



EDUCATION PACK

# CHICAGO

THE MUSICAL



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# “IS EVERYBODY HERE? IS EVERYBODY READY?”

CHICAGO is the longest running American musical ever to play in London’s West End. The show is a worldwide phenomenon that has captivated over 18 million people. From its stunning Fosse-style choreography, to its central concept of the ‘celebrity criminal’ and its themes of corruption and justice, audiences have been thrilled by the story of vaudeville star Velma Kelly, chorus girl Roxie Hart and top Chicago lawyer Billy Flynn.

CHICAGO opened in London on 18 November 1997, a year after its triumphant Broadway revival. It retained the ‘Brechtian’-style of staging that Bob Fosse had developed in the original, breaking down the ‘fourth wall’ and reinforcing the parallels between the story of the show and contemporary society.

These parallels, the concepts and themes of the show, provide a wealth of opportunity for follow-up classroom activity. This pack is aimed at teachers across the curriculum. It contains activities suitable for students of Dance, Drama, Art & Design, Photography, Music, Media Studies, English, ICT, PSHCE and Citizenship, from KS3 to KS5, including some of the specialist units of BTEC Performing Arts courses and the new Creative and Media Diploma.

We hope that this pack will be just a starting point for your students’ work and that you will feel inspired to explore with them the magic that is CHICAGO.





# “THE TENSE AND TANGLED WEB”

On June 3rd 1975, a new show opened on Broadway. Called CHICAGO: A MUSICAL VAUDEVILLE, it received mixed reviews and closed after two years and 936 performances. Directed and choreographed by the legendary Bob Fosse, it was, in many ways, ahead of its time with its themes of exploitation, manipulation and celebrity.

Bob Fosse and his then wife, Gwen Verdon (who starred as Roxie Hart in the 1975 show), had tried for some time to acquire the rights to create a musical version of CHICAGO, a play by sensational former Chicago Tribune columnist Maurine Dallas Watkins. In 1924, Watkins had covered the trials of two women, both of whom were accused of killing their lovers whilst under the influence of drink and jazz. Belva Gaertner became Velma Kelly and Beulah Annan became Roxie Hart.

As Velma Kelly would later do in CHICAGO, Gaertner denied the murder of her lover, married car salesman Walter Law, claiming that she had no memory of what had actually happened. Found at her apartment with blood soaked clothes on the floor, Gaertner admitted that she owned the gun that had been used to shoot Law, but as to what happened, she said, “*I don't know, I was drunk.*”

**“It wasn't until later, when I was washing the blood off my hands that I even knew they were dead.”**

Velma Kelly, CHICAGO

A few weeks later, Annan was arrested for killing her lover, Harry Kalstedt. Her story changed over the weeks leading up to her trial, even including her announcement that she was pregnant, the day after another woman was given a life sentence for murdering her lover. The baby became her *raison d'être* for shooting Kalstedt. She told him that she was pregnant, she said, there was a struggle and they both grappled for the gun.

**“So I closed my eyes and I shot... to save my husband's unborn child!”** Roxie Hart, CHICAGO

In fact, Annan never did give birth to the child that she claimed to be bearing.

Maurine Dallas Watkins, the Mary Sunshine of the Chicago Tribune, described the two “*jazz babies*” at the time as the “*most stylish*” and “*prettiest*” women on Murderesses' Row respectively. They were certainly able to play on the media attention that they received, and both became infamous, if not the celebrities of their time. Both, incidentally, were acquitted - by all male juries, sympathetic to their plight and sensitive to their charms!

In many ways, Chicago was thriving. At the end of the 19th Century, it had been the second American city to reach a population of 1.6million and this was set to increase further with the Great Migration of African-Americans from the southern states around 1910. With the enormous increase in population, infrastructure was needed. Marshall Field had already established one of the most ground-breaking department stores in the world in Chicago in 1881, promising always to “*give the lady what she wants*”. In 1900, Chicago's major sewage problem was solved by the reversing of the Chicago River's water flow, with the construction of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

Of course, Chicago by the 1920's was a haven for law breakers. Crime flourished, to the point where many policemen earned more from pay-offs from organised crime than they did from their salary. In a city of vice and murder, Al Capone battled gangsters and the law. Meanwhile, nobody bothered very much about prohibition (which was law in the United States from 1920-1933) and everything went 'underground'.

This is the background against which Gaertner and Annan were being acquitted of murder and Maurine Dallas Watkins was writing.

Her play CHICAGO was produced on Broadway in 1926, directed by George Abbott, where it ran for 172 performances. Its subsequent tour included an appearance by the, as yet unknown, Clark Gable, playing Amos Hart, before the play was made into a silent movie in 1927, produced by Cecil B. DeMille. The next incarnation of the story of Roxie Hart was in 1946, although this time with Velma Kelly firmly excised from the screen, in the movie *Roxie Hart*, starring Ginger Rogers.

Beulah Annan died in 1928 after suffering a mental breakdown. Belva Gaertner, on the other hand, attended the opening of Watkins' play in 1927 and managed to recognise herself on stage! She lived until she was 80, dying of old age in California in May 1965. Although she wrote other plays, Maurine Dallas Watkins was always best known for CHICAGO. Sadly, she died in 1969, having been disfigured for several years with facial cancer and becoming something of a recluse. Although she had refused Fosse and Verdon the right to adapt her play whilst she was alive, she left instructions for her estate to sell those rights after her death.

**“Gin and guns - either one is bad enough, but together they get you in a dickens of a mess, don't they.”** Belva Gaertner, quoted by Maurine Dallas Watkins in the *Chicago Tribune*

Enter John Kander and Fred Ebb who, reflecting the cabaret singer background of Belva Gaertner, modelled their numbers on traditional vaudeville songs or vaudeville performers. Kander and Ebb had already written hit musicals, most notably their 1966 adaptation of John Van Druten's play *I Am a Camera*, which received its premiere on Broadway as *Cabaret*.

Fosse decided to be overt about the parallels between the Chicago of the show and the shortcomings of society, breaking down the fourth wall in Brechtian style and addressing the audience directly. This technique made some audience members feel uncomfortable and the show received mixed reviews which, according to legend, is what Fosse both expected and wanted! He had made his point!

The 1996 revival of CHICAGO started off as a concert version at Encores in New York City, which was so successful over four nights in May that a transfer was quickly arranged, produced by Broadway producers Barry and Fran Weissler. It opened on 14th November at the Richard Rogers Theatre, starring Ann Reinking (who also choreographed in the style of Bob Fosse), Bebe Neuwirth and Joel Grey. Of course, a concert-style show could only be the inspiration for a full-scale Broadway production, so the Weissler's astutely launched CHICAGO as a full scale theatrical event. Happily for them, the audiences loved it and it became the fastest ever Broadway show to recover its initial costs!

