or syntactical errors.	Frequent grammar or syntax errors distract the reader.
Organization		The essay is well-organized, with one paragraph leading seamlessly into the next. Strong topic sentences and transitions create a flowing writing style. A strong conclusion supports and reaffirms the analysis.	The essay is fairly well-organized, with one paragraph leading mostly seamlessly into the next. Fairly strong topic sentences and transitions create a flowing writing style. A conclusion supports and reaffirms the analysis.	The essay is not particularly well-organized, with one paragraph leading somewhat stiltedly into the next. The conclusion is not strong, and the flow of some paragraphs is stilted or awkward.	The essay is poorly organized, with one paragraph leading haphazardly into the next. The conclusion may be weak, and the flow of some paragraphs may be stilted or awkward.
Evaluator's additional comments					
SCORE: _____ / 40					



Lesson 4: Optional elements (choose 2)

Create a poster advertising *The Fantastiks* as if it were returning to a New York theater. Your poster should be full-sized and have information such as ticket prices, the theater name, the major cast members and the playwright. It should also have a visual image.

Watch the movie version of the play and write a one-page critique of the performance as if you were a movie reviewer. Find sample movie reviews in the newspaper or on a website such as mrqe.com for ideas on how to write a movie review. One reviewer called the play as “a funny and romantic musical about a boy, a girl, two fathers and a wall.” Would you agree? How would you describe it?

Imagine you are a set designer for a local theater. Create a model of a set for your favorite novel adapted to the stage. What is your vision? What do you want to accomplish for the audience? This stage should be three dimensional.

Create a brochure for the play that contains visual images, a short history of the production, and a short synopsis written in your own words. Use the brochure maker found at bit.ly/printpress.

CATEGORY	Scholar Points Available	Excellent (9-10)	Strong (7-8)	Acceptable (4-6)	Emerging (0-3)
Presentation	The presentation's design is flawless and at a virtually professional level.	The quality of workmanship is exceedingly fine, with clever wording and graphics.	The quality of workmanship is high, with every required element addressed thoroughly.	The quality of workmanship is acceptable, with nearly every required element addressed thoroughly.	The quality of workmanship is lacking or haphazard and/or is missing elements.
Creativity	The layout and/or visuals display an understanding of design principles.	The visuals are completed creatively, with quality visuals effectively used.	The visuals are completed with some level of creativity.	Creativity is evident but not particularly strong.	Product lacks creativity, is mundane or does not extend beyond the typical.
Depth		The product displays an in-depth understanding of the play.	The product displays a full understanding of the play.	The product displays an understanding of the play.	The product does not display an understanding of the play.
					SCORE: _____ / 30