

THE INTERNATIONAL **SELL-OUT** HIT

LONDON TOKYO MILAN BERLIN
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WEST SIDE STORY

'QUITE SIMPLY A MASTERPIECE'

Evening Standard

WEST SIDE STORY

Based on a conception by Jerome Robbins

Book by **ARTHUR LAURENTS** Music by **LEONARD BERNSTEIN**

Lyrics by **STEPHEN SONDHEIM**

Originally produced on Broadway by Robert E. Griffith and Harold S. Prince
by arrangement with Roger L. Stevens

Entire original production directed
and choreographed by **JEROME ROBBINS**

WEST SIDE STORY EDUCATION PACK 2013

These resources are designed to give learners of all ages the opportunity to develop their understanding of **West Side Story** by investigating themes, characters, and text. Teachers can use them to prepare their students to see **West Side Story**, and make the most of what they have learned on their return to school. The suggested activities can form part of lessons and workshops based on the production, tailored to specific curriculum requirements.

These resources contain a range of exercises and techniques, some of which were used in rehearsals with the cast of **West Side Story**. In addition to the work and discussion on the piece, there are interviews with some of the company and broader information about careers in the theatre for those students who are thinking of working in the performing arts.

Originally created in 2008 by Simon James Green and updated by Zoë Briggs for the Ambassador Theatre Group in 2013.

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THE PLOT

With the exception of the prologue (which takes place over a number of months), *West Side Story* unfolds over a two-day period.

During the prologue we observe the Jets, who are the established, white, gang of the neighbourhood enjoying their control of the territory. Gradually, this control is threatened as one, then two, then three and then more Puerto Ricans arrive, forming the now rival neighbourhood gang, the Sharks. By the end of the prologue it is very clear that the two gangs are intense rivals and will go to any lengths necessary to protect themselves, each other and gain control of the territory. The Jets decide that they are going to settle the situation once and for all with an all-out fight, or 'rumble'. Riff, the leader of the Jets is going to issue the challenge to Bernardo (the leader of the Sharks) during the dance at the gym, that evening. The Jets are delighted and celebrate how great it really is to be a Jet.

Riff goes to visit Tony (who started the Jets with him). Tony has moved on from being part of a gang and now has a job working for Doc at his drugstore. Nevertheless an insistent Riff pleads with him and Tony reluctantly agrees to come to the dance that evening too.

At the gym the two gangs battle for supremacy on the dance floor, each trying to outdo one another with their moves. Tony arrives, as does Maria, who is Bernardo's sister. Maria is at the dance with Chino - Bernardo's best friend, who he has arranged for Maria to marry. Left by herself for a moment, Maria meets Tony and it is love at first sight. They dance a little, then kiss - only to be pulled apart by a furious Bernardo. Riff joins in the explosive atmosphere by issuing the challenge to a rumble, which Bernardo is only too pleased to accept. They agree to meet for a war council at Doc's drugstore a little later in the evening. Everyone leaves the dance, leaving Tony in a daze as he contemplates just how wonderful Maria is.

Tony goes to find where Maria lives and clammers up onto her balcony so he can be with her. He assures Maria that whilst he may technically be from a rival gang he is 'not one of them' and she shouldn't be afraid. Clearly in love, but afraid they might be interrupted by her parents, Maria insists that Tony leaves and tells him to call for her tomorrow at the bridal shop where she works.

At the drugstore the Jet boys try to keep their cool, as they wait for the Sharks to arrive for the war council. The details of the rumble are agreed, just as Lt. Schrank arrives. The boys all play innocent but Schrank vows to find out where the rumble is going to be.

The next day, Anita and Maria are closing up at the bridal shop. Just as she is about to leave, Tony arrives and Anita realises what Maria is up to. Seeing herself in Maria, Anita agrees not to say anything, but advises Maria to be home in fifteen minutes, before anyone becomes suspicious. Tony and Maria embrace, but there is something on Maria's mind - she wants Tony to stop the rumble that is planned for that evening. Tony points out that the rumble is only going to be a fist fight now, but that if she doesn't even want that to happen, then he will stop that too. Maria is delighted.



The pair then get wrapped up trying on the wedding outfits in the shop and what starts as a game quickly becomes very real and emotional as the pair play at 'getting married'.

The gangs meet under the highway. Tony arrives and tries to stop the fight, but things quickly get out of control and Riff and Bernardo end up pulling knives out. They fight and Riff gets stabbed. Tony, blinded with rage that Bernardo has killed his best friend, takes the knife and kills Bernardo too. A fight breaks out until police sirens are heard and everyone leaves. Tony cries out in anguish and Anybodys encourages him to run away. She then picks up the knives and runs away herself, leaving the dead bodies of Riff and Bernardo on the ground.

At the top of Act 2, Maria is none the wiser about the night's events as she enjoys a night in with the girls. They are interrupted by Chino who tells Maria what has happened. She accuses him of lying and he runs away. Tony arrives and tells Maria that it is indeed true. Tony and Maria imagine a world where everyone gets along and is happy, with no rivalries or prejudice.

Baby John and A-Rab are questioned by Officer Krupke, but manage to get away. The Jet boys make fun of him but the merriment is cut short by the arrival of Anybodys with news that Chino is out looking for Tony. The Jets spring into action to find Tony and bring him to a safe hiding place.

Anita arrives outside Maria's locked door. Tony escapes out of Maria's window and Maria lets Anita in. Anita isn't fooled though. She has an argument with Maria but eventually begins to understand the depth of Maria's love for Tony. Anita tells Maria that Chino has a gun and is looking for Tony. The moment is interrupted by Lt. Schrank, who wants to ask Maria some questions. Maria and Anita speak in coded language and Anita leaves to go to the drugstore to give Tony the message that Maria will meet him there later.

Outside the drugstore the Jet boys stop Anita and deny that Tony is hiding there. Despite her pleas that she has a message for him they continue to taunt her before raping her. A distraught Anita runs away, telling the boys that Maria is dead because Chino found out about her and Tony and shot her.

Doc breaks the news to Tony who, having nothing else to live for now, goes out in the streets, screaming for Chino to come and shoot him too. Suddenly, Maria appears. Tony runs towards her, but Chino shoots him just as he reaches her. He falls into her arms and dies.

