



Teacher Resource Guide and Lesson Plan Activities

Tickets: thalian.org

910-251-1788

or

CAC box office 910-341-7860

Featuring general information about our production along with some creative activities to help you make connections to your classroom curriculum before and after the show.

The production and accompanying activities address North Carolina Essential Standards in Theatre Arts, Goal A.1: Analyze literary texts & performances.

Look for this symbol for other curriculum connections.



A Chorus Line

Book, Music & Lyrics by: Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey

April 28th - May 7th

7:30 PM Friday - Saturday and 3:00 PM Sunday

Hannah Block Historic USO / Community Arts Center
Second Street Stage 120 South 2nd Street (Corner of Orange)

Resource Summary:

Page 2

Summary,
About the Musical,
Vocabulary

Page 3

Gypsies, Writing Prompts,
Discussion Questions

Page 4

Listening for Lines,
The Setting & Characters

Page 5

True or False, Honesty,
Forms of Storytelling,
Discussion Questions,
Comparative Art Contest

Page 6

Music, Emotions,
Self-Identification Game

Page 7

Musical Theatre & Culture,
Classroom Discussions,
Research Activities

Page 8

Reflection,
Cross the Line Activity,
Resources

Page 9

Write an Advertisement,
Write the Director

Page 10

Resources

About this Teaching Resource

This Teaching Resource is designed to help build new partnerships that employ theatre and the arts. **A major theme that runs through *A Chorus Line*, is the importance of education and the influence of teachers in the performers' lives.** In the 2006 Broadway production of *A Chorus Line*, it was stated that the cast had spent, all together, 472 years in dance training with 637 teachers! **The gypsies in *A Chorus Line*, are judged and graded, just as students are every day.** Students know what it's like to be "on the line." **This study guide for *A Chorus Line*, explores the Pulitzer Prize winning show in an interdisciplinary curriculum that takes in English/Language Arts, History/Social Studies, Music, Theatre, and Dance.** Learning about how *A Chorus Line*, was created will make viewing the show a richer experience for young people.

About the Musical & Its Relevance for Today

A Chorus Line began performances at the New York Shakespeare Festival during the spring of 1975, when traditional values were under tough scrutiny with Vietnam and Watergate eroding American's belief in long-cherished institutions, including the Broadway theater. *A Chorus Line* dealt with the present, with all its disappointments, ambiguities and possibilities. It portrayed real lives of real people, yes they were Broadway dancers but their struggles to pursue dreams at a time when opportunities seemed to be diminishing can apply to most anyone and continues to feel relevant today. After rapturous reviews and passionate word of mouth, the show was moved to the Shubert Theatre on Broadway, where it played to sold out crowds for fifteen years. The show closed on April 28, 1990, after 6,137 performances. It won nine Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for drama. The success of *A Chorus Line* has generated many successful productions worldwide and was revived on Broadway in 2006, and in the West End in 2013.

About Thalian Association Community Theatre

Thalian Association Community Theatre was founded in 1788, to provide arts education & bring the excitement of the performing arts to Wilmington, North Carolina & produces five major productions annually on the Main Stage at historic Thalian Hall. In fact, Thalian Hall was proudly named for our organization in 1858. Our mission is to present quality live theatre that illuminates the human experience for the citizens of Wilmington, New Hanover County and beyond. We teach life skills through theatre education and provide an outlet for artists and technicians to develop and exercise their crafts. Established over 35 years ago Thalian Association Youth Theatre is an extension of Thalian Association Community Theatre non-profit organization & is dedicated to the enrichment of arts education for our community's youth. We offer academy classes (in drama, voice, playwriting, story telling & theatrical makeup) that are aligned with the National Standards for Arts Education. Through generous support from: PPD, Cape Fear Rotary, Wilmington East Rotary an affiliate of the North Carolina Community Foundation, Landfall Foundation and the Dan Cameron Family Foundation, we provide six ongoing Community Outreach Scholarship Classes to children in the Youth Enrichment Zone. We want to turn out great theatre artists as well as great doctors, lawyers, teachers and bankers. Thalian Youth Theatre is about developing collaborative & thoughtful members of our community.