CHICAGO opened in the West End of London on 18th November 1997, starring Ruthie Henshall, Ute Lemper, Henry Goodman and Nigel Planer. Since then, it has grossed over £120million in London, part of which has gone to provide over 14,871 tights, 581 metres of fishnet fabric, 136,520 hairpins and 9,666 hairgrips needed to make sure that the show is perfect every night. As Billy Flynn himself says in the show, “That's Chicago!”

**“And all that jazz!”**



# “SIT DOWN, DUMMY!”

**In the Press Conference Rag, Billy Flynn ‘manipulates’ Roxie Hart like a ventriloquist’s dummy - he speaks and she looks like she’s speaking! This deceptively simple routine requires precision and restraint in order to attain the innovative and rhythmic quality that is its success, as students will discover when they try to recreate the routine themselves and explore the principles of human puppetry!**

## DANCE - 1

Students need to be aware of using different body parts in dance and exploring how they move and react. Pair up your students and label them A and B. Dancer A should stand directly behind Dancer B. Dancer A then gently touches a body part of Dancer B, who must allow that body part to fall or move. For instance, if Dancer A were to tap Dancer B on the shoulder; Dancer B could let the shoulder fall forwards. Key to success of this activity is control. Dancer A acts and Dancer B reacts. Continue this for one minute.

Develop this task by asking Dancer B to respond to Dancer A’s touch with more exaggeration. For instance, if Dancer A touches their head, Dancer B could drop the head and then take this into a roll forwards. Dancer A could then begin to make contact with Dancer B using different body parts; their elbow could tap Dancer B’s knee, for instance.

Continue to develop this activity by adding in more movements and play with changes in dynamics - Dancer A following Dancer B into the space, perhaps.

Swap roles at intervals, giving each dancer an opportunity to assume ‘control’.

## DANCE - 2

Ask students to choreograph a manipulation exercise, showing a puppet and their master, using the principles of action and reaction, question and answer, contact work and mirroring to show the theme clearly to the audience. For more able students, ask them to try to perform the same idea without the puppet master, as a solo dance, for instance:

- Puppet in a box/bin, coming to life, possibly ‘dying’ again at the end of the routine and ending up back as they started
- A puppet who is trapped - explore what each body part is capable of, circulation of the head, locking and popping the shoulders, sharp arm gestures, pulling and showing resistance
- Breaking free, each isolation getting bigger, exploring the space

## DRAMA - 1

In order for Billy to successfully tell Roxie’s story for her in the *Press Conference Rag*, the two of them must have worked hard to ensure that they were both clear of the details that they were about to relate.

Ask students, in groups of 3, to create a background for a character who is incarcerated in the Cook County Jail. To do this, they should start with a ‘role-on-the-wall’. Ask them to draw a ‘gingerbread man’ shape and write details of the characteristics of their role inside the body. Outside of the body, they should write any other facts about the character including, perhaps, what other people think about them. This ‘role-on-the-wall’ will provide the basis of the character that students will be acting out later on in this exercise.

Now, ‘hot-seat’ a couple of the characters that have been created. Students can refer to their ‘role-on-the-wall’ if they need to, but should aim to answer questions from the audience as honestly and ‘in character’ as they can. It is worth reminding the audience that the object is not to ‘catch out’ the actor, but rather to illuminate the character and to find out more about them.

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Next, divide the class into small groups in order that all of the characters can be 'hot-seated', as this will help the actors when you move on.

Back in the original groups of 3, students should now create a scenario, involving a police sergeant, a lawyer and the 'criminal' character that has just been developed. They must first agree on a crime and the details of how the crime was allegedly committed. It is important that all of the actors in the scene deal with the same pieces of information, even if they choose not to reveal them all.

Students should now work on the scene, in which the developed character is interrogated about the crime that has just been agreed. The drama must have pace, and the lawyer character must answer every other question that the police sergeant puts to the accused. A well rehearsed, pacy performance should reflect the speed of the *Press Conference Rag* from CHICAGO.

More able students can look for ways to play against the facts - although they, as actors, are aware of them, their characters can either lie, trick, or pretend not to know the facts if they think that to do so would help to get them off a charge.

For added jeopardy, when the pieces are performed, ask the audience to act as jury and decide whether or not to convict!

## DRAMA - 2

Divide students into groups of 4. Using the 'ventriloquist' idea from CHICAGO, ask them to create a modern-day scenario in which a teenager is having a row with a parent. However, in this version, the action will be mimed by 2 of the actors, whilst the other 2 act as 'narrators', telling the story of what is happening.

Tell students that the narrator must include explanations in their performance, as well as dialogue. However, when it comes to the dialogue, this must be planned and rehearsed carefully with the actors, so that they know exactly what they 'should' be saying and when. The narrator, at these points, should affect a vocal change, as if they are impersonating the character in the scene. More able students will be able to ensure that the lip-sync of the narrators matches the 'mouthing' of the characters exactly and that the characters in the scene continue performing constantly, even when there is no dialogue.

## MEDIA STUDIES - 1

The *Press Conference Rag* is based on the premise of manipulation of the truth, which these days the media like to call 'spin'. Of course, in some respects, Billy Flynn resorts to complete lies in order to gain the sympathy of the press for his client, Roxie Hart, but usually spin contains at least an element of truth.

Ask students to imagine that they are lawyers taking on Amos Hart as a client. Consider his basic story (see resource section). How could this be 'spun' to ensure that Amos is found 'not guilty' of the charge of murder? What elements of truth could be taken and manipulated? How can they be manipulated whilst still sounding believable? Are there any additional 'facts' that could be brought into the story that may not be true at all, but that could help his defence?

## MEDIA STUDIES - 2

Billy Flynn manipulated the media on behalf of his clients from Murderesses' Row. Even when talking about himself, he cannot help but put a 'spin' on his descriptions, as in the number *All I Care About*.

Ask your students to imagine that they are journalists and that they have been given the opportunity to write an in-depth profile piece on Billy Flynn, the legendary Chicago lawyer whose clients seem to consistently get away with murder. They will be the first journalists who have ever been given this level of access to the great man himself. Of course, he will try to 'spin' whatever answers he gives, so questions will have to be very carefully put together in order to catch him 'off guard'.

Students should focus on asking 'open' questions so that Billy cannot get away with a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. They should consider very carefully what they would like the answers to be and then try to frame questions that will elicit the answers that they want.