An anguished Maria tells the assembled gangs that they all had a part in killing Tony, as well as Riff and Bernardo. Tony's body is carried away by members of both gangs - a glimmer of hope that things might finally be resolved...

EXERCISE

West Side Story has many parallels to Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. Make a list of themes and plot points from **West Side Story** and their counterparts in *Romeo & Juliet*.



CHARACTERS

THE JETS

Riff - the leader and Tony's best friend
Tony - his friend and co-founder of The Jets. Maria's beloved
Action - second in command. Hot headed and always ready for a fight
Baby John - the youngest of the gang
A-Rab - Baby John's friend, looks after him
Big Deal - something of a joker. Has a conscience
Diesel - the best fighter in the gang
Snowboy
Gee-tar

THEIR GIRLS

Graziella - Riff's girl
Velma - Graziella's best friend
Pauline - a hanger-on
Anybodys - dresses like a boy and wants to be one of the gang

THE SHARKS

Bernardo - the leader, Maria's brother and Anita's boyfriend
Chino - his best friend and Maria's fiancé by arrangement
Pepe - Chino's friend
Moose, Anxious, Indio, Nibbles - gang members

THEIR GIRLS

Anita - Bernardo's girl and friend to Maria
Maria - Bernardo's sister. Loves Tony, not Chino
Rosalia - none too bright and longs to return to Puerto Rico
Consuelo - a good time girl who loves it in the USA
Teresita, Francisca

THE ADULTS

Doc - Drugstore owner and Tony's boss. Tries to understand the kids
Lt. Schrank - dislikes the Jets but hates the Sharks more. A dangerous and racist cop
Officer Krupke - A beat cop who is hopelessly ineffectual and a figure of fun
Glad Hand - a winnable social worker who patronises the kids at the dance at the gym

EXERCISE

Make a list of characters in *West Side Story* and their counterparts in *Romeo & Juliet*.



VOCABULARY & JIVE SLANG

PR's - Puerto Ricans

I'm a casual - A-rab means he's a casualty because of the Shark attack on him.

That makes you a Puerto Rican tomato - Big Deal is teasing A-rab, calling him a Puerto Rican party girl now that A-rab's ear has been "pierced."

Protocality calls for... - Riff means that there is a protocol, a procedure to be followed in arranging the rumble.

Callate! - Maria is telling Tony to be quiet: *Callar* in Spanish means to silence.

Ya vengo - Maria tells her father she'll be in, in a minute.

Buenos noches - good night.

Te adoro, Anton - I love you, Tony.

Who is really a Polack - Bernardo is deriding the American point of view that U.S. born children of immigrants are Americans while Puerto Ricans, though born U.S. citizens, are foreigners - and he's doing that with the ethnic slur polack instead of Pole.

Vamonos, chicos, es tarde - let's go, boys, it's late.

Hoodlums - criminals.

d.t's - delirium tremens. A-rab's father is accused of being an alcoholic.

Bruja - witch.

Querida - dear.

Buenas tardes - good evening.

Headshrinker - a psychologist or analyst.

My grandma pushes tea - Grandma is selling marijuana, the active chemical ingredient being THC, thus, "T" or "tea."

Be a schmuck - a clumsy or stupid person; an oaf.



Wotta buncha Old Man Rivers: they don't know nothin' and they don't say nothin' - Anybodys refers to the song "Old Man River" from the Hammerstein-Kern musical *Showboat*:

Ol' man river,
Dat ol' man river
He mus' know sumpin'
But don't say nuthin'
He jes' keeps rollin'
He keeps on rollin' along.

Por favor - please.

Non comprende - you don't understand.

De nada - it's nothing.

Cut the frabbajabba - chatter.

Gassin', crabbin' - talking and complaining for the sake of it, not to effect change.

Daddy-o - a precursor to man, applied to any male held in your esteem.

Spics, micks, wops - Latinos, Irish, Italians, i.e. not Americans.

Glory Osky - a socially acceptable exclamation used in place of "God!" when such a term was not necessarily permitted out loud.



THE CREATION OF *WEST SIDE STORY*

In 1949, dancer and choreographer Jerome Robbins suggested to composer Leonard Bernstein that they join forces on a modern musical version of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. He thought the love story, set against a background of family feuds, had universal appeal. The writer Arthur Laurents was called in to work on the libretto, but due to work commitments, the project was put on hold.

Six years later, Bernstein and Laurents again discussed the project and Stephen Sondheim was enlisted to write the song lyrics. The creative team was now in place...

Between 1955 and 1957 they worked to create a form of musical theatre "unlike anything done before." "The aim," Robbins said, "was to see if all of us could bring our acts together and do a work on the popular stage... the idea was to make the poetry of the piece come out of our best attempts as serious artists." *West Side Story* was surely a daring, innovative experiment, seemingly ahead of its time; yet the show also represented the culmination of the integrated concept musical that traced back to *Oklahoma!* Under Robbins' direction, all elements of the book, score, choreography and design would be woven seamlessly to support what he defined as the show's central theme: "the futility of intolerance".

Working with Bernstein on the lyrics, Sondheim sought "to bring the language down to the level of real simplicity [while still expressing serious themes]." According to Bernstein, the key to his edgy, feverish music was the tritone interval. Bernstein suggested that while he and Sondheim were working on the music and lyrics "we raped Arthur's playwriting. I've never seen anyone so encouraging, let alone generous, urging us 'Yes, take it, take it, make it a song'".

While past efforts to turn Shakespeare into musical theatre had always involved adaptations of the Bard's comedies, *West Side Story* was the first attempt to use one of the tragedies as the basis for an American musical. Laurents chose to let the story wind its own way, using the original as a reference point but sticking as closely as he could to Shakespeare's original plot. According to Carol Lawrence, who played Maria in the Broadway premiere, at first the collaborators thought Maria should die, as Juliet does, but when Laurents broached the idea to Richard Rodgers (of Rodgers and Hammerstein), Rodgers replied, "You know, the moment Tony dies, Maria is dead already. Her life is over. You don't need to kill her. It's sadder if she has to live on alone." So Maria lives.

To make the characters timeless yet realistic, Laurents invented a special street language, as he felt contemporary slang would date the piece. He even pre-empted the widespread use of "cool" which was not modified into its slang form until several years later.