“Every Little Step She Takes”

SUMMARY

The lights come up in the middle of auditions for a new 1975 Broadway show. The director of the show, Zach, and his assistant, Larry, choose 17 dancers out of dozens of hopeful performers. Zach tells them that he is looking for 8 dancers, 4 men and 4 women. He wants to find out more about them, to see if they can work together well in a group.

Many of the dancers are reluctant to speak about themselves and why they began dancing, but one by one, they begin to open up. Mike describes watching his sister’s dance class and realizing that he could do that; one day he takes her place in the class and stays forever. Maggie, Sheila and Bebe talk about the beauty and escape they found at the Ballet: they all saw the Ballet as a way to make up for things they missed in real life.

We are introduced to other dancers: Kristine and Al, a married couple of dancers who support each other; Mark, a young and eager performer; Diana, who sings about how she struggled through her terrible high school acting class; and Val, who describes how, despite her extraordinary dancing, she was rejected by casting directors because of her looks.

It becomes clear that Zach and Cassie have known each other in the past. She had been a rising star on Broadway and had gone to Los Angeles to become a movie actor. During the break, Zach asks her what she is doing here, auditioning for the chorus, and Cassie tells him that she hasn’t been able to find work. She wants to start again, at the beginning, in the chorus. She pleads with him to give her a chance.

Zach lets Cassie learn a new dance with the rest of the gypsies. Zach speaks to Paul alone on stage. He likes Paul’s dancing, but wants the young man to open up about his past. In a wrenching monologue, Paul describes how being a dancer has changed his view of life, his family and his definition of manhood.

As the auditions come to an end, Zach must decide which of the performers in front of him will make up his chorus line.

About the Musical

When *A Chorus Line*, opened in 1975, audiences were shocked at its raw honesty, its look “back stage” at **auditions** for a Broadway show. Today, we are used to auditions, we’re used to seeing people put everything “on the line” in shows like *American Idol*, or *So You Think You Can Dance*. We’re used to hearing people talk about their lives, on the latest **reality show** or in **blogs** everywhere.

In 1975, director Michael Bennett, in **collaboration** with a group of top theatre artists and performers, brought the story of the **chorus dancers** to life on stage. *A Chorus Line* took the dancers’ own words and in a powerfully simple setting – a bare Broadway stage – told their stories through words, song and especially, dance. It was **utterly** unique. It won the **Pulitzer Prize** in 1975, and the **Tony Award** for Best New Musical. It changed the American musical forever.

The **original** musical hit the stage at a **volatile** time—in the wake of **Vietnam** and **Watergate**, as the **hippy era declined**, as movements in **civil rights**, **women’s rights**, and **gay rights** were gaining voices across the world, and as the **Cold War** continued without end in sight. *A Chorus Line*, **injected** into this **fractured** landscape a saga of the under **appreciated**, the overlooked—the everyday individual who struggled in **pursuit** of **fulfillment**. This story, displayed with all the musical and visual poetry the best talents in the world had to offer, sparked a **renewed** interest in theater, new **trends** in fashion, and new **inspiration** for storytelling.

Vocabulary Enrichment

Research & Write the definitions for the **highlighted** words above.



N.C. Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy L1.4a: Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

*“Give me somebody to dance for. Give me somebody to show.
Let me wake up in the morning to find I have somewhere
exciting to go!”*

The actors who star in *A Chorus Line* – and the characters they play – are members of a special group of professionals: the Broadway musical theatre performer. Through pain, injury, rejection and doubt, they are expected to shine on stage eight shows a week. Which they do, without complaint. For years, dancers in the chorus, (the “gypsies” who moved from show to show) were the unsung heroes of Broadway. They did what they did for the chance to perform in front of an audience.

