A Teacher's Guide to Musical Theater

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The true beauty of music is that it connects people.
It carries a message, and we, the musicians, are the messengers.
-Roy Ayers

There is research and entire books written on the power of music and theater for all children, whether typically developing or children with disabilities. Interventions using a musical or theatrical framework have been developed and used successfully for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, vision loss, and others. I began this project with the desire to utilize my theatrical experience and tailor it specifically to the needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH).

And what better way to teach language and promote communication than through music?

Regardless of if we are formally taught, we are constantly surrounded by music. It's on the radio while we drive to school, it's sung on birthdays, it blasts from every Disney movie your niece demands to watch on repeat. It's that one song that takes you years back to a memory, and it's that song you haven't heard in years, but still somehow, you know all of the lyrics. For whatever reason, we are drawn to music. It is a shared culture, but also a deeply personal and individual experience.

Children need adult role models who are not necessarily music professionals. They need to see adults, regardless of skill, engage enthusiastically with the musical culture of their classroom, school, and community. They need to see that, regardless of singing skills, a person can have fun with and deeply love music. As a teacher, being enthusiastic, silly, and having fun with what you are doing will carry you further than you think as you embark on integrating music into your classroom.

Teaching music is ultimately about setting students on their own path of exploration, experimentation, and love of music. For children who are DHH, achieving this is even more important in empowering them to drive their own auditory development.

This guide is divided up into seven chapters that follow the order I use to teach the progression of skills while making a play or musical with children. I want to emphasize that just because this guide is broken up into chapters does not mean that once you are done with a step in the process that you will never cover the topic again. This process is about learning and using each step to build on the next. I use warm up songs and games in every lesson. I ask questions about story elements in every lesson. We use our words, voices, and imagination in every lesson regardless of what step we are on.

What is Musical Theater

Fundamentals of Singing

Warm Up Songs and Games

Teaching Elements of a Story

Writing Your Story

Writing the Music

Designing the Show

Putting On Your Show

In the past, with one theater class of children from three to five years old once per week for forty-five minutes, I have given myself a full year to create a fifteen-minute musical. By no means do you have to have the same timeline. I like using a year because it gives me plenty of time to focus on developing students' skills, especially literacy and language. From the beginning of school up to the Holiday break, I worked with students on singing, understanding the elements of a story, and writing our own story. The next half of the year was dedicated to writing the music and designing the show. I want to emphasize that this is not how you need to do it! You can break up the steps in whatever way fits best with the needs of your students and the time you have available.

This guide is meant to be an example of how one person has approached making musical theater pieces with DHH students. There is no single right way to do it and I encourage you to experiment and play with the process. Find out what is right for you and your classroom. This guide is filled with tips and tricks that I have found as I have gone through the process and I truly hope that it will take some of the fear out of doing musicals with young children.

Chapter 2: Your Role as the Facilitator

I have noticed a lot of anxiety surrounding theater and music, especially if a teacher has never had any experience teaching theater or making a play. Take a deep breath, because I know that you can do this! Creating a play seems to many people like a huge task or a step away from what they are usually teaching. It's not! Every day, you teach language. You also teach pre-literacy skills, phonemic awareness, music, and auditory memory. Musical theater, as a framework, takes everything you teach, and has your students apply it. Follow the processes of this guide one step at a time and you will get to the end and finally be able to look back. I guarantee you will be blown away by what you have been able to accomplish.

Creating a play or a musical is about *process*, not product. If you find yourself getting frustrated or tired, let that be your mantra,

> ## Creating a play is about the *process*, not product

because your students are learning so much through this process. Remember, your students are learning more than their lines or songs. Your students are learning how to construct a narrative, and how to empathize and think like a character. They are developing listening skills and thinking about how words go together and sound. They are seeing that their voices are powerful. They are learning that they have so much to offer to the world.

They are not professional theater artists, but they are creative artists in their own right. It is your job as the facilitator to provide enough support for all of your students to collectively and collaboratively pool their ideas and construct their own story.

I can guarantee that your students will pick up on your own feelings about the play, so keep it positive and celebrate what they have accomplished!