Laurents planned the musical numbers very carefully. With the exception of "Gee, Officer Krupke", which is pure light relief, every song arises from one of the three dramatic situations in the show: the feud between the Jets and the Sharks, Tony and Maria's mutual love and Anita's remonstrations with Maria. Robbins too wanted his work to be as integrated as possible with the other elements of the show and the routines he developed were street-wise and vibrant.

The production was not without problems. The original producer dropped out six weeks before rehearsal and Robbins hired young dancers who, while fitting the age profile of the piece, had little acting experience. To make them act like real street gangs, he encouraged them to live out their stage roles, even to the extent of not socialising with members of the other gang. It worked so well that one cast member complained that no one would eat with her.

The show opened in Washington DC to mixed reviews but was an artistic triumph and commercial success when it moved to Broadway. It ran on Broadway for 734 performances before embarking on a national tour.

In 1961 *West Side Story* was made into a film which was awarded ten Academy awards.

(Adapted from *West Side Story* official site)

DISCUSSION TOPIC

Bernstein wrote in his diary on the day of the Washington opening "what made it come out right is that we all collaborated, we were all writing the same show".

- Music, lyrics and dance are indeed effectively integrated in *West Side Story*. Identify the places where dance is used. Why is dance more powerful at certain moments than words might be? How is dance used to express emotion?
- At the very end of the show, as the two gangs appear to be cooperating by carrying Tony's body, a peaceful sounding high chord alternates with an ominous-sounding low note. Yet this dissonance between the two sounds never resolves. By ending the show without a musical resolution (a traditional tonal cadence), what comment do you think Bernstein is making?



WEST SIDE STORY - 50 YEARS ON

West Side Story changed the course of musical theatre when it opened on Broadway in 1957. It remains one of the most successful stage shows of all time.

Having sold out around the world in cities including Tokyo, Beijing, Sydney, Madrid and Paris, this production is now on a UK tour. This production was directed and choreographed by Joey McKneely (former assistant to Jerome Robbins). Joey has choreographed and directed extensively on Broadway and his credits include *Smokey Joe's Café*, *Whistle Down the Wind* and *Twelfth Night*. He staged and choreographed **West Side Story** at La Scala in Milan and has worked on many Hollywood movies. He choreographed *The Boy from Oz* with Hugh Jackman in the leading role, before embarking on the direction and choreography for the production of **West Side Story**.

Fifty years on and the themes of **West Side Story** are just as pertinent. Love and hate are universal themes which mankind will doubtless experience forever more, but when barely a week goes by without news of another teen stabbing on the streets of the UK, it is perhaps time to ask why nothing seems to have changed in all this time.

During the course of rehearsals, it became clear that much of what the teenagers in **West Side Story** feel and experience is still experienced by young people today and this education pack allows you to explore some of these ideas, just as we did in rehearsals. The details of the broken home lives suffered by most of the Jet boys (alcoholic fathers, unemployed and in poverty, various forms of abuse), are sadly still echoed for an alarmingly high number of young people in the UK and USA today. Racism still exists, whether it's black, white or eastern European and the tensions between different communities are palpable in many areas of the UK, with resentment and fear still playing their part.

There is a wealth of information and discussion on the Internet about knife crime, teenage gangs and so on - but the best starting point is probably a discussion with your own class or group. Just as the adult characters in **West Side Story** manage to miss the point and not appreciate the gravity of the situation, so too should we be careful of applying too much of what we think the causes are, and let those who are actually living it tell it like it really is.

In discussing whether there is hope, you may like to draw attention to the somewhat unresolved ending of the show. Not only does it not resolve musically, but we finish with Anybodys, alone on stage, uneasy, the expanse of the city before her, before she too runs off. Whether she is running towards a different, a *better* future, is open to doubt, and fifty years after she ran off stage for the first time, it would appear little has changed...



LOVE.....

Love is one of the overriding themes of *West Side Story* - deep, intense and passionate love. The kind that defies everything - even families and loyalties. Love is often described as a 'drug' making us behave in irrational ways and feel heightened emotions. This is the kind of love we wanted to show on stage in *West Side Story* - and if the audience are to buy into what happens in the story, it's essential they believe that Tony and Maria feel this sort of love for one another.

But it's not just romantic love we see on stage in this show. The loyal, almost brotherly love, we see between Tony and Riff - who have been friends since they were little and who have grown up together, is just as intense, so much so that it drives Tony to kill at the end of Act 1. Equally, the love that Chino feels towards Bernardo causes him to avenge his death and eventually kill Tony. Anita's love for Maria makes her keep her secret and even persuades her to try and help the doomed lovers, even though Tony has murdered her own love.

Love is clearly a powerful emotion. Combine love with the often impulsive, passionate emotions of the show's teenage characters and you have an explosive mix.

So how do we create these feelings on stage? The creative teams on *West Side Story* have always tried to allow the actors to experience the emotions for themselves, for real - getting them to connect to real experiences and genuine emotions and then bringing that emotional connection to the stage.

EXERCISE: THE LOVE LETTER

What does it feel like when you fancy someone? What does it feel like when you discover someone fancies you? Ask students to individually write a short note on a piece of paper which expresses, very simply, that they fancy someone. The someone should be anonymous - make it clear they are not writing the note to anyone in the room specifically. A line or two is quite sufficient. Ask students to fold the note over and hand them over.

Create a simple space with a couple of chairs, a table and a few props - a bag, a magazine etc. Each student takes it turn to wait outside the room, while you conceal a random 'love letter' somewhere in the space. The student will then enter the space and go about their business, perhaps tidying the space, or reading the magazine. During this they will discover the note and read it. We are then interested in their reactions in the ten seconds immediately afterwards.

Will they simply smile?

Will they punch the sky and shout?

Will they be nervous and worried?

After each student, take a moment to discuss what feelings came across to the audience and what feelings the student was experiencing.



West Side Story is a musical - which means we can tell the story through words, through song and through dance. The choreography in **West Side Story** is an important part of advancing the plot, often revealing what the characters are feeling. Even in the regular scenes, physical actions and body language play just an important part as the dialogue in telling the story.

Try this exercise using body language techniques first and then progress to a simple sequence of movements and even more complex choreographic steps, depending on the abilities of your students.

EXERCISE: LET'S GET PHYSICAL!