Set up the interview situation, with students taking on the roles of Billy Flynn and the journalist.

## RESOURCES

### DANCE RESOURCES

*Stravinsky's Petrushka*, scene IV (The Shrovetide Fair) - this professional dance work illustrates the actions and dynamics that resemble a puppet and fuses music, ballet, choreography and history in perfect balance.

Consider using *Da-m-pire (slideshow remix)* from *Battle of the Year 2000 (OST)* by Knightz of Bass, which is a great piece of music for a puppet scene - or *Besta ETu* by Tony Mola and Bragada, which works really well for creating a toy shop dance.

### AMOS'S STORY

**“So I ah...I took the gun, Officer,  
and I shot him.**

**Why just last week, the jury thanked  
a man for shooting a burglar.**

**A man got a right to protect his home  
and his loved ones, right?**

**Well, I come in from the garage, Officer,  
and I see him coming through the window.  
With my wife Roxanne there, sleepin' like  
an angel...**

**Good thing I got home from work on time,  
I'm tellin' ya that!**

**I say I'm tellin' ya that!”**





# “JUST READ THE MORNING PAPERS, PALSIE”

**Central to the story of CHICAGO is the notion of ‘sensationalism’. Both Roxie and Velma try to manipulate the press to keep their names on the front pages and on the lips of the newspaper-reading public. The press, in their turn, create a ‘sensation’ out of the tiniest fact or the smallest event with the sole purpose of selling more newspapers.**

## DRAMA

As guilty of modern-day sensationalism as the print media are the 24 hour news channels on television. Ask students to imagine that they are a journalist working on the famous news station Chicago 24. They have been sent by their editor to provide a ‘live’ link from world famous salesroom Cook County Auctions. There, the extremely famous celebrity Roxie Hart has been auctioning some of her personal items, “to raise money for her defense. They’ll buy anything she ever touched.” This, in itself, is not much to go on so it will be up to the reporter to ‘sensationalise’ the story, perhaps utilising the headlines from CHICAGO (see resource section). They should also remember that, at this point in the story of CHICAGO, Roxie is in prison. She may have been let out to attend the auction, but she will have to return to the care of Mama Morton soon. This could be an added ‘twist’ to the story that the reporter may want to pick up on.

For their piece of drama, students will need to be in groups of 4. Apart from their obvious need to have a TV Reporter and a News Anchor; they will need to choose their other characters carefully, all of whom will be interviewed by the journalist. These could include: the Auctioneer, Roxie Hart, a Roxie Hart fan, Roxie’s husband Amos.

Students should stage their performance using the ‘split screen’ drama technique, with the TV news studio on one side of the performance space and the ‘location’, outside the salesroom, on the other side. It is important that students rehearse carefully so that the TV News Anchor and the Reporter know exactly when they are ‘on air’. More able students may wish to include supplementary questions from the TV News Anchor, or from the audience, after the end of the main action.

## MEDIA STUDIES

CHICAGO provides a fantastic opportunity for students to discuss ‘spin’ and how media reports are manipulated depending on the agenda of the journalist, the editor or the proprietor. As Billy Flynn says at the end of the show, in relation to Mary Sunshine, “things are not always what they appear to be.” Present students with Mary Sunshine’s radio report from Roxie Hart’s trial (see resources section). What is Mary Sunshine’s agenda? Is she biased for or against Roxie? How do we know?

Ask students to rewrite Mary Sunshine’s report, changing the bias or agendas to the opposite of what they currently believe it to be. Could any other agendas be brought to bear on this story? Are there any external factors, not directly related to Roxie’s story, that could influence the way in which the piece is written? As an extension activity, ask students to look at issues of two or three current newspapers and to suggest how each of them would ‘spin’ the Roxie Hart story. Write Mary Sunshine’s report for *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Independent*. How and why do they differ?

## ENGLISH/DRAMA

Using the lyrics from the *Press Conference Rag*, ask students to imagine that they are one of the reporters from the Chicago Tribune, covering the story of Roxie Hart. Using the information that they have been given, and their own ability as a reporter to ‘sensationalise’ a story, create tomorrow morning’s front page under the headline, “CONVENT GIRL HELD”.

Students will need to decide whether they are writing the story from the point-of-view of a sympathetic journalist like Mary Sunshine, or one who is not so sympathetic. As Billy Flynn says in CHICAGO, “they’re not all pushovers like that Mary Sunshine.” And they will need to remember that every news stand in Chicago will be full of newspapers that are trying to grab the attention of the public. Their story must be the one that the public wants to buy!

## RESOURCES

### HEADLINES

**“ROXIE ROCKS CHICAGO” “FANS RIOT AT ROXIE AUCTION”**

**“ROXIE’S NIGHTIE RAISES 200 BUCKS!”**

### MARY SUNSHINE’S REPORT

Mrs Hart’s behaviour throughout this ordeal has been truly extraordinary. Seated next to her attorney, Mr Billy Flynn, she weeps...but she fishes in her handbag and cannot find a handkerchief. Finally, her attorney, Mr Flynn, hands her one. The poor child has had no relief. She looks around now, bewildered, seeming to want something. Oh, it’s a glass of water. The bailiff has brought her one. Mrs Hart, her usual gracious self, thanks the bailiff and he smiles at her. She looks simply radiant in her stylish blue lace dress and elegant shoes with rhinestone buckles.

### FROM THE PRESS CONFERENCE RAG - lyrics by Fred Ebb

**Reporters:** Where’d you come from?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** Mississippi.  
**Reporters:** And your parents?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** Very wealthy.  
**Reporters:** Where are they now?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** Six feet under.  
**Billy:** But she was granted one more start  
**Billy (as Roxie):** The Convent of the Sacred Heart!  
**Reporters:** When’d you get here?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** 1920.  
**Reporters:** How old were you?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** Don’t remember.  
**Reporters:** Then what happened?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** I met Amos. And he stole my heart away, convinced me to elope one day.  
**Reporters:** Who’s Fred Casely?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** My ex-boyfriend.  
**Reporters:** Why’d you shoot him?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** I was leavin’.  
**Reporters:** Was he angry?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** Like a madman! Still I say, “Fred, move along”  
**Billy:** She knew that she was doin’ wrong.  
**Reporters:** Then describe it  
**Billy (as Roxie):** He came toward me.  
**Reporters:** With the pistol?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** From my bureau.  
**Reporters:** Did you fight him?  
**Billy (as Roxie):** Like a tiger.  
**Billy:** He had strength and she had none.  
**Billy (as Roxie):** And yet we both reached for the gun.