As the teacher, you are going to be the leading force of this project, but it is important to understand your role in creating the musical. First and foremost, you are the *facilitator*. As a facilitator, your job is to:

Listen mindfully –you may be the facilitator, but never miss out on teaching opportunities. As you listen, take in a child's ideas, but pay attention to the concepts they have or have not mastered. This can include literacy-related topics such as characters, conflicts, resolutions, settings, or story order or other topics such as theory of mind and how a character would be feeling and experiencing the story.

Ask probing questions –this will help students expand on their own or their classmates' ideas in a collaborative and positive manner while also targeting the child's expressive language skills.

Stay neutral –when deciding on characters and plot, it is of the utmost importance that you remain neutral and let the students decide.

Collect ideas – there are going to be a lot of suggestions. Once students get going, you can get a lot of wonderful ideas, so write them down where the students can see them. This will help you keep track of student's suggestions and also be a visual reinforcer that all ideas are important enough to be recorded and reviewed later. Use questions, synthesize, and repeat for clarification to make sure you get it right. Once you start to pull the story together, it will be your job to present the children's suggestions before they vote on what they want.

Give feedback – remember to always keep feedback *specific* and *positive*! Even if an idea is too big to be used, acknowledge the imagination and attention to detail that the student used to come up with it.

Synthesize ideas – Kids have vivid imaginations and their ideas can be huge. Help pick out the key parts of a student's idea and present it to the group.

Paraphrase and repeat for clarification. This is a great opportunity to incorporate any specific vocabulary targets that you are using in the classroom.

Summarize and describe the whole story. By repeating the story one plot piece at a time, you are giving the students multiple exposures to the plot and sequence of the story.

Evaluate objectives being met – as the teacher, it is your job to make sure that your group is on track to produce your play in your timeframe.

Have Fun – on top of tracking language and ideas, remember to relax and enjoy the process. The more you show your students that you enjoy what you are doing, the more invested they will be in it too. Your energy will set the pace and the tone of the lesson, so stay positive and celebrate all of your students' unique gifts that they are bringing to this process!

I have also found that, just like in the classroom, it is important to set some rules at the beginning of the year. Get it done early, make the rules together, and review them as often as you need to. The two crucial rules that I suggest having are:

1. Everyone Participates
2. All Ideas are Good Ideas

It is important to create a space where students feel safe, comfortable, and supported in offering ideas to a larger group. I have found that these two rules are important in establishing that everyone is invested in creating a story together, that everyone is part of the experience, and that we value and respect other's ideas.

Chapter 3: Teaching the Elements of Music and Singing

We sing along with songs in movies and on the radio, we sing them during games out on the playground, and we sing throughout the school day. But why do we sing and how do you actually *teach* a child to sing? This chapter will break down what singing brings to our students and offer some strategies to help you actively teach your students how to sing loud and lovely.

Of this entire process, your students are going to be most familiar with singing than with the intricacies of storytelling. Now, each child is unique, and so their approach to singing is too. You may have a student who loves belting out the newest Disney songs, or a student who is shy and does not like singing in front of others. It is your job to learn where your students fall on that continuum and to adjust your teaching style accordingly.

Why Singing?

As teachers we need to ask ourselves why is singing useful as a teaching approach? The answer lies in listening and spoken language strategies we use every day and I want to highlight three of them: Acoustic highlighting, auditory bombardment, and repetition. All of these strategies are inherent parts of music. Singing is a natural form of acoustic highlighting because as we sing, we are drawing out the length of words and sounds, emphasizing them as we go along. Sung words are louder and have more suprasegmental features of speech: duration, intensity, and pitch. Songs, with their catchy choruses, are repetitive and bombard singers and listeners alike with language. Songs are vocalized poems, containing rhyme, cultural idioms, and non-concrete concepts like emotions. Singing teaches auditory discrimination skills, phonological awareness, development of vocabulary, and builds auditory memory.

That is a lot packed into what on the outside can seem like a simple childhood song.

Treating Our Voices Right: How to Sing Loud and Lovely

Before we start singing in any of my theater classes, I have found that it is helpful to talk to students about good singing habits. This can range from rules like "open and clear mouths when we sing" to avoid choking, or sitting up straight while we sing, but the most important lesson I have found is emphasizing that we can sing loudly so everyone can hear us, but also nicely, so that it sounds as good as we want it to sound. Loud and lovely is the key!