Create a bench using a couple of chairs. Two people will approach the bench. They may do this at different times. They may sit if they so choose. Instruct one person to try and show that they are attracted to the other person. Instruct the other person that they are not interested. Ask the pair to play out a short scene that communicates this to the audience, but does not use any words or other vocalisations. Try this a couple of times with different pairs. Get feedback and comment on the body language used which successfully communicates the story:

- Eye contact
- Physical proximity
- Pointing legs and feet towards the other person

Body language which suggests disinterest in this romantic advance includes:

- Crossed arms or legs
- Avoiding eye contact
- Physically moving away from the other person

Try the exercises again, but this time, instruct both people that they are attracted to one another. Highlight that this can still only be shown physically (no talking!) and that the rule is they cannot actually touch each other. Keep the scenes short and discuss what body language and physicality is most successful in telling the story.

When Tony and Maria first meet, their emotions and attraction to each other is told entirely through movement, using simple choreography that makes them almost mirror each other and conveys their unity. Work on a short, simple set of movements in pairs that conveys such unity and attraction. In **West Side Story** we use:

- A simple rocking motion, with each individual leaning in toward the other
- Bodies that almost touch and then do in fact touch
- Arms that weave around each other, suggesting a coupling or joining up

Experiment with simple steps and actions that convey this.



The type of love that Tony and Maria share in **West Side Story** isn't straightforward. It's forbidden. Just as Romeo and Juliet belong to warring families, so Tony and Maria come from different sections of society which do not get on. This makes their love forbidden and unacceptable - adding an extra frisson and sense of danger to the story. How do we create this on stage?

EXERCISE: THE FORBIDDEN KISS

This exercise is suitable for older students, 16+.

Students should be in pairs. Create a space that resembles Maria's balcony. Discuss what the balcony means and how it might make our characters feel:

- It is high up. That makes it both difficult to reach and also dangerous.
- It is Maria's balcony, or more specifically, her parents'. Other people will be in the rooms nearby. If these people see Tony, their response to him is likely to be negative.
- The balcony has views across the city. Looking out from it allows you to see the world in an all-encompassing way. Suddenly we can see beyond the immediate gang rivalries and hatred to a better place.

In pairs, and again without speaking, students will be in the balcony space. During a short scene, they will move around one another, being careful not to arouse the suspicion of people who may be in the adjoining rooms. On a number of occasions, they should get very close, almost kissing, but then pulling back at the last moment, perhaps afraid they are about to be discovered, or scared because they heard a noise.

Discuss the effect of these 'near kisses' on both the actors and the audience. Notice how, as an audience, it makes us really want the characters to share the kiss - and how we find ourselves sharing in the frustration that it doesn't happen. This exercise does a number of things: it brings to the fore the electric energy that it is necessary for Tony and Maria to share and communicates that to the audience. It also brings the audience firmly onto the side of Tony and Maria - we find ourselves wanting Tony and Maria to kiss, we buy into their love for one another and therefore we buy into their story.

Once the actors have understood the feelings and emotions we need to get across in a particular scene, it's a good time to introduce some script and see if those feelings can be transferred into the actual dialogue.



EXERCISE: PAGE TO STAGE (SENSE MEMORY)

Give students a copy of the Tony and Maria scene from the script resource section. Initially, allow students to attempt the extract with little guidance. Then, get them to do it again, this time re-connecting with the various emotions explored in this section. Ask students to close their eyes for a moment and talk through the opening of the love letter in the first exercise. They should comment on every detail, paying particular attention to anything connected with their senses, i.e.:

"The room was hot. It was quiet inside but I could hear people talking in the corridor outside. I found the note in my bag. It was written on crisp, smooth, white paper, folded with neat creases. The blue ink was smudged. I didn't know what it was at first. I read the first line. My heart was beating faster. It felt weird. I had to look around to make sure no one had come into the room. It was like a secret. A really brilliant secret. I was breathing fast so I tried to calm down. It was like I wanted to shout and tell people. It felt exciting and new. Like the start of an adventure."

Following this, ask the students to do the scene again and comment on the improvements.

The actors in **West Side Story** used a very similar 'sense memory' technique when exploring the many emotions they have to deal with in the show. Encouraging the actors to revisit every sensory aspect of a particular experience allows them to re-live it as they actually felt it, detailing what they heard, smelled, tasted, saw etc and making everything very real again. The nature of the plot in **West Side Story** meant that some of these memories were painful and difficult, often dealing with death and pain. It is not recommended you take the sense memory technique down this road with young students, although those in further and higher education on performing arts courses may be able to deal with the technique. It is important to use this technique only in a safe environment where your actors feel secure. It is best conducted in small groups in a small space and make it clear that actors do not have to revisit any memories which they don't feel ready to explore yet.



...AND HATE

*The hate we encounter in **West Side Story** is borne of racism. The Jets perceive the arrival of the Puerto Ricans as a threat. In the age old (and false) complaint of people from other countries 'coming over here and taking our jobs' Action complains that the Puerto Ricans are 'the reason my old man's gone bust.' From this simple beginning, hatred spreads, caused by things as simple as cultural differences and different skin colour. Just like the Capulets and Montagues in **Romeo & Juliet**, hatred breeds hatred and spreads like wildfire.*

Hate drives much of the plot in **West Side Story**, so it's important to get the depth of that hatred across to the audience. In Jerome Robbins' original production, the Jets and Sharks were kept entirely separate during rehearsals, even having to eat separately. Eventually, they actually started to hate one another and become rivals.

It is obviously difficult to go quite so far when trying to maintain a happy cast for a 12 month UK tour; however in the current production the Jets and Sharks are kept in separate dressing rooms backstage, in different parts of the theatre, so that the sense of difference can be established as soon as the actors start preparing for the show each day.

Establishing hate, the causes of hate and trying to understand where hate comes from was an important part of rehearsals...



EXERCISE: ESTABLISHING HATE

Split your group into two halves. Each half needs to have an identifying 'badge' be it a coloured arm band, T-shirt, cap etc. Something which clearly divides the group into two identifiable halves.

One half will leave the space entirely. The remaining half stay in the space, controlling it. Their simple mission is to pick up a selection of clothes pegs that you have left lying around the space. They can help each other with this. There is no competition and actors can help other actors. Once a peg is picked up, it must be clipped to part of the actor's clothing.