What’s vitally different about *A Chorus Line*, and why it remains an important show for young people to experience, is that the performers are auditioning, not to be famous or to spread the word about themselves. They’re simply looking for a job. Do these gypsy dancers hope for fame? Someday sure, but right now, they’re dancing & working, simply for love. They just wanted a chance.



Discussion Questions:

What do you love? What do you want to be or do when you are an adult? How will you make a living and support yourself and your family? Would you do something for no or very little pay, just to be able to do what you love?

Writing Prompts

Using the words below, write a story about “the future you”. What will you be doing? Where will you be living? Who will you be living with? What are your weekly activities? Who will you be supporting? How will you be enjoying life? How will you be using your gift?

SACRIFICE PERSEVERANCE SUPPORT HOPE UNDERSTANDING FINANCES AWAKING LOVE



N.C. Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy SL.2: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. **L1.4a:** Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase. **W.5.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details and clear event sequences.

True or False

- A Chorus Line played on Broadway, for 6,137 performances over 16 years.
- It won nineteen Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize.

The Art of Storytelling

- Isn't all art a form of storytelling? Discuss how painting, sculpture or photography are forms of storytelling.
- *A Chorus Line*, began with perhaps the oldest form of theatre: storytelling. Dancers gathered together in the middle of the night and told stories – about dance, work and why it all matters so much. The creation of *A Chorus Line*, is a fascinating story of trust and risk and using storytelling to find common ground.
- In his book *A Chorus Line and the Musicals of Michael Bennett*, Ken Mandelbaum writes that “the dancer is of necessity a creature of honesty.” What does he mean? What about being a dancer makes you honest? What premium do we place on honesty today? Do you consider yourself an honest person? Is it important to be honest? Why or why not?
- Describing the finale of *A Chorus Line*, Zach says to the dancers, “Now – this is important! I want to see Unison Dancing. Every head, arm, body angle, exactly the same. You must blend. This is one of those numbers where you back the star – you're her frame. I don't want anybody to pull my eye.” After you see *A Chorus Line*, discuss the ending. Is it a happy ending or a sad ending?

Tell Your Story

Tell your own stories. Start out by gathering in a circle and, one by one, telling one thing about yourself. Then open it up to anyone who wishes to go into further detail.

Don't know what to talk about? Brainstorm on these ideas:

- Talk about your family. Describe your relationship with your parents or guardians, and your siblings. How many brothers and sisters do you have? Are you an only child? Relate one event that exemplifies your family life.
- What's your favorite subject in school? Least favorite? Why?
- Who are some of your heroes? Who is someone you admire, and why?
- Do stories in the news scare you? Disgust you? Inspire you? Why?
- What are your dreams for the future? Where you think you will be in the next 10 years?

Tape record the stories. Notice what you have in common with your peers. How do your stories compare with the stories in *A Chorus Line*?

Comparative Art

Based on the themes of *A Chorus Line*, or your own internal conflicts & conflicts with others, use recycled materials create an art piece that conveys your message about how it makes you feel. (Ideas: draw, paint, write a poem or a song, choreograph a dance with props or create beat) Make your own creative art masterpiece, using recycled materials such as: cardboard, paper, old socks, trash can lids, drums, broom handles, etc.

Enter your masterpiece in our art contest (details on last page) & you could win: two free tickets to our special preview night of *A Chorus Line*, 7:00 PM Thursday April 27th and one free theatre arts class **for your entire classroom!**



NC Essential Standards Health Education 2.MEH.1.4: Explain the influence on self-concept on performance and vice versa. **North Carolina Essential Standards, Information and Technology Standards 2.TT.1.1:** Use a variety of technology tools to gather data and information. **Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy: W.5.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details and clear event sequences. **North Carolina Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy: R.L.1.2:** Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message and lesson. **RL.9-10.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges & is shaped & refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. **National Standards for Arts Education Visual Arts 3.V.1.2.** Understand that artists use their art to express personal ideas.