> Quick Tip
> Children sing in a naturally higher voice than adults. Singers call this their "head voice," so as you sing, try to sing in your head voice with your students

> Quick Tip
> Give students the opportunity to sing on their own. With a little support, like a set of pictures to remind them of the words, you can make their confidence in their singing soar!

The best approach I have found so far is a demonstration where you model your loveliest singing voice and then your worst and loudest voice. By worst, I really mean shouting instead of singing. Afterwards, ask questions and have students reflect on how you sang. Did shouting sound good? How do the children think your throat felt after shouting? Then have them try it out for themselves!

> Quick Tip
> Singing is fun, but there are ways you can make it even more engaging for your students! Give your students drums, bells, or rattles and try to make a rhythm. It is fun and can help you target syllables as students experiment with the rhythm of different words.

Playing with Music: Musical Dynamics

Musical dynamics are a great way to change up songs and task those auditory systems. Later on, it can come in handy when you are developing your characters and how they sound. Don't let the name fool you; musical dynamics are the suprasegmentals of speech, just sung. Duration, intensity, pitch. Try playing with them the next time you are singing a song with the class. First, sing the song as you would normally, then try singing it again by changing one of these elements. You can sing slow or fast, loud or quiet, high or low. You can combine all of these elements together and try singing the song like a bear (slow, loud, and low) or a mouse (fast, quiet, and high).

For an added challenge and a great opportunity to introduce the students to musical vocabulary, you can try using the musical words for the intensity, or loudness of your singing. For simplicity, I chose three to represent quiet, medium, and loud (Piano, Mezzo-Forte, and Forte), but you can add in any others you like!

Dynamic	Name	Voice
ppp	Pianississimo	Whisper
pp	Pianissimo	Almost a Whisper
p	Piano	Quiet Speaking Voice
mf	Mezzo-Forte	Speaking Voice
f	Forte	Loud Speaking Voice
ff	Fortissimo	Shouting

Evaluate Yourself

Are children singing without shouting in their natural vocal range?
Am I being a good model by singing in my head voice?
Am I allowing students to sing independently?

Chapter 4: Start with a Song: Vocal Warm-Ups and Games

As a teacher, I like to begin with a song and a game for two reasons. First, just like playing an instrument, we need to warm up our voices and bodies before we can sing our best. The second reason I begin with a song and a game is to help boost the energy in the room. Sitting and talking about characters and setting can get boring if you do not have the right energy for it, and our goal is to keep our lessons fun. By starting off with a fast-paced fun game and breaking up discussion times with songs, you are grabbing student's attention and bringing them all up to an energy that they can use to sustain their interest and enjoyment of the lesson.

Songs

There are thousands of songs out in the world, so how do you choose the right songs to sing with your students? The answer is that all songs are the right songs to sing! If you are singing, you are building your students auditory skills and having fun while doing it. Pick your songs for the vocabulary they teach, or the challenge they pose to your students, but most of all pick songs that your students enjoy, because children learn best while playing. Below are some of the types of songs that I like to use in and outside of the classroom.
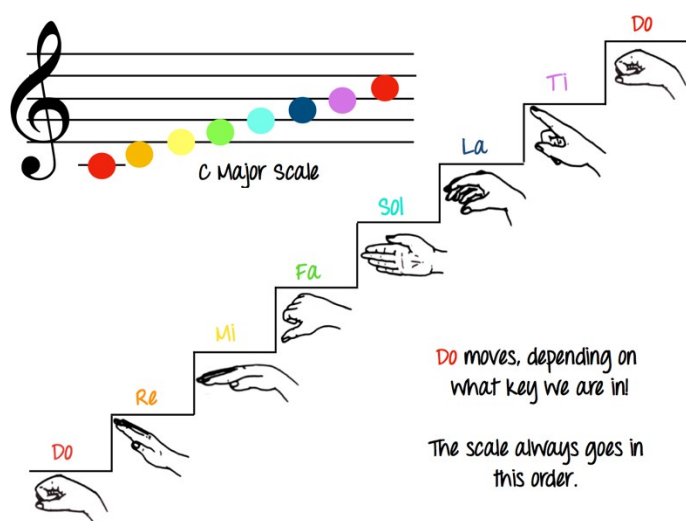

Nonsense Songs:
Nonsense songs are challenging and fun because they are not real words! By introducing these nonsense words to students, they have to listen and pick out the sounds that make up these new words. Singing makes the phonological task easier because of its natural features that match listening and spoken language strategies. The silliness of the words and the fun of singing help students tackle this task without as much frustration and pressure to get it right.