# “IMAGINE, I MEAN, CAN YOU IMAGINE?”

**One of the themes of CHICAGO is the manipulation of truth. In *Cell Block Tango*, the “six merry murderesses of the Cook County Jail” tell their stories, explaining in their own inimitable style, how their murdering actions can be justified. This number offers an opportunity for students to explore the notion of truth and the way in which stories can be told in different ways in order to give a different impression.**

## DRAMA - 1

Remind the class of the *Cell Block Tango* number from CHICAGO. Explain that they are going to use three of the stories from this number to explore ‘truth’ and its manipulation. As a whole class, read through the three stories. Ask students to suggest ways in which these stories could be staged as pieces of drama. It is important that we understand the feelings and motivations of the characters. This could be achieved through the use of narration, or thought-tracking, for instance.

In groups of 4-5, give students a small amount of time to create their own staging of one of the stories, exactly as they believe that it *really* happened. Consider when watching these whether the feelings and motivations of the characters have been made clear.

Next, ask students to create a parallel version of the same story - the version that their ‘merry murderess’ will be telling the judge. This will need to have a spin on it that ensures that they are found ‘not guilty’. However, it needs to stick as closely to the truth as possible in order to be believable. It may be staged inside a courtroom or in the same setting as their previous piece of work. Explain to students that they should find a way to show both scenes within the same performance. They could simply ‘freeze-frame’ at the end of one before moving onto the other, or they could offer their scenes utilising the ‘split-screen’ device. Discuss with them which drama strategy they feel would be the most appropriate. You may also wish to highlight the possible use of ‘flashback’ here.

They should then work on the two scenes so that they are ready to perform to the rest of the group. As an extension activity for more able students, ask them to create the opportunity for a ‘cliffhanger’ at the end of their drama, which could be the moment when the judge is about to deliver his verdict.

## DRAMA - 2

Use the drama-explorative strategy of hot-seating to explore the characters of Liz, Annie and Velma from *Cell Block Tango*. Place a student in the ‘hot-seat’. Explain that they are going to play one of these characters and that, for the purposes of this exercise, they will take on the attitudes and opinions of that character. The rest of the class should think of questions to ask the ‘hot-seated’ student, to extend their knowledge of the character’s feelings and motivations. In order to balance the activity in a mixed class, use the characters of the husbands of the ‘merry murderesses’ and ‘hot-seat’ them too. What sort of character is Bernie, in Liz’s story? Or Ezekiel Young from Salt Lake City? Or Charlie, husband of Velma?

Having ‘hot-seated’ some of the characters, ask students to record the characteristics and personality details that they have discovered on a ‘role-on-the-wall’. This should help students to create characters with more depth and believability than before.

Finally, use this information to place the characters in a police interview room situation. The ‘hot-seating’ and ‘role-on-the-wall’ activities should help students to suggest in their performances how their characters will react to the intense questioning that they will inevitably receive.

## PSHCE / CITIZENSHIP / ENGLISH

Explore the notions of truth and choice by utilising one of the stories from *Cell Block Tango*. Explain to students that every story, every action, has an outcome and that, therefore, choices have been made to arrive at that outcome. What if the choices were different? How would the story turn out then? Ensure that students understand that all of the stories in this number are about relationships and that relationships are, by their nature, two-way. And that all actions have consequences.

If something annoys you, as in Liz's story in *Cell Block Tango*, what are the possible choices available to you?

- Ignore it
- Discuss it
- Offer a compromise
- Shoot

For each of these options, ask students to consider, in small groups, what the outcome of each choice would be. Which choices are likely to secure the best outcomes? Why?

Individually, ask students, as Liz, to write a letter to their partner, explaining her feelings and offering suggestions for working through the annoyance that she feels.

## RESOURCES

### CELL BLOCK TANGO - Lyrics by Fred Ebb

Liz: You know how people have these little habits that get you down. Like Bernie. Bernie liked to chew gum. No, not chew. POP. Well, I came home this one day and I am really irritated, and looking for a little sympathy and there's Bernie layin' on the couch, drinkin' a beer and chewin'. No, not chewin'. Poppin'. So I said to him, I said, "Bernie, you pop that gum one more time..." and he did. So I took the shotgun off the wall and I fired two warning shots... into his head.

Annie: I met Ezekiel Young from Salt Lake City about two years ago and he told me he was single and we hit it off right away. So, we started living together. He'd go to work, he'd come home, I'd mix him a drink, we'd have dinner. Well, it was like heaven in two and a half rooms. And then I found out, "single" he told me? Single, my ass. Not only was he married... oh, no, he had six wives. One of those Mormons, you know. So that night, when he came home, I mixed him his drink as usual. You know, some guys just can't hold their arsenic.

Velma: My sister, Veronica, and I did this double act and my husband, Charlie, travelled around with us. Now, for the last number in our act, we did these 20 acrobatic tricks in a row, one, two, three, four, five... splits, spread eagles, flip flops, back flips, one right after the other. Well, this one night we were in Cicero, the three of us, sittin' up in a hotel room, boozin' and havin' a few laughs and we ran out of ice, so I went to get some. I come back, open the door and there's Veronica and Charlie doing the number Seventeen - the spread eagle. Well, I was in such a state of shock, I completely blacked out. I can't remember a thing. It wasn't until later, when I was washing the blood off my hands that I even knew they were dead.





# “IT’S SWELL WITH TWO PEOPLE”

**CHICAGO is a showcase for contact work as the dance routines, in the style of Bob Fosse, are executed with style and power. Physical strength and agility is required to create the fluid, close contact duet with a sensory feel that we see in the show. Contact work is a great tool for choreographers and for students of the performing arts.**

## DANCE

Firstly, students need to understand the key points about contact work:

- Contact is a nonverbal language
- Contact explores two ways of communicating involving listening and responding
- Contact involves trust
- Smooth execution in contact work can be achieved through the careful placing of each other’s weight

Ask students to walk around, exploring the space and listening for numbers 1-5 to be called out by the teacher. Each number represents a form of contact, for example when the teacher calls out number one, students are to find a partner and perform a balance whilst making contact. Either use different dance actions for each number or each number can represent a body part which students must connect with, i.e. shoulder to shoulder or back to back.

Next, divide the class into groups and ask them to form a line at the side of the space. As the student at the front of each line runs into the space they are to form a shape. The next student in line then follows and explores ways to go under, over or around the person who is still holding their original shape. The other students in the line then follow until all students are in the space. The student who began then repeats the exercise, however this time they begin to add in actions as a way of travelling into the space. This exercise gets students used to exploring each other’s body positions as they become familiar with using their body as a tool.

