



**NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS Present:**

## **THE MUSICAL ADVENTURES OF OLIVER TWIST**

Adapted from the classic novel by **Charles Dickens**

Music and Lyrics by **Scott DeTurk**

Book by **Joellen Bland**

Directed by **Paul Bower**

Choreographed by **Michelle Eiland**

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors' production of ***The Musical Adventures of Oliver Twist***. We are offering this study guide as a way to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming production and your experience at the theater. Included in this guide are a historical note about the story, a synopsis of the musical, a list of characters, a vocabulary list and curriculum ideas, and some audience protocol reminders. We always enjoy hearing from you and your students and look forward to receiving any pictures, stories, or comments about the production. Thank you for your support of New Mexico Young Actors. We'll see you at the show!

### **HISTORICAL NOTE**

Charles Dickens (1812—1870) continues to be one of the most popular English authors. He wrote during the Victorian era in England, a time of progress in the industrial revolution which led to great prosperity but also great deprivation and hardship. He is known for humanely portraying down and out characters who were true to life and from the lower classes of London society. Indeed, his creative works influenced legislation that led to better conditions for the working poor during his lifetime. *Oliver Twist* was his second novel, published as installments in a London periodical from 1837 to 1839. The novel is filled with complex characters from various walks of life as well as intriguing, suspenseful scenes. It is an early example of literary realism—presenting real people in real situations—as opposed to fantasy or fairy tale. *Oliver Twist* was very popular among the public and led to Charles Dickens becoming a household name in England and America in the 19th century.

### **OLIVER TWIST SYNOPSIS**

At the parish workhouse in a small English village, the hungry children sing about their dream of delicious food and a home to call their own. The well-fed master of the workhouse, Mr. Bumble, enters with the matron, Mrs. Corney, and they enjoy afternoon tea in front of the children. Soon, Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry enter seeking another laborer for their undertaker business. Oliver is recommended for the position, but he escapes after an altercation with the bully, Noah Claypole.

Oliver makes his way to the busy streets of London after running away for a week. He meets another boy, the Artful Dodger, who invites Oliver to the den of the thief, Fagin. Fagin meets Oliver and begins to train the boy, along with other members of his gang, in the art of pickpocketing while the villainous Bill Sikes and his girlfriend, Nancy, have their doubts about Oliver's ability. Dodger and Bet take Oliver back to the streets for pickpocketing practice and manage to steal a handkerchief from the gentleman, Mr. Brownlow. Oliver is accused of the theft but is released because of the eyewitness testimony of the bookseller while Dodger and Bet escape. Mr. Brownlow decides to take Oliver into his home so that the boy can recover. Meanwhile, Dodger and Bet return to Fagin's den, where they are reprimanded for losing Oliver. A mysterious stranger arrives named Miss Monks. She has a peculiar interest in the boy and they decide to work together to try and kidnap Oliver before he exposes their criminal ring.

Oliver spends a month at Mr. Brownlow's house. He sings to a portrait of a woman on the wall with which he seems to have a strange connection. Brownlow sends Oliver on an errand to the bookstore in town and begins to worry when he doesn't return for several hours.

Back at Fagin's den, Sikes and Nancy have successfully nabbed Oliver while he was on his errand for Mr. Brownlow. The gang decides to take Oliver along on a robbery in order to turn him into a thief while Nancy determines to intervene on Oliver's behalf. It is evening and Bumble and Corney are in the city to meet Miss Monks, who pays them for a locket that was given to Oliver when his mother died at his birth. Meanwhile, Mr. Brownlow and Rose, Oliver's friend, are also in London in search of Oliver when Nancy meets them and discloses that Oliver has been kidnapped by Fagin. She agrees to betray the gang and deliver Oliver to them the following week while also revealing the involvement of Miss Monks.

One week later, Nancy manages to sneak out of Fagin's den to return Oliver to Mr. Brownlow in London. Sikes follows her and, after she releases the boy, he attacks and kills her. Mr. Brownlow and the townspeople rush to the scene and vow to bring the murderer to justice while Sikes manages to kidnap Oliver once again and return to Fagin. At Fagin's, Sikes confesses to his crime and wants to keep Oliver as a hostage. The police arrive. Sikes is fatally shot as Dodger, Fagin, and Bet are arrested and Oliver is returned to Mr. Brownlow.

Back at Brownlow's house, Brownlow escorts Miss Monks into the parlor where he reveals that Monks is Oliver's half-sister and that she had schemed to destroy the locket, which is proof of Oliver's heritage, as well as corrupt Oliver and receive their father's entire inheritance for herself. The painting on the wall turns out to be a portrait of Oliver's mother. Brownlow ushers Monks out of the house and he agrees to adopt Oliver. The rest of the household rejoices at the favorable outcome.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Oliver Twist**, an orphan boy

**Mr. Bumble**, master of the workhouse

**Mrs. Corney**, workhouse matron

**Old Sally**, a servant

**Mr. Sowerberry**, an undertaker

**Mrs. Sowerberry**, his wife

**Charlotte**, a silly maid

**Noah Claypole**, a cowardly bully

**The Artful Dodger**, a young pickpocket

**Bet**, another young pickpocket

**Fagin**, wicked leader of a gang of thieves

**Bill Sikes**, a sinister thief

**Nancy**, Bill's girl

**Mr. Brownlow**, a respectable gentleman

**Miss Eliza Sellers**, a bookstore clerk

**Miss Monks**, a mysterious stranger

**Rose**, a young lady

**Mrs. Bedwin**, Mr. Brownlow's housekeeper

**Mrs. Grimwig**, a skeptical old lady

## VOCABULARY

The following are some words that are associated with and can be found in the script of *Oliver Twist*:

Act	Plot	Set	Props	Downstage	Upstage
Director	Producer	Program	Gruel	Crumpets	Knickers
Cricket	Pauper	Dawdle	Parish	Delectable	Cellar
Stout	Apprentice	Impudent	Covey	Melancholy	Intrigue
Protégé	Loitering	Vagabond	Trifles	Respectable	Acquaintance
Avaricious	Greed	Inquiry	Malice	Handkerchief	Pickpocket
Scrupulosity	Prig	Befuddled	Gallows	Magistrate	Infamous

## LESSON IDEAS

### Classroom Discussion (Pre-Performance)

1. *How many of you have experienced a live theater performance? What did you see?*
2. *What are some of the differences between going to the theater and watching television or going to a movie?*
  - Theater features live actors on stage. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.
  - The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation for the performers is shown by close attention, participation, and applause at the proper times. The success of the production often depends on the audience.
  - The theater is a very special place. Its atmosphere is entirely different from your home.
  - It is easy to identify with live actors. You can see how they use their bodies and voices to convey different emotions.
  - Actors wear costumes and make-up to help create the impression of the characters they portray.
  - There is much more to most live performances than actors. Special sets, effects, lighting, music, costumes and, of course, the audience add to the total experience.

### Curriculum Connections (Pre or Post-Performance)

#### Language Arts

- Read *Oliver Twist* as a class. How does the musical differ from the story in prose? What are similarities?
- Research the history and biography of Charles Dickens.
- Define literary devices such as theme, symbolism, and motif. Find Dickens's use of these devices in the novel. For instance, the theme of forgiveness or the recurring motif of familial relationships.
- Relationships are an integral part of *Oliver Twist*. Explore the relationship of protagonists and antagonists in classroom stories and draw a comparison to relationships in the musical, such as Oliver and Mr. Brownlow, Nancy and Sikes, Fagin and Sikes, Oliver and Dodger.
- Write a sequel to the musical. What is the fate of Fagin, Dodger, and Bet after they are arrested? How does Oliver mature in the home of Mr. Brownlow? What career path does Oliver choose later in life?
- *Oliver Twist* is filled with a lot of words that may be unfamiliar to your students, or may no longer be common. Share some of the vocabulary above with your students. Define and spell the terms. Discuss how language changes over time as new words are introduced and old words go out of fashion.

#### Art

- Create a class mural of the musical. Include scenes from the story such as London, Fagin's den, and Mr. Brownlow's parlor.
- Draw a picture of a favorite scene or character.
- Re-create one of the scenes using clay forms in a box or using cardboard. Label the areas that correspond to the scene in *Oliver Twist*.
- Draw an advertisement or program cover for the musical.
- Design stage scenery for *Oliver Twist* or another story that you would like to see on stage.
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## **Music, Dance, & Film**

- Ask the students to identify musical instruments that they heard in the musical. Discuss other instruments that could have been added for effect.
- Can you identify any recurring musical themes or motives in the music?
- How did the music express the action or emotion of the story (tempo, volume, range of notes, etc.)?
- Did you hear any incidental music (purely instrumental music that functioned as background music for a scene change)?
- Discuss how dance adds to the storytelling of a musical.
- Schedule a movie day and show all or part of the 1968 movie musical, *Oliver!*, or the 2005 film, *Oliver Twist*. Compare and contrast the films and the musical.

## **Math**

- Create a budget for a theatrical production. List all of the expenses involved (set design and materials, professional musicians, lighting design, props, costumes, theater rental, scripts, royalties, etc.). Discuss ways that a theater company might raise money to cover all of the expenses.
- Using a spreadsheet, create a rehearsal schedule for a theatrical production. Discuss how much time it might take for the cast to learn all of the staging and dancing. How many hours a day/week/month does it take to put on a production?

## **History/Social Studies**

- *Oliver Twist* is set in the 1830s, the beginning of the Victorian period in England. The musical presents many opportunities to study society at this time in English history. Queen Victoria was on the throne from 1837 to 1901. Research this era. What were some of the customs and styles of this time period?
- The mid-19th century was also the start of the industrial revolution. How did advances in industry improve society? What were some of the negative consequences of the rise of factories and workshops during this time?
- Explore how Victorian society could have approached the poor and destitute more compassionately in this era. What social programs could have been developed to help improve the standard of living for a wider range of people?
- Investigate the legal code in 19th century England. Was it just? What amendments would you make if you were a legislator during this time? Create a courtroom scene as a class, complete with a prosecution, defense, judge, and jury.
- Discuss why someone may choose a life of crime in Victorian society. Thoughts may include rigid class structures, lack of job opportunities, low wages, poor working conditions, etc.

## **Theater Etiquette**

*Discuss the role of the audience and proper theater etiquette.*

- Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything and so that you will not disturb the rest of the audience while trying to get comfortable in your seat. Lights go out before the curtain goes up and seating is very difficult after that time.
- It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay in your seat and listen very carefully.
- There is no intermission during the performance, which is 75 minutes in duration. Be sure to use the restroom before the performance begins.

- Although you may wish to say something to the actors, you need to hold your thoughts, as you will disturb their concentration.
- Sing or participate if you are invited to do so. Your participation is often very important.
- Listen to how the music sets the mood and affects your own feelings.
- Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song, dance, or joke.
- Be sure to turn off *all* electronic devices and cell phones. Do not text during the performance. This is inconsiderate to the performers and distracting to your fellow audience members.

## **SOURCES**

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