Flea Fly Flow

Flea Fly Flow is a silly nonsense song *and* a call and response song that build on itself, beginning with simple, monosyllabic words to a beat that then build up into full nonsense phrases with melody. The beauty of this song is that it combines the advantages of nonsense songs with the repetition and tone-matching of call and response songs, which are explained below.

Do Re Mi

Do Re Mi, though a nonsense song, predominantly focuses on pitch and stresses pitch perception and vocal monitoring rather than auditory memory. There are a few ways to use this song. You can follow in the footsteps of Julie Andrews and the Sound of Music or you can do a Solfege scale. A Solfege scale uses different hand signals paired with a rising hand height to signal the change in pitch, the same way musical notes go up the page as they get higher in pitch.

C Major scale

Do moves, depending on what key we are in!

The scale always goes in this order.

Call and Response Songs:

There are a range of call and response songs out in the world. Some have responders call back a common phrase to the main singer, other times the responders repeat exactly what the singer just said. I am especially fond of the latter type because this gives me the opportunity to see and build on responders' auditory memory.

The Princess Pat
Down By the Bay
Boom Chika-Boom
The Alligator is My Friend by Dr. Jean

Tongue Twisters:

Tongue twisters are silly, tricky, and oh so good at targeting a specific sound when you are focusing on articulation. They stress the motor system and are a good way to

focus on accuracy and fluency. I highly suggest starting slowly and repeating the tongue twister, getting a little faster each time. There are hundreds of tongue twisters out there, but here are a few to get you started:

Be-bot, Be-bot*z*
Woo, Waa, Whoa, Wow
Red Leather Yellow Leather
Rubber Baby Buggy Bumpers
Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers
She Sells Sea Shells

Warm-Up Games

Just as it is important to warm up our voices and ears, it is important to warm up our body and get our wiggles out. Below I have listed a few of my student's favorite games to play, but these are by no means the only games you can use. You know your students best, so tailor your lessons to their interests and skill level.

Piano, Mezzo Forte, Forte

This activity is all about playing with musical dynamics. First, your students need to know the musical vocabulary you will be using: Piano, Mezzo Forte, and Forte.

The first time playing, it is a great idea to define these terms as a class. For example, piano is as small as a _____. Mezzo Forte is my talking voice. Forte is as big as a_____. While you define these terms, like small as a mouse, use your hand height to show small (close to the ground) and big (high in the air above your head). Now it is time to show them an example. Pick a song you feel comfortable singing and start with your hand low to the ground, singing very quietly, getting louder as your hand gets higher. Play around with it and don't be afraid to get silly with it!

Now that you have defined the terms and shown them an example, let your students choose a song they know to sing. It could be Twinkle Twinkle Little Star or Let It Go from Frozen so long as it is a song they know all the words to. Sing along with them as you act as the conductor, raising and lowering your hand as you sing as a class. As your class becomes more familiar with the game, do not be afraid to let students be the conductor and lead the class!

The Great Wizard Warm Up

This game is a fun way to get the kids moving and warm up their imagination. The teacher is the "wizard" who casts a spell on the class, declaring that they are now all_____'s. My class was fond of being turned into alligators, mummies, and rocket ships. Join in with them and play. Remember, you are their model! While you play and move with them, ask questions to help them get into character. How does a mummy move? Are they fast or slow? What kind of sound does a rocket ship make?

For older students, I like changing the environment too. Instead of turning the class into animals, I will change the environment of the classroom. Maybe we are in a hot, hot desert or we are underwater. Maybe we are in a haunted mansion or fighting our way through the thick jungle. As you move with students, keep asking questions or narrate what you are feeling. "I am walking slowly through the desert. Boy it is hot. Oooh and I am so thirsty." This is a great opportunity to push in vocabulary related to the senses or emotions.