“All I Ever Needed Was The Music & The Mirror & A Chance To Dance For You”

Composer, Marvin Hamlisch and lyricist, Edward Kleban, were brought on board to write the songs connecting & embellishing the dancers’ stories. As Edward Kleban later said in the book, *A Chorus Line and the Musicals of Michael Bennett* by Ken Mandelbaum, “every twenty or twenty-five pages there would be something and interesting not just to the chorus gypsy. Suddenly you discovered something like the realization that ‘I can do that,’ that young man could excel and have a special life if he danced. There was a song.” Marvin Hamlisch wanted the music in *A Chorus Line* to match the driving force and motion of the dancers. He said, “We tried to make the music energetic, kind of **angular** and very **rhythmic**.”

“Angular” is a word you would usually use to describe a solid object, one with sharp edges. How can a piece of music be “angular”? What do you think Hamlisch meant?

MUSIC DESCRIPTION CHART

Map out what you learn about the characters through their songs and how the songs move the story forward. In the second column, write 2-3 descriptive words about the feelings behind the song.

CHARACTER	SONG	INSIGHTS	DESCRIBING WORDS
The Company	“I hope I get it”	_____	_____
Mike	“I can do that”	_____	_____
Sheila, Bebe, Maggie	“At the Ballet”	_____	_____
Kristine, Al	“Sing”	_____	_____
Dianna	“Nothing”	_____	_____
Cassie	“The Music and the Mirror”	_____	_____
The Company	“One”	_____	_____
Dianna & Company	“What I did for love”	_____	_____

What Emotions do you feel?

“One smile and suddenly nobody else will do!”

“Wish Me Luck, the Same To You!”

“Everything Was Beautiful at the Ballet!”

“I dreamed a dream in time gone by”

“As we travel on, Love’s what we’ll remember”

Self-identification

Create a “Bag of Emotions”. Write down emotions on small pieces of paper and put the slips in a bag. Each person in your class or group will reach into the bag, pull out an emotion and silently convey that emotion to the rest of the group, the “audience.”

The “audience” has two jobs:

- 1) Guess what emotion is being portrayed.
- 2) Once someone has guessed, write down descriptions of how they convey the emotions. (Do they use gestures, expressions or abstract movements?)



North Carolina Essential Standards, Information and Technology Standards 2.TT.1.1: Use a variety of technology tools to gather data and information. National Standards of Arts Education Music 9: Understanding music in relation to history and culture. NC Essential Standards: Music CR.1: Understand global, interdisciplinary, and 21st century connections with music.

Musical Theatre & Culture

Musical Theatre is a reaction of the culture in which it is produced. Michael Bennett said that he wanted *A Chorus Line*, to be an answer to the feelings of mistrust and suspicion that loomed in the mid-1970s. In many ways, *A Chorus Line*, marked the beginning of Times Square's revival; a massive hit at The Shubert Theatre, *A Chorus Line*'s huge electric sign shone like a beacon calling audiences back to Broadway.

The 1970s was a time of great change for the American musical. Before *A Chorus Line*, Michael Bennett worked on two ground-breaking shows, *Company* and *Follies*. These were later called "concept musicals" shows that revolved around an idea, a concept, rather than simply relying on plot. The 1970s saw new freedoms of language, content and theatrical staging in shows like *Pippin* (1972), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Chicago* (1975) and *Pacific Overtures* (1976). How did the times affect the creation of these shows? How does art intersect with history? How does culture influence current events, or vice-versa?

HISTORICAL

CULTURAL

Create two time lines of the 1970s, one cultural and one historical. The historical time line will represent important events of the decade; the cultural time line will show influential cultural events, in theatre, television, architecture, art.

Classroom Discussion

Use the above parallel time lines as the foundation for discussion. Where do they meet? What cultural events were influenced by history? What historical events were influenced by artistic achievements?