One single member of the other team is then allowed into the space. This person also wants some pegs - if they can't find any in the space, they will have to take a peg off another actor's clothes.

The game continues. More members of the other team are gradually allowed into the space, all wanting pegs. Team B will try to take pegs from team A and team A will try to hold onto their pegs and snatch them back again.

Stop the game shortly before an all-out fight develops and they start battering one another over the head.

Discuss what came out of the game:

- How did Team A feel when they were by themselves collecting pegs?
- How did Team A feel when the first member of Team B came into the space?
- How did that single member of Team B feel?
- How did that single member feel when they were joined by another Team B member?
- How did Team A feel as more Team B entered the space?
- Why did it start to feel violent? What do students feel might have happened if the game hadn't been called to a stop when it was?



GANGS

We needed to understand why gangs were formed. What factors make teenagers form gangs? What is it about the lives of the Jets and Sharks which make the existence of a gang necessary?

YOUTH VS. EXPERIENCE: HOW THE ADULTS FAIL THE KIDS IN WEST SIDE STORY

Exploring the script, we noticed how both the on-stage and off-stage adults all fail the kids in *West Side Story*. How this becomes so important can be demonstrated with a simple exercise.

EXERCISE: USELESS ADULTS

In pairs, A is an adult figure and B is a teenager. B wants to discuss a problem with A. The trouble is that A is:

- A parent who is too busy with work to listen.
- A teacher who is really patronising and talks to B like they were 8 years old.
- A policeman who is convinced that B only wants to cause trouble and suspects B of stealing from a shop.
- A parent who is too drunk to listen or respond properly.

It may be helpful to give A an idea of the type of problem they need to discuss:

- They are being bullied at school.
- They have an eating disorder.
- They are worried about a lump they've found on their leg.
- They've received a threatening text or letter.
- There is no food in the house and they haven't got any money to buy anything.

Try a few of these short scenes where B tries to talk about their problem but A responds in various unhelpful ways. Discuss how it felt. How does B feel about not having anyone to talk to? What does that pent up fear feel like? What do they feel about the adult concerned?

It is clear from the script that the Jet boys all come from backgrounds where the parent figures fit into the above categories. Schrank sums up the problem in a speech that hits the lads hard:

"How's the old man's DT's A-rab? And how's the action on your mother's mattress, Action?"



We know that Riff lives with Tony because he can't stand living with his Uncle. Reading between the lines, we can make other assumptions about the Jet boys. In rehearsals we discussed the likely possibility that Action suffers sexual abuse and that Big Deal is the joker of the gang because he gets no attention at home. Baby John is just a little kid, yet his folks are apparently happy for him to be out on the streets at night.

With parents who either hurt them or don't care, police who loathe them and refer to them as 'scum' and patronising youth workers, where else do the boys have to turn but to each other for support and protection?

Why be in a gang?

"Without a gang, you're an orphan..." Riff

EXERCISE: PROTECTED IN A GANG

We needed the actors to understand why being in a gang feels so good. This simple exercise shows just that.

Some students find this exercise quite intimidating, so be careful who you select to go in the middle. Keep the same group split as for the hate exercises. Place 1 member of team B in the middle of the space and have Team A surround them. Team A now begin to shout insults at the team B person in the middle - but the insults must be related to the identifying item that the person is wearing, i.e.

"What a stupid red cap."

"You look stupid in that cap."

"Only losers wear caps like that!"

You may even find that terms like "Red Cap!" eventually become an insult in this exercise.

After a short time, have another member of team B join in the middle. Team A should continue with their 'insults' but now there are 2 people in the middle. Gradually add more members of team B and then allow Team B to start shouting 'insults' back, until everyone is hurling cap or t-shirt coloured abuse at each other.

In feedback after the exercise, discuss:

- How the single member of team B felt when being abused like that.
- How they felt as more member of their team joined them.

What came clearly out of the exercise for us in rehearsals is that whilst you can feel deeply threatened and afraid by yourself, that fear subsides as soon as you are joined by your 'gang'. Gangs provide a feeling of safety and security - and when the adults in your life don't help you and other kids on street are out to get you, what other option is there?



EXERCISE: PAGE TO STAGE

TRANSFERRING THESE EMOTIONS TO THE SCRIPT

Remind students of the feelings and emotions connected to the exercises on hate and gangs:

- The aggression and pumped-up energy.
- The way speech often becomes loud and out of control.
- The energised physicality, again aggressive and charged.

Try the script extract at the back of this pack and see how these feelings can be transferred to the text between Jets and Sharks.



MOMENT TO MOMENT

Whilst there may be some argument for suggesting that fate and destiny plays a part in the story of *Romeo & Juliet*, it is adolescent inexperience and the spontaneous reactions of youth (based on raw emotion rather than thought) that lies at the heart of the tragedy in *West Side Story*.

Throughout rehearsals, actors were encouraged to allow their characters to live 'in the moment', responding to events in an emotional way, as they happen, rather than completely thought through. This presented a challenge, as most actors are trained to give a lot of thought to how they play a part, giving a lot of time to considered responses. But the teenagers in *West Side Story* don't give considered responses and in the quest for absolute truth on stage, a number of techniques and exercises were necessary to achieve the desired effect.

EXERCISE: HAVE YOU READ THE SCRIPT?

Of course you have - any actor would. The trouble is, the character you are playing hasn't. To them, there isn't a script - this is their life. The danger of playing the script before it has happened, as opposed to the moment, is demonstrated here:

Give students the extract from the bridal shop. Anita is on her way out, but bumps into Tony as she is about to walk through the door. Play the scene once. Then have a quiet word with the actor playing Tony. Tell him not to enter at all this time. Play the scene again - chances are the person playing Anita will get to the door and stop, expecting to meet Tony. But Tony isn't there! So why has she stopped? She's stopped because she is playing the script, rather than the moment. Point made?

Genuinely truthful responses often only happen when you actually surprise the actor like this. When thought and preparation go out of the window and something unexpected happens, the spontaneous reaction of the actor is often a useful thing to hold on to.



IDEAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

ROMEO & JULIET

West Side Story is loosely based on the story of *Romeo & Juliet*. Look at another Shakespeare play and see if you can develop it into a musical. Things to consider are:

- What plot elements you will use?
- What characters you will use?
- What sections of the story could be better told through a song or dance?