For more able students, replace the exploration of travelling through, under and around the shape their peer is making, by asking students to manipulate a body part which initiates them forming a new shape (as in action and reaction).

Teaching a class 3-4 new contact moves each lesson and then allowing time for them to practice and link each move together will provide students with a bank of ideas, building on their trust work as they become confident with contact work. A body part could be a focus for each week, for example: hips, hands, shoulders or torso.

To focus on the torso, for instance: in pairs, students place their backs firmly together and try and travel down to the floor without breaking balance and control. Once they have achieved this they can then explore travelling back up and balancing their weight by leaning forward, sideways or using their backs to turn around.

Next, get students to place their hands and knees on the floor, in a ‘cat’ position. By placing their weight directly over another student’s back, they can explore rolling over, balancing on their backs or exploring what else can be achieved from this position.

Once students have a bank of contact moves they can then begin to use transitions and think about the dynamics and relationships they would like their dance to be about, i.e. friendship, the idea of magnets (pushing and pulling) etc.

## PERFORMING ARTS

Students often find it very difficult to successfully analyse and evaluate their own work and the work of others. As Bob Fosse's choreography, recreated in CHICAGO by Ann Reinking, is so precise and detailed, Fosse himself is a good place to start!

Watch a CHICAGO number from the official website (see links section). Ask students to find words to describe the signature style of Fosse, the drilling of the dancers right down to the raising of an eyebrow or the lifting of a finger. Ask them to reflect on why the style is so successful in CHICAGO and how it creates the mood for the show. Fosse's style has been described as "exuding a stylised, cynical sexuality." What does this mean?

Encourage students to research Fosse and to be able to recognise his unique style of choreography. Compare and contrast a routine from *Cabaret* (1972) with a routine from CHICAGO. Is it possible to recognise that they are choreographed in the same style? How? What are the identifying factors?

## DANCE - 2

Bob Fosse's jazz dance is immediately recognisable. It may look easy, but it takes focus, patience, timing and accuracy to fully grasp the style.

Focusing on the fluidity and the accurate stylistic details within the Fosse style, teach students a small phrase with them in linear formation upstage, aiming to travel downstage using a variety of the Fosse vocabulary:

- Stylised walks - forward, backwards, to the side, changing levels
- Use of focus - either directly at the audience or towards the end of a movement, following the finished pose
- Big arm or hand gestures - across the body in waves, extending them up above the head
- Circular movements of the wrists and spreading of the fingers
- Swift turns that finish with a strong still pose
- Shimmer of the shoulders
- Hip move - rolls of the hip (circular or pushing hip out to the side)  
Teach students the following sequence in the style of Fosse, or adapt it as required.
- Roll the hip on each step whilst walking forwards(x4).
- Introducing the hands coming around in little fists, arms are circling around the body from behind the back, touching in front and then circling behind again.
- The hips should then follow the stylised walk (x4) but out to the sides, the eye contact is also focused out to the sides.
- A sudden turn to the right, followed by both arms reaching up to the sky, whilst right knee is bent (repeat on both sides).

As an extension activity for more able students, encourage them to explore the use of a chair, focusing on leg gestures and using the chair to stand on, go under, over and around. Alternatively, use white gloves and explore exaggerated hand gestures that, in a dark space, give the effect of a specific area of light (as students will have seen in the number *Mister Cellophane* in CHICAGO).



## RESOURCES

### DANCE RESOURCES

*Bird Song* (2004) by Siobhan Davies - 'Snake' section - example of a 'follow-the-leader' style activity

*Perfect* (2005) by Motionhouse Dance Theatre - breathtaking examples of this company's trademark physicality and contact work

*Enter Achilles* (1996) by Lloyd Newson - explores interplay between two male dancers

# “MURDER IS LIKE DIVORCE”

**In the number *I Can't Do It Alone*, Velma explains what her act with her sister Veronica was like. She doesn't, however, use words to explain; she demonstrates using actions. Every action that she demonstrates leads to a reaction from Veronica. Of course, Veronica is dead, so Velma has to show both sides of the routine!**

## DANCE - 1

As a warm-up, ask students to walk around the space and then stop them by shouting out an emotion (love, hate, fear etc). Students should immediately represent this emotion using only themselves. Next, read out the first line of a poem or a story. Again, students should try to tell this story segment by means of a simple movement. If they find this difficult, ask them to start by creating a still image to represent the story and then add movement later. Link moves or still images together to form a narrative dance piece.

Using the number *I Can't Do It Alone* from CHICAGO, set students the task of 'filling in the gaps'. Individually, they should create the routine that Velma and Veronica performed together, using their own ideas. They will only have a limited number of counts to fill and the music will suggest particular types of movement to them.

Develop this by using the poem *Escape* by Philippa Werry. Ask students to recreate the actions from the poem, the dynamics described and to consider the use of space (the way that the lizard might move around the floor, for instance). For pouncing, they may want to crouch behind another student and jump out at the right moment, if they are working in pairs.

## DANCE – 2

To explore the idea of question and answer in dance, get students to use parts of their bodies to make sounds that replace the verbal conversation. Once students have explored using their bodies to create sounds, they can begin to work in pairs or small groups and create a conversation through movement; as one student performs, another student replies and so on. Students can play with changes in speed, building to a climax. They can also explore having conversations in unison and the effective use of stillness within a 'conversation'.

## MUSIC

Action and reaction can be explored in a similar way in music. Start with simple percussion instruments, explaining to students that the strength or tone created when playing a particular instrument could indicate a particular emotion of feeling.

Ask students to create a 'conversation' between two instruments, where one instrument reacts appropriately to the sound made by the other. For instance, a soft sound could be replicated in a similar way, as could a harsh sound and so on.

As an extension activity, get students to write a 'script' for their instruments, including various different types of emotions that they then play as they would a piece of music. For more able students, ask them to write their 'script' using musical terminology that they have learnt, such as *allegro* (fast), *lento* (slow), *tranquillo* (calmly) or *irato* (angrily).

## DANCE – 3

This activity uses the Afro-Brazilian Martial Art form as a means of exploring the quick-smooth action and reaction device in dance.

Students form two lines, standing opposite their partner. The teacher should teach line A an action move, then line B performs a reaction of their choice. This could be a basic duck and crouch (known as a *cocorinha*), or a roll to the side. This can quickly become a competition to see which pair completes the action and reaction the quickest.

Students will soon feel confident enough to choreograph their own action and reaction moves, making sure that they look realistic and flow continuously.

Other capoeira moves can be found in *The Little Capoeira Book* by Nestor Capoeira.

## RESOURCES

From *I CAN'T DO IT ALONE*

Lyrics by Fred Ebb

First I'd...  
Then she'd...