Rain Storm

There is nothing like making a rainstorm as a class. This activity is fun and engages your senses as you make different sounds with your mouth and hands to imitate sounds from nature. I like doing this game sitting down so that you can use the floor as a percussive instrument. As you do the physical gestures written down below, narrate what is happening. "Oh, I hear the wind blowing, a storm is coming this way!"

> *Quick Tip:*
> *You can use your voices and body to make the sounds or you can introduce different instruments to the students. Which one sounds like wind? Rain? Thunder? This is a great opportunity to let your students experiment with sounds!*

Movement 1: Blow out through rounded lips. (This is the wind)
Movement 2: Tap one finger on the palm of your hand. (These are the first raindrops.)
Movement 3: Tap all 4 fingers. (Many more rain drops.)
Movement 4: Full out clapping. (It's getting more intense!)
Movement 5: Slap on the floor, or your thighs. (Thunder enters!)

After a big crescendo, repeat all the activities in reverse order as the storm dies down, until you are rubbing your hands together. Then quietly stop, and there should be absolutely silence.

The Mystery Box

The activities we have laid out so far have focused on warming up our voices and our bodies. This activity is focused on waking up our imagination and our words, which we need to create. It is funny and silly and brings play back into our learning equation while also focusing on language. This activity is entirely driven by words, senses, and imagination.

The basic concept of this game is relatively simple. Using an empty box, you pretend to pull different things out of it and share it with the class. Easy, right?

First, I will gather all of the students and we will decide on a magic word. Maybe it is "Abracadabra". In one class, it was "Aardvark Aardvark Open Up!" Whatever the chant is, we will say our chant and mark the syllables by hitting the lid of the box. Then it is time to open up the box and show the students what you have imagined.

I like to build student's anticipation of what could be in the box. For example, the magic box has an imaginary kitten inside. Use strategies like auditory first to describe the kitten, to listen to the sounds it makes. After you have described what you imagine, pull it out! I have found that students are quick to say, "there's nothing there," but don't let that stop you. Pet your imaginary kitten. Narrate what it is doing or what it looks like and once the students begin to buy into the idea, offer the "kitten" around the circle for each one of them to interact with. Once you have set the stage, pass the box around and have each child open the box and pull out their own imagined thing.

> *Quick Tip:*
> *While you are pantomiming your animal, giving it imagined weight, size, and even a mood will all add to the experience. Maybe there is a very angry tiger inside the box. You can hear roaring and the box is shaking!*

This is one of my favorite games to play with students, especially when I am targeting basic category concepts. Maybe today the box is only giving out things from the food category. Maybe it is only animals. Follow where your students lead, but remember that you set the tone for this activity and it depends on you to make it successful. When you are pulling a ferocious lion out of that box, you need to show the students that you believe it!

Chapter 5: Teaching the Elements of a Story

Story Elements
Characters
Setting
Plot (Problem & Solution)
Lesson, Moral, or Meaning

Before beginning to write your theater piece, your students need to understand the parts of a story in order to create their own. In the example lesson at the end of the chapter, a teacher will take a familiar book and break it down into its parts. Remember, as the facilitator, it is your job to support your students and to listen and recast their suggestions to flow into a group conversation. You already know plot, setting, and characters, but your students do not, so make sure you use wh- question to get them to think about what each element means.

The Lesson at the end of the chapter can be taught once or multiple times. For young children, I recommend a three-read format. On the first time reading through a story, you push in information about the vocabulary and plot of a story. You label the story elements and explain the vocabulary. On the next two readings, you pull out information from the students by asking questions to give them enough exposure to the story and the vocabulary, and to practice using their new knowledge.

What's the Skill? Why It Is Important:
Understanding the elements of a story are fundamental skills for literacy and comprehension. Intentionally teaching these elements allows students to first look at and discuss these parts, and later to be able to identify them independently. What is happening in the story? Where is it happening? Who is it happening to? Being able to first answer and then ask these questions is a key reading comprehension strategy.

Characters

When laying out the idea of characters, it is awfully tempting to fall into the good guy/bad guy way of presenting characters rather than go into the bigger idea of antagonist and protagonist. It seems crazy to use language that is so high, but I can say from personal experience that it did not matter. With enough repetition, I had children ages 3-5 with the full range of hearing loss and technology using these words spontaneously after 3 months of theater lessons.