Research Activities

- **Times Square** and **Broadway** are places made famous by the artistic, hard working and determined people who worked there. Break your class into smaller groups and have them draw a name out of a "Top Hat". Each group will research the lives, achievements and innovations of the person they have chosen and present a brief report on their findings. Using all **photos, images, newspaper clippings**, and anything else they find on their subject, have students create their very own **Times Square Who's Who Book** and use it to present their report to the class. Here are a few suggestions to get you started: **George Gershwin, Oscar Hammerstein, O.J. Gude, Rudolph Guiliani, Florenz Ziegfeld, Irving Berlin**
- Research the life and career of Joseph Papp. Why was he important to the development of American theatre during the last decades of the 20th century?
- *A Chorus Line*'s **Lighting Director, Tharon Musser** was stimulated by the paintings of the **Dutch artist Piet Mondrian**. Look at examples of Mondrian's work. As you watch *A Chorus Line*, think of how Musser was inspired by Mondrian. How is the lighting used to show us the difference between the characters' inner dreams and public lives?



North Carolina Essential Standards in Visual Art: 2.V.2.3: Create art from real & imaginary sources of inspiration. **3.V.1.2.** Understand that artists use their art to express personal ideas. **4.V.1.2.** Apply personal choices while creating art. **5.V.3.3.:** Create art using the processes of drawing, painting, weaving, printing, stitchery, collage, mixed media, sculpture, ceramics, and current technology. **N.C. Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy SL.2:** Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. **North Carolina Essential Standards, Information and Technology Standards 2.TT.1.1:** Analyze theatre in terms of the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which it was created. **5.TA.CU.2:** Understand the traditions, roles, and conventions of theatre as an art form. Use a variety of technology tools to gather data and information. North Carolina Essential Standards in Theatre Arts TA.CU.1: **Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy: W.5.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details and clear event sequences.

“The Sweetness And The Sorrow”

REFLECTION

What do you think young people can take away from *A Chorus Line*?

“Well, I think they take away the same things that audiences got from it in 1975. I think that when they see the show, **they know that they’re not alone.** I think they know that when they hear these stories, they realize that the same things happen to them, either in school, or at home, the same family troubles, **the same embarrassments at school** - and those **issues are totally the same;** they’re about **pain and love.** “

- Bob Avian, *A Chorus Line*

What are your thoughts?

What did you take away from *A Chorus Line*?

“ I think a young person can take away two lessons from *A Chorus Line*.

The first one is: **try to be true to yourself** and **do what you truly believe** will fulfill your life and what you love. That takes a lot of honesty with yourself, it takes honesty to **admit what your strengths and weaknesses are.**

The second lesson is that **life is full of acceptance and rejection.** Throughout your entire life, you’re going to be faced with that, **whether it’s being accepted or not accepted** to a school, or whether, when you get older, you get accepted or rejected for a new job you’ve always wanted. **Acceptance and rejection is a part of our lives.** These lessons don’t have anything to do with being an actor or a dancer. What those performers are going through is something that **everybody goes through,** no matter what role they choose for themselves in life.”

- John Breglio, *A Chorus Line*, Producer

The below “Icebreaker Activity” will show that we all have similar experiences and have much in common:

Cross The Line Activity: Count off by 2’s and then have students stand in 2 lines facing each other. A student facilitator asks a series of questions and after each question students answering “yes” to the question take a step forward and cross the imaginary centerline to the other side and turn and face the new group across the line. Students will observe that both groups will be completely jumbled by the end of the series of questions because we all have similar experiences. You can get as deep as you want with these questions—the more honest the participants have to be, the better the results. After you get folks warmed up, if you feel comfortable enough, have the students throw out a few statements. Teachers should be part of the two groups crossing the line.

Example questions (you can make up your own):

- If you are wearing green, cross the line.
- If you have a younger sister cross the line.
- If you have ever told a lie, cross the line.
- If you have a parent or grandparent born in another country, cross the line.
- If you have ever felt stereotyped, cross the line.
- If you have ever been a victim of hate, any form of hate, cross the line.
- If you speak a language other than English at home, cross the line.



N.C. Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy R.L.1.2: Retell stories, including key details, & demonstrate understanding of their central message and lesson. **SL.2:** Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. **L1.4a:** Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase. **North Carolina Essential Standards, Information and Technology Standards 2.TT.1.1:** Use a variety of technology tools to gather data & information.