Then we'd...

**But I can't do it alone!**

Then she'd...

Then I'd...

Then we'd...

**But I can't do it alone!**



**ESCAPE**

by Philippa Werry

Sun is blazing,  
lizard lazing

Cat comes slouching,  
crouching,  
pouncing.

Sudden dash,  
silver flash.

Lizard skitters,  
cat – misses.

Lizard lurking  
in the grass,  
lucky for you  
that you're so fast.



# “STUN AND STAGGER ‘EM”

**CHICAGO does not use a large amount of props, but the ones that are used are very specific and selected for their ability to move the story forward or to highlight a particular character trait, for instance. Students often think that the use of props is easy and they must litter their performances with props - CHICAGO is a lesson in minimalist theatre and the careful and targeted selection of appropriate props.**

## DANCE - 1

In CHICAGO, props such as the bentwood chair, hats, newspapers, umbrellas, white gloves, feathers and canes are all used effectively by the skilful performers on stage. The balancing of a hat, the twirling of a cane or the flicking of a newspaper, all add to the magic of the performance.

Props can be used in lessons either as a stimulus or to accompany a dance piece. When a prop is used it should highlight, initiate or extend an action or movement phrase. A prop can help students visualise an idea and help them to communicate their ideas to the audience. Students can explore the shape, texture, style, size and colour of the prop and begin to explore many ways of using it.

Start your work with props by gathering students in a circle. Place a prop in the middle and ask each student in turn to enter the circle. One by one they should pick up the prop and perform an action whilst holding it. This could be for example turning with the prop, jumping over the prop or rolling and touching the prop.

## DANCE - 2

This activity utilises the newspaper, a recurring prop seen in CHICAGO.

Students are set into a group of 4 (a quartet) in linear formation resembling a waiting room. Teach them 8 counts which they will perform in unison. For example:

- counts 1-2: picking the newspaper up off the floor with both hands and placing newspaper on their laps
- counts 3-4: using the right hand to flip over a page
- counts 5-6: left leg crosses over the right leg
- counts 6-8: peer over the newspaper of the dancer to your right then quickly close your own paper

Students rehearse their 8 counts, making sure they are in unison. They can then develop this by choreographing their own 8 counts (2nd bar of 8), then performing the first bar of 8 in canon.

Contact improvisation can also be used, playing with pedestrian movement, moving seats and coming up with different and imaginative ways to incorporate the newspaper.

## DANCE - 3

Using an umbrella as a prop can add a visual connection to the theme or the sound accompaniment. Use any carnival music (the style called *Frevo* (1908), originated in Recife in Brazil is good) or something more contemporary such as *It's Raining Men* by Geri Halliwell.

The umbrella will need to be used delicately and you may want to start working without introducing the prop straight away.

The umbrella can be effective when held in the down position (resembling a cane). The motion of popping it up and down, twirling it on the floor, spinning round with it open, turning in canon/unison, throwing and catching it and eventually having multiple umbrellas in different colours can add great effect.

Begin the dance with the students offstage and set them a task to decide on how they might enter. Then, play with different formations, lifts, changes in levels and the creation of tableaux.

## DRAMA

Start with students sitting in a circle. Introduce a prop. This can be anything at all, but should not be too obscure. An everyday object works best for this activity. Ask students to think of something that the object could be. The only rule is that their idea should not be something that the prop could *really* be used for. For instance, if it is a rubber glove they may not use it for washing up.

Pass the object around the circle. When you shout 'stop', the person holding the object must stand in the middle of the circle and mime an action that involves their new use for the prop. They must continue until somebody else in the group has correctly guessed what the object is being used for.

## ENGLISH

Use an unlikely prop as a stimulus for creative writing. Introduce your prop to the class and inform them that the prop has been involved in a murder. It may look harmless, but something has happened and this prop has led to someone dying. Use the example from CHICAGO of Liz in *Cell Block Tango*, who was annoyed by the chewing and popping habit of her husband Bernie (see resource section). Your prop in this case would be a stick of chewing gum.

Whatever prop you have chosen, ask students to write the story of how that prop came to be either a murder weapon or an accessory to murder. It is important that they make their story believable - that it is possible (although not advisable) that their idea could actually happen.

As with the example, for more able students, ask them to write their story in the first person. Ask them to consider how this will change the dynamic of their story, given that they are likely to be writing from the point-of-view of the murderer.

## PERFORMING ARTS

Much of the success of CHICAGO is in the simplicity of the set and the minimalist nature of the overall production. As a design project for performing arts students, ask them to consider alternative minimalist set ideas if CHICAGO were to be staged without the band being onstage.

Allow them one or two 'set' items per scene. Part of the consideration for their designs must be the way in which these set items will be set and struck. Will they fly in? Appear on trucks from the wings? Or be carried on by actors or dancers? The fluidity of the changeover between scenes is crucial to the success of CHICAGO and they must maintain this in their new designs for the production.

They should consider all the main sets that feature in the show:

- Roxie's bedroom
- Billy's office
- The Cook County Jail
- The Courtroom

## RESOURCES

### DANCE RESOURCES

Wade in the Water from *Revelations* by Alvin Ailey  
American Dancer Theater - this piece uses many props throughout

### FROM CELL BLOCK TANGO

#### Lyrics by Fred Ebb

You know how people have these little habits that get you down. Like Bernie. Bernie liked to chew gum. No, not chew. POP. Well, I came home this one day and I am really irritated, and looking for a little sympathy and there's Bernie layin' on the couch, drinkin' a beer and chewin'. No, not chewin'. Poppin'. So I said to him, I said, "Bernie, you pop that gum one more time..." and he did. So I took the shotgun off the wall and I fired two warning shots...into his head.



# “A WHOOPEE SPOT”

**CHICAGO is presented on an open stage, with a bandstand and little else. However, the director and choreographer cleverly utilise this space to create the various scenes that play a part in the story of CHICAGO - Roxie’s bedroom, the Cook County Jail, Billy Flynn’s office and so on. The entire set is enclosed in a golden ‘frame’, representing the various attempts at ‘framing’ that take place within the show. In the same way, location can provide a variety of frameworks for classroom activities.**

## DANCE

Dance students, particularly GCSE dance students, need to be aware that dance can be performed not only in the theatre, but in non-theatrical spaces as well. Create a mind map with your class, considering the effects of watching a dance in the theatre as compared to a dance piece that is made for a specific location ('site-specific') or for film.

Watch the clips from CHICAGO that are available on the show’s website to illustrate how elements of the set are used to set different locations and how the entrances and exits of different characters vary depending on where or who they are. Watch other professional works that are site-specific to provide students with ideas for this type of work (see resources section).