Resist the urge to use "good" or "bad" as character labels, especially if that label is given for something a character does. Antagonists are not bad guys! They are the force that works against the protagonist. Often, they create an obstacle or a problem.

Remember, labels are powerful and often limiting. Children are watching and learning how we apply these labels and they ask themselves if those labels can be applied to themselves. It is heartbreaking to have a student ask, "Am I a bad kid?" after making a mistake or a bad choice. Labels, like good or bad, should define actions, not people.

Setting

Setting, in a very simplified form, is where the action of the story takes place. In the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, it is traditionally set in a house in the forest. In Jack and the Beanstalk, it is in Jack's home and high in the giant's castle. The setting plays another important role by creating the tone of the story and influences the emotions of the characters. Goldilocks saw a cute little cottage and felt right at home. Jack saw a towering castle filled with gold and bones that filled him with awe and fear. And when it comes time to creating costumes, the setting may help you decide on what kind of costume pieces you need. Don't let the idea of making the set or costumes scare you. They can be very simple and still be fun and effective.

Plot

When teaching plot and identifying it in stories, we have an important opportunity to bring other non-academic skills into play. As we grow up and mature, our Theory of Mind does as well. We understand that others can have different thoughts, feelings, and opinions than us. They can interpret a situation differently and can come up with a different solution. The plot of the story is made up of a problem and the solution to that problem. This is your chance to go around the room and ask your students what

would they do if they were the characters in the story? Would they do the same thing? How would they feel?

This is a wonderful exercise in perspective and empathy for students and can help them build on and develop their own understanding of how others feel. We do not think about it much and it seems like common sense that everyone has their own thoughts and feelings. But for children who have not reached this level, it is an important concept to introduce and discuss.

The Lesson, Moral, or Meaning

Now when you create your own story, this can be something you decide on as a class, something you pick as a teacher, or a lesson that naturally emerges from the story you have created. In one of the productions I have done, a group of witches get accidentally turned into frogs because some overeager and clumsy mummies want to help them with their potion. The story follows these characters trying to turn the frogs back into witches and ends with the witches making potions together with their new mummy friends. A lesson about friendship and working together naturally emerged from the children's story because of asking questions and engaging students' empathy and sense of right and wrong.

If you miss the opportunities while teaching plot to engage students' empathy, you might just end up with a disturbing lesson, especially if you are relying on a fairytale to build the framework of your story. Sometimes the moral lessons of those stories are decidedly grim (pardon the pun). Because, let's face it, was it a good choice for Goldilocks to commit breaking and entering? What about a witch who committed kidnapping and attempted cannibalism in Hansel and Gretel? What about Hansel and Gretel shoving said cannibal-witch into a fiery oven? Not so great choices and a decided lack of empathy.

Teaching Goal/ Theater Lesson	
Unpacking and understanding the elements of a story	

Language Targets/Vocabulary	Materials Needed
-Characters, Place/Time (setting), Problem + Solution (Plot)	The book, *Hansel and Gretel*

Activities/Lesson Procedures: (include specific language you will use/target for each activity, LSL strategies)	LSL Strategies and Skills
1) Pre-Teaching: Before beginning to read the book, be sure to let the students know what they will be learning today. You can use words that they do not know yet, and if they ask you what the words mean, turn the question back to them. What do you think it means? Can the context of the story tell us what this word means? After getting suggestions and brainstorming the meaning of new vocabulary, go over the real definitions and remind them that all stories have characters, settings, and plot. 2)Initial Readthrough: Read through your book, pausing to ask and answer questions as they come up. During this first read-through, pointing out characters and the setting as you go along is important. Remember, for the first read through, you are pushing in the information they need to know and what you will ask them about at the end of the book. Draw their attention to the important details. 3) Characters: After you have finished the story, ask the kids about the characters. "Who were the characters in our story?" (the witch, Hansel, Gretel, their father and mother, the birds who ate the breadcrumbs, etc.) "What were the characters like?" 4) Setting: Conversations about the setting of the story can naturally flow into a discussion of the plot. "What happened when Hansel and Gretel were in the woods? That's right, a witch tried to eat them!" 5)Plot: You can then move on to the plot. The plot is made up of a problem and a solution, so ask them separate questions about each. Problem: "What was the problem?" If students need a little more guidance, ask leading questions like, "why were Hansel and Gretel scared?" Well, they were lost in the woods with a Cannibal witch trying to eat them. Solution: "How did they solve the problem?" If students need a little more guidance, ask leading questions like, "Well, we said they were afraid of the witch. What happened to the witch? That's right, they pushed her in the oven. Were they scared then? No, so they solved their problem!"	Animated reading: Auditory first: Sabotage Recasting Sentences