Create a complete list of scenes for your show and give it a title. You may even be able to write the lyrics for some of the songs and try coming up with a tune. Just like **West Side Story**, you don't have to use the exact plot or the exact characters, but just use them for inspiration.

YOUR OWN WEST SIDE STORY

If you were directing your own production of **West Side Story**, what ideas would you have? How would you make the show as relevant as possible for young people today? Think specifically about how you would tackle:

- The costumes
- The set
- The choreography

WEST SIDE STORY TODAY: GANGS AND KNIFE CRIME

The central themes of **West Side Story**, with its gang culture and use of knives and guns which ends in tragedy rings an especially pertinent bell today.

West Side Story is the perfect vehicle for a class or group discussion on the nature of gangs and gang violence today.



WHO'S WHO IN THE SHOW?

Apart from the 31 cast members you will see on stage in *West Side Story*, there are many other people who will be working backstage along with a team of over 30 others who support the show in production, artistic, marketing, press and technical departments. You know what the actors do - but what about all the other people you see listed in the programme? Here is a list of some of the other important jobs on *West Side Story*...

RESIDENT DIRECTOR - is in charge of maintaining all artistic aspects of the show. Once the show has been rehearsed and set up, the original director leaves the show in the hands of the resident director. The resident will watch the show 2-3 times a week and give notes to the cast to help maintain their performances. The resident director also has responsibility for rehearsing the understudy company and any replacement casting during the run.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR - has responsibility for all musical aspects of the show - including the cast vocals and the orchestra. The MD will give notes to the cast and orchestra and will also work with the resident director to rehearse the understudy company.

COMPANY MANAGER - manages the whole company and crew. This person sorts out the payroll so everyone gets paid and is the first point of contact for any problems anyone has. The company manager is a jack-of-all-trades, and acts variously as disciplinarian, friend, father, mother, listener, punch bag, sage and confidant.

STAGE MANAGER - in charge of everything that happens on the stage, overseeing the rest of the stage management team and crew who work on the show, moving sets and ensuring the safety of the actors on stage.

DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER - working from a 'book' gives all the cues for the show over their headset, ensuring that lighting, sound and set changes all happen at the correct time. The DSM is also responsible for the smooth running of rehearsals.

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS - have responsibility for props and moving items of set which are not automated.

WARDROBE MISTRESS/MASTER - oversees all the costumes for the show, managing a team of dressers who make sure each actor has the correct outfit and helps them to change into it, especially during quick changes during the show. The wardrobe department has to wash and dry all the costumes between shows, as well as make alterations and repairs. A team of people works throughout the day to wash, dry and iron all the costumes. *West Side Story* tours with a bank of their own washing machines and tumble driers to help with this enormous task.



DEPUTY WARDROBE - assists the wardrobe mistress/master with the above.

WIGS AND MAKE UP MISTRESS/MASTER - oversees the wigs and hair pieces in the show, and provide hair design for those cast members who do not need wigs. Also provides make-up advice and guidance for the cast.

CHIEF ELECTRICIAN - oversees the installation and maintenance of the lighting and projection equipment on the show. Either the Chief or Deputy LX will also operate the lighting console during the show, which controls the intelligent fixtures (moving lights), projections and dimmers. Chief LX programmes the lights, re-creating the lighting designer's lighting plot and liaises with other departments to maintain the artistic vision of the show.

DEPUTY ELECTRICIAN - assists the Chief LX with the above.

SOUND OPERATOR NO 1 - working from the sound desk at the back of the auditorium, this person mixes the show, ensuring the correct balance of vocals and orchestra are heard by the audience.

SOUND OPERATOR NO 2 - working backstage, this person ensures all the actors are wearing their radio microphones correctly, replacing batteries and dealing with any on-stage sound issues.

CARPENTER - has specific responsibility for the set and on *West Side Story*, the automation. They oversee maintenance of the set and its use during the show.

DANCE CAPTAINS - *West Side Story* has dance captains who have responsibility for maintaining all dance aspects of the show. They watch the show a couple of times a week, giving dance notes to the cast and taking extra dance calls where necessary.

PHYSIOTHERAPIST - *West Side Story* is a big dance show and the cast often injure themselves performing some of very difficult choreography. *West Side Story* tours their own physiotherapist who is always on hand during the day and throughout the show to help fix them!



INTERVIEW WITH STEVE DIAMOND (COMPANY MANAGER, 2008 PRODUCTION)

1. WHAT IS A 'COMPANY MANAGER' EXACTLY?

In short, the Company Manager is the representative of the producer - the person who looks after all aspects of the show when it's out on tour. I look after all the people involved in the show, both on stage and off. I have responsibility for overseeing all areas including technical, marketing matters, box office reports (which detail how many tickets have been sold and how much money has been taken) - all the things that go into putting a show together. For the cast, I am teacher, father, friend, disciplinarian and sage all rolled into one!

2. HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR ON *WEST SIDE STORY*?

A company of 70 all together, which includes 31 actors, 19 musicians and the remainder are technicians and creatives in various departments.

3. HOW DID YOU GET INTO COMPANY MANAGEMENT?

I worked my way up through stage management, so I started as an assistant stage manager, and then after a brief spell as an actor, came back to stage management, moving up through the positions of deputy stage manager, stage manager and then ultimately company manager.

4. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE WHO WANTED TO BE A COMPANY MANAGER?

There are various routes, but it definitely helps to come from a fairly varied technical background - that way you have a broad knowledge of all the aspects that go into a production. Also, some background in performing is also useful, because then you understand the nature of performers.

5. WHAT'S THE HARDEST PART OF YOUR JOB?

Dealing with diverse personalities and egos.

6. WHAT PARTICULAR SKILLS DOES A COMPANY MANAGER NEED TO HAVE?

You need to be totally on the ball and ideally one step ahead of everything so you can anticipate problems before they actually become problems.

7. WHAT'S YOUR TYPICAL DAY?

I'm in the theatre most days by around 11am, when I check my email and get back to anything that needs responding to. Then it really depends - some days my phone doesn't stop ringing with questions from the company or technical things that need dealing with - other days it can be much quieter. We start to get ready for the evening show from around 4pm. Actors will pop into my office with any problems they may have, such as ticket requests or needing to see a doctor.