As a group, spend time exploring the school site, looking for areas that could be of interest for choreography. Pay particular attention to unusual settings that provide an opportunity to explore entrances and exits, objects to hide under or around and that will be interesting to work with. Students can then be divided into small groups and be given time to explore their chosen space. Video students’ work in progress and the class can see how others have chosen to explore their different spaces.

Within the chosen space for each lesson students should be given a new task to explore. For example, focus on the choreographic devices of unison, canon, exaggerated movements etc. Extend tasks for students by adding music, exploring the textures and shapes of the building around them, or adding a theme to their dance to either complement or contrast with their location. Test the professionalism and performance skills of your students by asking them to perform their finished piece continually, whilst an audience walks around the school with a guide in Promenade Theatre style.

Back in the classroom, to further explore the way in which CHICAGO creates location, use an object or a piece of furniture to symbolise your location of choice and your students can then create their dance with a view to making clear to their audience where they are.

## ENGLISH/DRAMA

Location can make a difference to the power of a speech or the delivery of a piece of prose. Just reading out written work in a classroom does not always help the writing to seem real to students. Therefore, site-specific work can be useful for the English or Drama teacher too.

Take poetry books outside in the summer and read them away from the school buildings. Ask students to reflect on of the effect that this has on them as an audience and/or as a reader.

Ask students to try delivering Billy Flynn’s summing- up speech from the end of CHICAGO in an appropriate location (see resource section). This could be in a corridor; imagining that a jury has just visited the scene of the crime, outside the front of the school, as if he is speaking to assembled journalists, or in the school hall, doubling as a courtroom. Does/can the speech vary depending on where it is delivered and to whom?

## DRAMA

Students often feel that they need significant elements of set to represent the location of their drama. Suggest to them that, as in CHICAGO, they should create a piece of drama that moves quickly from one location to another without the need for traditional 'set changes'.

Provide students with the following quote from CHICAGO as a stimulus for their drama:

***“Things are not always what they appear to be.”***

Ask students to create a piece of drama that moves quickly between three locations - a murder scene, a police interview room and a jail cell. Allow them to use two or three minimal items of set, perhaps a table and two chairs, but explain that they must find a position for these set items that does not change throughout their three scenes. For more able students, do not allow them to use any set items at all, but rather they must use their dramatic skills to create the scenes in the minds of their audience.

Remind students that, in CHICAGO, there is no miming of doors when entering a room and that, to be most successful in this task, they should consider every single move or action and reject it if it is unnecessary in the telling of their story.

## ENGLISH/MEDIA STUDIES/DRAMA

Writing for a newspaper article is a specific skill that students will benefit from practising. Site-specific work provides a fantastic opportunity to encourage students' descriptive abilities in this area.

Find a part of the school that looks like the entrance to a courtroom - this could be the school entrance itself, the doors to the school hall or a corridor near the Headteacher's office. Select 5 or 6 students to create a still image that shows Roxie Hart and Billy Flynn as they prepare to enter the courtroom for Roxie's trial. Apart from the 2 main characters, journalists and photographers will be crowding around, trying to get a quote and a photo for tomorrow morning's front page.

Drama students will be familiar with the technique of 'thought tracking', where a thought in the mind of one or more of the characters is said out loud, to highlight a particular aspect of the story or to understand the character better. This technique can be used successfully in this situation to provide copy for the journalists.

The key to success in this task is the students' powers of description. They should describe the view that they see in as much detail as possible, perhaps including what they imagine the defendant to be wearing (as Mary Sunshine does in CHICAGO) in order to set the scene for their readers.

As an extension activity, you could take digital photographs of the still image and ask students to create a layout for the newspaper, including a headline and their story of Roxie's day in court.

## RESOURCES

### **BILLY FLYNN'S SUMMING-UP**

Ladies and gentlemen, you and I have never killed. We can't know the agony, the hell that Roxie Hart lived through then. This drunken beast, Fred Casely, forced his way into her home, forced liquor upon her, physically abused her and threatened her life. At that moment, mother love and a deep concern for her neighbours stirred within her. She shot him. We don't deny that. But she has prayed to God for forgiveness for what she has done. Yes, you may take her life, but it won't bring Casely back. Look, look closely at that frail figure. My God, hasn't she been punished enough? We can't give her happiness, but we can give her another chance. You have heard my colleague call her temptress, call her adulteress, call her murderess. But, despite what the Prosecution says, things are not always what they appear to be. The defence rests!

### **SITE-SPECIFIC DANCE RESOURCES**

Cross Channel (1992) by Lea Anderson - dance made for the camera; locations include a beach, train, bike etc

Flesh and Blood (1989) by Lea Anderson - set in a church

Enter Achilles (1996) by Lloyd Newson - set in a bar

The Waterless Method of Swimming Instruction (1973) by Robert Chan - set in a dry swimming pool on board an ocean liner featuring dancers with exaggerated movements

Swansong (1987) by Christopher Bruce - uses a chair to represent a prison cell, as a weapon, shield and safety net



# “UNMITIGATED EGO”

**The genius and irony of CHICAGO is that its message about ‘celebrity’ parallels the actual casting of the show in both the West End and on Broadway. ‘Star name’ casting has never been so successful as in a show that has at its centre Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly, both desperate themselves to be ‘star names’.**

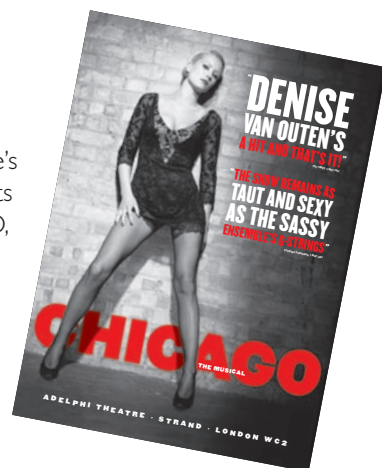
## DRAMA - 1

To some extent, the notion of stardom featured in CHICAGO, particularly in terms of Roxie’s desperation to be famous, conforms to a ‘celebrity’ stereotype. It is important that students understand about stereotypes, how they can be used successfully, as they are in CHICAGO, and the effect of their inclusion in a piece of drama.

Ask students to construct a piece of ‘backstage’ drama, featuring the arrival of a big star called *The Diva*. She has been cast in the leading role in a major West End smash hit musical, but rather than focus on the responsibility of getting it right, *The Diva* is more interested in materialistic concerns.