Chapter 6: Writing the Story

You have now come to the moment where all of your work and ideas have to come together and you finally begin constructing your story. Your students know what characters are and what they do, you have discussed the settings, problems, and solutions that are in other stories. Now it is time to combine all of those elements into your own story.

When approaching story writing, especially with young children, I like to approach the story using a 5-sentence story framework that goes like this:

> *(Once upon a time, there was/were (Protagonists) who (normal life/routine to be disrupted) at/in a (setting). One day (the problem) happened. They tried to fix it for the first time, but it didn't work. They tried to fix it for the second time, but that didn't work. They tried a third time and it worked (solution).*

I want to emphasize here that this is by no means the only way to create your story. Your narrative does not need to follow this structure. I have found that beginning a sentence and allowing students to fill in the missing story elements is effective for my students, but that may not be the case for every class. Take charge, take creative liberty, and tailor this to what you need.

Quick Tip:
For small groups (8 or fewer), think about only having 2 types of characters: Antagonists and protagonists. With only 2 groups, children will have at least another student with them so that they do not have to feel the full brunt of stage fright on their own!

Quick Tip:
For Large Groups (10+), with so many students, this is an opportunity to make a third group of characters, the Helper characters who aid the protagonists in fixing their problem.

Chapter 7: Writing the Music

Now it is time for the music! You have developed the bones of your story, now it is time to fill it in with music. There are two approaches to music writing I have tried before and I will talk about the merits and challenges of both:

Approach 1: Fill in the Blanks

The "Fill in the Blanks" approach to making your music is very teacher directed. In this approach, you would pick a song (it could be a nursery rhyme song, or a popular song from the radio) and change the words while still keeping the melody. In this approach, you have the option as the teacher of picking the song and changing the lyrics on your own, leaving a word here or there for the children to fill in or go line by line with the students and match your words to the song.

Approach 2: Child Directed Music

This approach, in my experience, is much harder that writing the music yourself, but it is also much more rewarding and educational for the students. For this approach, you can select a song the students know to serve as the base of your music. Instead of leaving only a word here and there for the students to choose, you will go phrase by phrase through the song and put in your own words.

This approach gives you the opportunity to target syllables, expand vocabulary, and have students reflect on key elements of the story that they need to tell their audience.

Let's break it down in an example with Twinkle Little Star:

The first phrase of the song is "*Twinkle twinkle little star*." In order to put our own words to it, we need to see how many syllables are in each word. Twinkle and little have two syllables and star has one. Next as a class, we would decide what we want to say in those few words. Now comes trial and error where you can go around the room and ask how a few students would say it and start matching words to syllables.

In a musical I created with my students, they decided that they wanted to tell the mummy characters that they couldn't eat the witch characters. "Don't eat the witches," was a common suggestion as we asked students how they would say it. We settled on singing, "*Mummies mummies, don't eat them*" so that we could match the syllables of the song.

Using Twinkle Little Star, we created our own song telling the mummy characters to not eat the witches and to help fix the problem of the show.

"Mummies mummies, don't eat them
They are all our witchy friends.
Help us, help us, if you can
Turn them back, we need a hand."

> Quick Tip:
> After you have written your music, make a recording of the class singing the entire musical. You can send the recording home for students to practice with and later, you can have the children sing along with that recording at their performance.

The songs that you make together can be as simple or as complicated as you would like. If you find yourself grasping for more to add to songs in order to make them longer, I have found that singing about how characters feel is always a great addition. Just have fun and stay positive!

Chapter 8: Designing the Show

Now comes the fun part, my absolute favorite part of putting a show together. You have developed your story, you have written your music, and now it is time to put the finishing touches on it all by making your set and costumes for the final performance!