8. WHAT OTHER SHOWS HAVE YOU WORKED ON APART FROM *WEST SIDE STORY*?

I've been doing this for over 25 years now - I did *Cats* for several years and before that, *Chicago*. Also, I've worked on *Grease*, *Smokey Joe's Café* and *The Rocky Horror Show* as well as concert shows for the likes of Shirley Bassey and Sting.



INTERVIEW WITH SIMON BECK (MUSICAL DIRECTOR, 2008 PRODUCTION)

1. WHAT DOES THE JOB OF MD ENTAIL?

My main function is to conduct the performance every night as well as certain rehearsals that take place during the day, such as understudy rehearsals or vocal calls for the principal cast.

2. HOW MANY MUSICIANS ARE IN THE ORCHESTRA?

18 - which includes six strings, three woodwinds, six brass, piano, drums and percussion.

3. WHAT PARTICULAR CHALLENGES DOES *WEST SIDE STORY* HOLD FOR AN MD?

Because the show is exceptionally demanding for the cast from a dance point of view, keeping the vocals up to scratch is something that has to be monitored on a daily basis.

4. HOW DID YOU GET TO BE AN MD?

Mine is a classic 'in the right place at the right time' story. I trained at Junior Guildhall as a principal study pianist and secondary study French horn player. By the time I left there, aged 18, I was completely certain that I wanted to be an MD and conductor in theatre and in my last few weeks at college I met up with an older student who I knew was on the MD circuit already. He gave me lots of advice and within 6 months he offered me some dep work with Mary Hammond who's a very high profile vocal coach and course leader at the Royal Academy of Music. There, I met David White who was conducting *Sunset Boulevard* at the time. He offered me the job of Assistant Conductor on the German production of *Sunset* and the rest is history!

5. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE A YOUNG PERSON WHO WANTED TO BECOME AN MD?

If you want to be an MD in theatre, make sure you understand what theatre is. It's a very different way of working with music than simply making music. The music has to serve the drama at all times. The music has to be 'live' in the sense that if something different is happening on stage, you can't just play the music as you always do - it has to be very spontaneous and in the moment. Opportunities are few and far between unfortunately. There's no 'easy' way into being an MD. The music colleges in London are a great start and they often provide possible contacts and connections. Through your teachers, try to get an opportunity to sit in the orchestra pit and again make further contacts.

6. WHAT SKILLS DOES AN MD NEED?

You need to be able to work with the musicians, be it a band or orchestra, as well as being a vocal coach with an understanding of vocal technique and vocal health. Also, you need to be a real people person who is able to communicate with musicians, actors and other creatives alike.



7. WHY IS WEST SIDE STORY CONSIDERED SUCH A GREAT MUSICAL?

It's a great score and it's so moving. Between Bernstein, the composer, the lyricist Stephen Sondheim and the bookwriter Arthur Laurents I think they achieved that complete understanding of how all the elements come together to create a piece of musical theatre. The score is incredibly emotional - it's not simply a bunch of great songs, and they all completely serve the characters' journeys through the piece. Jerome Robbins choreography is fantastic - groundbreaking in the 50's, it still feels as fresh 50 years on and the testimony is in the response of the audiences every night.

8. IS WEST SIDE STORY STILL MUSICALLY RELEVANT TODAY? DON'T YOU THINK SOME YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD PREFER SOMETHING THAT SOUNDS A BIT MORE MODERN?

Within Bernstein's score there are so many musical styles - there's the big band sound (like you get at the 'dance at the gym' sequence), that young people today will recognise from the styles of Michael Bublé and Harry Connick Jr. The lush orchestrations are similar to those of many film scores and there's even their own 1957 version of rap in the Officer Krupke number. It's a little bit of everything that's not a million miles from what people are listening to today.

INTERVIEW WITH SUZANNE PARTRIDGE (WARDROBE MISTRESS, 2008 PRODUCTION)

1. WHAT DOES YOUR TYPICAL DAY CONSIST OF?

On a typical day, I start work 4 hours before the show. Myself and the wardrobe deputy check over the work of the local wardrobe staff who come in early in the morning to do the ironing, steaming and sorting of underwear. We then begin with any repairs and alterations from the previous show and check over shoes and accessories as required.

There are lots of other jobs too - such as ordering new shoes, haberdashery supplies, dyes and cleaning products, updating notes for the local dressers and keeping up to date with the petty cash and dry cleaning. The dressers arrive one hour before the show. We brief them about any cast changes for the show and explain how this affects them. We then supervise the dressers as they take the costumes to the dressing rooms and the quick change areas. The dressers then set the costumes for the quick changes, which are then double checked by myself and the wardrobe deputy.

Everything is in place and ready to go by the half hour call. During the show we supervise all the quick changes which take place on stage, as well as doing some changes ourselves during busy periods. As items of costume are finished with, we begin to wash, dry, iron and steam ready for the next show.

At the end of the show the dressers return the remaining costumes and laundry to wardrobe. We sort it into hand and machine washing, separating all the colours. It normally takes about an hour to get everything washed and into the dryers and hot-box ready for the local staff in the morning. On a matinee day we have to work hard as a team to get everything ready as quickly as possible for the evening performance.

2. WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL HOURS?

We usually start work 4 hours before the show and finish an hour after curtain down. But it's variable. Shopping for particular items can take a lot of time. We work as many hours as we need to get the job done. My longest working week was about 92 hours!



3. WHAT IMPORTANT SKILLS DOES A WARDROBE MISTRESS NEED?

Organisation is the most important skill. You also need to be able to sew and be happy to work long hours. You need to have excellent people skills and good leadership skills as well as being a team player. You need a good knowledge of costume through the ages and of different fabrics and sewing techniques, as well as a good knowledge of where to source varied costume and wardrobe items.

4. WHAT OTHER PEOPLE WORK IN THE COSTUME DEPARTMENT?

There is a wardrobe deputy who I work very closely with, 6 dressers who look after the actors (3 for the males and 3 for the females) and 3 maintenance people who arrive in the mornings to do the ironing, steaming and sorting of underwear. We also have three extra staff to help unpack and pack all the costumes when we arrive and leave each venue. On a matinee day we have an extra local wardrobe person to help prepare the costumes for the evening performance.