PERFORMERS WANTED!

Imagine you are Zach, casting for parts in a new Broadway musical. Write an advertisement describing the kind of performer you need. Remember what you have learned about Zach in *A Chorus Line* and what he wants from the performers at the audition.

Brainstorm five words to describe the performer Zach is looking for, each one highlighting a different aspect of his perfect chorus dancer:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Using the words you wrote above in any combination you wish, write a paragraph description of the kind of performer you are looking for your new show. Remember, somewhere out there is the perfect performer for your show – use your words to attract him or her to your theatre!

WANTED! PERFORMER FOR A NEW BROADWAY SHOW

The performer I'm looking for must be:

Imagine that you are one of the characters in *A Chorus Line*. Write Zach, the director, a letter, letting him know why you should be cast in the show. Describe yourself, your training, and why you would be the best choice. Be polite, but enthusiastic; remember, he's going to be looking through many such letters. Why will he choose yours?

Date: _____

Dear Mr/Mrs Director,

And that's why I believe you should cast me in your show!

Sincerely,



Theatre Corner

What is the job of the Producer?

The job of the producer is to concern yourself with just about every aspect of the show, both the creative elements, and, of course, all of the business & financial elements. When it comes to the artistic and creative elements, certainly you look to your director, your choreographer and your writers to take the lead in presenting the show in the best possible way from an artistic point of view. But your job is to keep that collaboration together and working smoothly. There's nobody else on the creative team whose responsibility it is to make sure that everyone else is working in tandem. All the creative forces in the show need to be working together, on time, in coordination with one another. And the person who needs to be on top of that is the producer.



Youth Theatre Academy Classes

Over 37 years ago Thalian Association Community Theatre established the Youth Theatre program dedicated to the enrichment of arts education for our community's youth.



We offer affordable classes in Drama, Song & Dance, Visual Arts, Musical Comedy, Audition & Stage Technique, Acting for TV & Film and Behind the Curtain (lights, sound, costumes, props & building sets) that are aligned with the National Standards for Arts Education, N.C. Essential Standards in Theater Arts & N.C. Common Core.

Starting as young as three years old (in TACT Tots) all the way to high school seniors, we have something for everyone! Classes are offered downtown at the Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center Building.



Thalian Association Youth Theatre Academy is the place to be if you want to learn "the ropes" from local professional artists currently working in their field.



If you are an aspiring performer or just want to build confidence & make new friends, check out thalian.org for more information on the New Youth Academy Fall Session, September - December.

Learn what it is like to be part of a show. Join the Theatre Community!



North Carolina Essential Standards in Theatre Arts
3.A.1.2: Evaluate formal or informal theatre productions.



Thalian Association Community Theatre offers 5 Youth productions annually with auditions open to performers ages seven through high school seniors. Would you like to be in a show?



Like us on Facebook to stay informed!

2017- 2018 Season Shows:

Hairspray

Sept. 15 - 24, 2017

Disney's Beauty and the Beast

Nov. 10 - 19, 2017

A Year with Frog and Toad

Jan. 19 - 28, 2018

Junie B. Jones the Musical

March 2 - 11, 2018

Disney's Tarzan

April 27 - May 6, 2018

Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center

Study Guide References: A Chorus Line, The Book of the Musical conceived by Michael Bennett, book by Nicholas Dante and James Kirkwood, Wikipedia, A Chorus Line and the Musicals of Michael Bennett by Ken Manelbaum, On the Line: The Creation of A Chorus Line by Robert Viagas, Baayork Lee, Thommie Walsh, Angel Fire, ncpublicschools.org, playbill.com, commoncore.org, essential standards, kennedy center, BMI, A Chorus Line Official Site, 125 Years of Broadway by Hollis Alpert, Joe Papp, An American Life by Helen Epstein, Vocal Selections from A Chorus Line by James Kirkwood, Nicholas Dante, Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Kleban,