There is no right or wrong way to design your set, costumes, or props for your show. What I have listed in this chapter are activity ideas to help get your students involved in the process. Keep it simple, keep it fun, and include the students whenever possible.

This is an area where it can be easy to get overwhelmed with work. I found myself facing the prospect of making 10 mummies costumes, 8 witch costumes which would then

have to transition into frog costumes, 6 fairy costumes, and outlining and painting a set. The best thing I did was to reach out to the families of my students and my fellow teachers. Witch hats, fairy wings, and old white sheets came pouring into school that next week. I had parents who could sew and others who offered to get headbands to make frog hats. Gathering together the student's ideas, a teacher drew the outline of our magic castle set. This point of the process is where collaboration flourishes and I encourage you to reach out to your colleagues and community to help make your student's creative vision a reality.
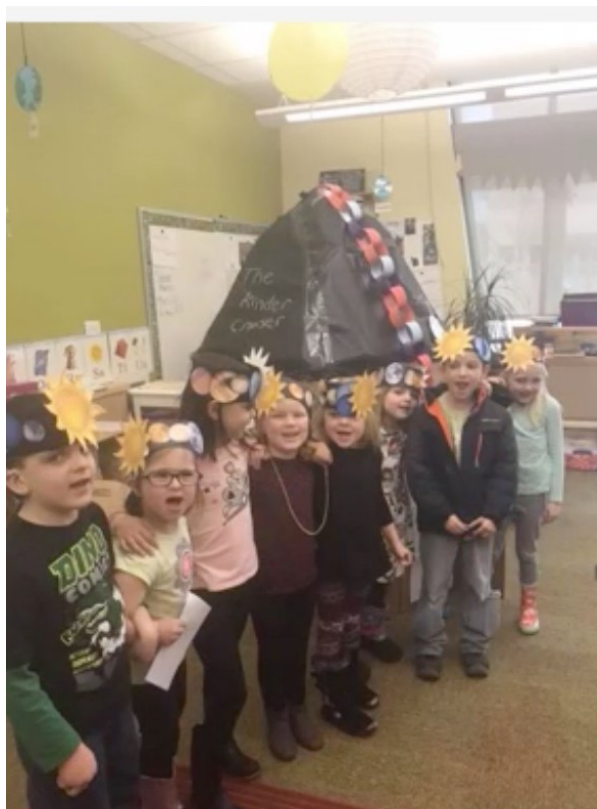
Making the Set

Individual Set Drawings

Just like professional set designers in the theater world, you and your students can create "renderings" of your set. This can be an activity you do together as a group, where students suggest ideas of what to add in, or you spread out around the classroom to make your own drawings. For older students, age 5 and up, you can give

them a blank piece of paper and have them go to town with ideas. For younger students, sometimes a basic outline is more helpful, like using coloring pages.

Outlining the Set

When it comes time to finally making your backdrop, I have found that outlining the basic parts of the set has worked well for my classes. As the teacher I will draw an outline of our set on canvas or cardboard so that we have a framework to work with. Then it is time to unleash the students with paintbrushes and some extra supervision to paint in the set you have worked together to design. From trial and error, I have found that the painting process is easier when the teachers control the paint and colors are painted one at a time.

Designing Costumes and Props

My mentors have imparted great wisdom to me, and I feel that it is important to pass it on. You do not have to reinvent the wheel. Keep it simple and keep yourself sane. When I realized that wrapping each child as a mummy would take an eternity, I went simple. I took a square of fabric, cut a hole in the middle to make a poncho, and then shredded it to make hanging "bandages." Paper hats and foam masks are your friends. Where you can, involve your students and embrace their creativity!

About the Author

Alexandra Lewis is a Utah native. She completed her undergraduate degree in History with a minor in Theater at Whitman College. While at Whitman, Alexandra rekindled her love of music and the arts and was an active member of Harper Joy Theater as a stage manager and actress.

Alexandra graduated in May 2019 from Utah State University with a Master of Education (MEd) degree in Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education.

She is passionate for the arts and hopes to foster students' love of music and theater through engaging learning activities that develop each child's confident voice. Alexandra is a self-taught ukulele player and enjoys reading, picking up new instruments, and volunteering at renaissance fairs.

Alexandra is currently working as a preschool teacher at the Spokane HOPE School.