5. WHAT ADVICE COULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO BE A WARDROBE MISTRESS?

There are two routes. The first is to go through the college system and do textiles or design in fashion or costume, or do a making course. Alternatively, you could start at your local theatre as a dresser and learn on the job, picking up wardrobe skills as you go along. All local theatres needs dressers, so drop them a line as your first point of contact.

6. WHAT EQUIPMENT DO YOU TOUR WITH YOU?

We have 2 washing machines, 2 tumble dryers, a spin dryer for the hand-washing, a hot box to hang items in to dry, an ailer, 3 irons and ironing boards, 2 steamers, 2 sewing machines and an overlocker. We have 5 wooden wardrobes on wheels for the costumes to travel in and 2 large cardboard skips for equipment such as haberdashery, tools, spare fabric, shoe supplies, glues, paints and dyes.

INTERVIEW WITH HARRY FRANCIS (BABY JOHN, 2008 PRODUCTION)

1. HARRY, YOU'RE 16. WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE CAST?

It's great - to be honest, I don't feel very different from the other cast members, apart from the fact I can't go clubbing with them!

2. HOW DID YOU GET THE PART IN *WEST SIDE STORY*?

I did my first professional show when I was 9 years old - *The King and I*, and then I went on to do shows like *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *Scrooge* and *Whistle Down the Wind*. For *West Side Story*, I was doing a dance class in London and the director and casting director spotted me and asked me to come and audition - and a couple of days later I was offered the part! It was April Fool's Day when they spotted me, so my mum didn't believe me!

3. WHAT WAS YOUR TRAINING?

I went to Sylvia Young's theatre school for 3 years and then trained in ballet with the West London School of Dance (ballet training is very useful for a show like *West Side Story*) before going to a musical theatre college which gave me a broader training in things like contemporary dance, jazz and so on.



4. WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE ABOUT BEING IN *WEST SIDE STORY*?

For me as Baby John, he's got to be young enough for the character to make sense, but not so naïve and innocent that the other gang members simply wouldn't hang out with him. Also in terms of the dance, you've got to be an athlete! In this show, so much of the story is told through dance and most movements have a story behind them. You must remember what those stories are, otherwise the choreography doesn't work as well!

5. WHAT WAS THE REHEARSAL PERIOD LIKE FOR THE SHOW?

West Side Story isn't a 'bullshit' show - it's got to be taken seriously - and that makes the rehearsal process very intense. Our director was very tough with us - although not as tough as I gather Jerome Robbins was with the original cast! We were taken through lots of different acting methods, including method acting, which I particularly found very useful. Also, before I started the job I got in contact with the original Baby John who told me that he used Stanislavski in his preparation. It does help. You can't just go on and hope for the best - you've got to be in the moment.

Rehearsals took five weeks and we started off by learning the dance, as that accounts for the majority of the show.

6. TELL US ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF BABY JOHN.

When I got in touch with the original Baby John one of the most useful things he told me was that young people, when they are trying to fit in, act older, and older people try to act younger. He's good friends with A-rab and that's his connection to the rest of the gang. He always seems to be the one who says the wrong thing and he's not as tough as the others. He's not really your obvious gang member. I don't feel that Baby John has such a tough background as the others - that's why he's more disturbed by the violence. Original London cast member Matt Zimmerman told me that Snowboy had been named after his cocaine addiction - 'snow' being another name for coke. He also said that Diesel's father worked at a petrol station, so his son stinks of it. Baby John is so called because he's the 'baby' of the gang.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE RAPE SCENE?

It's a horrible scene to do each night. It's a very creepy moment in the show and it's disturbing that they get the youngest gang member to commit the rape. It reminds me of the playful violence you see in *Clockwork Orange*. The show takes place over two days and at the beginning, I don't think any of them have any idea how much their lives are going to change in that small space of time. I think at the end of it, Baby John won't want anything more to do with the violence of being a gang member, but he will probably end up hanging with them as it's all he has.

8. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WANT TO DO WHAT YOU'RE DOING?

You've got to love it because it's tough and it's hard work. Get some ballet training because it's the best training you can have and having a good technique behind you prevents a lot of injuries. Go to a musical theatre college and do a course there and just keep watching it! Go and see as many shows and plays as you can - watch and learn!



SCRIPT EXTRACT: TONY & MARIA (LOVE)

TONY Maria, Maria...

MARIA Ssh!

TONY Maria!!

MARIA Quiet!

TONY Come down.

MARIA No.

TONY Maria...

MARIA Please. If Bernardo...

TONY He's at the dance. Come down.

MARIA He will soon bring Anita home.

TONY Just for a minute.

MARIA A minute is not enough.

TONY For an hour, then.

MARIA I cannot.

TONY For ever!

MARIA Ssh!

TONY Then I'm coming up.

VOICE Maria!

MARIA Momentito, Mama...



TONY Maria, Maria...

MARIA Calladitio! Ssh!

TONY Ssh!

MARIA It is dangerous.

TONY I'm not "one of them."

MARIA You are, but to me, you are not. Just as I am one of them...

TONY To me, you are all the...

VOICE Maruca!

MARIA Si, ya vengo, Papa.

TONY Maruca?

MARIA His pet name for me.

TONY I like him. He will like me.

MARIA No. He is like Bernardo: afraid. Imagine being afraid of you!

TONY You see?

MARIA I see you.

TONY See only me.



SCRIPT EXTRACT: JETS & SHARKS (GANGS)

RIFF We challenge you to a rumble. All out, once and for all. Accept?

BERNARDO On what terms?

RIFF Whatever terms you're callin', buddy boy. You crossed the line once too often.

BARNARDO You started it.

RIFF Who jumped A-rab this afternoon?

BERNARDO Who jumped me the first day I moved here?

ACTION Who asked you to move here?

PEPE Who asked you?

SNOWBOY Move where you're wanted!

A-RAB Back where ya came from!

ACTION Spics!

PEPE Micks!

CHINO Wop!

BERNARDO We accept!



SCRIPT EXTRACT: BRIDAL SCENE (MOMENT TO MOMENT)

MARIA That rumble, why do they have it?

ANITA You saw how they dance: like they have to get rid of something quick. That's how they fight.

MARIA To get rid of what?

ANITA Too much feeling. And they get rid of it: after a fight, that brother of yours is so healthy! Definitely: Black Orchid.

Tony enters.

TONY Buenas noches!

ANITA You go, querida. I'll lock up. It's too early for noches. Buena tardes.