Students will need to devise other characters to interact with the central ‘celebrity’ stereotype - these could include a director, co-star, stage manager, dresser or a sound assistant. They should explore the possibilities of using a stereotype to create drama that is believable and, as this piece is likely to be comedic, will have to work hard to stay in role effectively.

For more able students, the same scenario could be performed in silent movie style, with exaggerated actions and reactions that tell the story of *The Diva*’s demands with only the need for occasional captions.

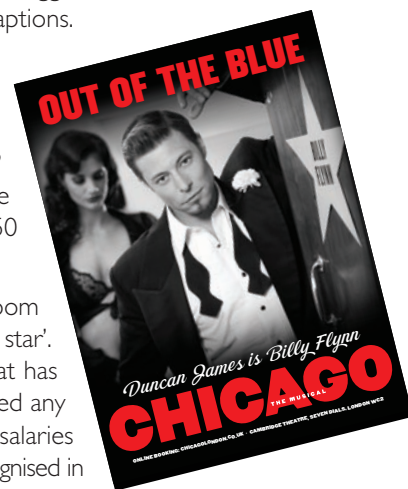


## DRAMA - 2

In the 1960’s, Andy Warhol famously predicted that, “in the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes.” But what happens when that fame comes to an end? Is it possible for a once-famous star to return to ‘real life’, to obscurity? Of course, the most famous attempt to answer this question was a resounding ‘no’ in Billy Wilder’s 1950 Hollywood movie, *Sunset Boulevard*, but what can students come up with?

Ask students to work on answering the above question, but focusing on a bar room conversation between the chauffeur and the harassed personal assistant of a once ‘big star’. They should explore how ‘big’ the star really was - is this a case of a genuine talent that has fallen on hard times, or a Big Brother loser from ten years ago who never really deserved any of it in the first place? How does their frustration at no longer commanding the big salaries manifest itself and, more importantly (perhaps), how do they cope with no longer being recognised in the street?

Students who are feeling brave may wish to bring in the ‘star’ towards the end of the conversation in order to illustrate what the two employees have been discussing over their drink.



## DRAMA - 3

Having explored stars in both the ascendance and the decline, ask students to make their own decision about a ‘celebrity’ of their own devising. They must decide on the talents of their ‘star’ and what they have become famous for: Are they still famous or has their shining star dulled in recent years?

Ask students to create a talk show interview featuring their star. In the course of the conversation they must include three quotes from CHICAGO that they must make ‘fit’ the conversation (see resources section). The drama should run exactly as per a talk show format, with the host introducing and welcoming the audience to the show and then building up to their ‘star’ guest.

Students will need to work on a back story for their ‘celebrity’, and some questions for the host to ask during the interview, particularly the questions that will elicit the quotes that must be included.

## ICT

Celebrities must stay up-to-date and engaged with their audience. These days, many 'stars' do this by means of their own website or blog.

Ask students to imagine that Roxie Hart were a star today. She would need a website or blog of her own to reflect her public image and on which she could portray herself as she would want to be seen. And, let's face it, no one's publicity is easier to believe than your own!

Set students a task to create the webspace for Roxie Hart, the vaudeville star. It is likely that the focus of this will be her new-found fame as part of "*Chicago's own killer dillers - those two scintillating sinners - Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly.*" However, Roxie will also undoubtedly want to put her side of the murder charge which Billy Flynn has so successfully managed to get her off! Perhaps a version of his 'rewriting' of Roxie's past would suit her needs for her new website (see resources section).

More able students may want to make cross-curricular links with performing arts students and shoot a recreation of elements of Roxie's celebrity for streaming on the web.

## MEDIA STUDIES

One of the difficulties of being a 'star' name is that you are always under scrutiny. But, at the same time, you want to use your name and your personality to 'sell' your product. As that product is you, this can naturally create some conflict. It is understandable, therefore, that big stars want to have control of their images and the way that they appear in the public arena.

Ask students to imagine that they are Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly, embarking on their new career as a double act at Chicago's McVickers Theatre. This is make or break, their one opportunity to make it big! To do this, they will have to sell seats for their show 'Roxie and Velma'.

Create a radio advertisement for the 'Roxie and Velma' show. It must be no more than 30 seconds long and must successfully encourage the radio audience to buy tickets for the show. Students must decide on the type of radio station that they intend to advertise on - is it a music station, talk radio or a news channel? Should the advert be different according to the type of station? Who do they expect to be interested in coming to the show? How can they achieve a broad audience appeal? What are older men and women wanting to see? What about younger customers? Is there a way of creating an advert with appeals across the audience profile? How much detail about the past 'crimes' of Roxie and Velma will be included? After all, this is the reason that they are famous in the first place. Students should remember that, for the purposes of this task, Roxie and Velma retain control of their image. As teacher, you may want to assume this role in order to help to focus students' ideas.



## RESOURCES

### 'CELEBRITY' QUOTES FROM CHICAGO - book by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse

"I always wanted my name in the papers."

"With all this publicity, I could still get into vaudeville."

"Think of those autographs I'll sign."

"I see that tomato's name on every front page - it drives me nertz."

"You're a phony celebrity, kid. In a couple of weeks,  
nobody'll even know who you are."

"These trials - the whole world - all show business."

"The whole world's gone low brow."

"Where are all the photographers - the reporters?  
The publicity? I was countin' on that."

"They didn't even want my picture. I don't understand that."

"Razzle dazzle 'em. And they'll make you a star!"



### BILLY'S VERSION OF ROXIE'S STORY

From convent girl to jail. Get this...

Beautiful Southern home...every luxury and refinement. Parents dead, educated at the Sacred Heart, fortune swept away - a runaway marriage, a lovely, innocent girl, bewildered by what's happened...young, full of life, lonely.

Caught up by the mad whirl of a great city - jazz, cabarets, liquor...drawn like a moth to the flame. And now the mad whirl has ceased.

A butterfly crushed on the wheel. She has sinned and she's sorry.

All she can remember is a fearful quarrel.  
He threatened to kill her. She can still see him coming toward her with that awful look in his eyes.

# “YOU CAN’T BUY THAT KIND OF PUBLICITY”

**CHICAGO is about celebrity. Roxie and Velma vie for the front pages, whilst Mama Morton makes the arrangements (for a small consideration). In a stroke of genius, the Producers of CHICAGO hit upon the notion of creating their own publicity storm, by casting ‘star’ names in some of the lead roles of their show.**

## ENGLISH

Roxie, Velma, Billy and Mama all attempt to manipulate the press and put their own versions of the truth out into the public domain. Using some contemporary newspapers and magazines, study how ‘publicity’ works now. Discuss the link between the semi-fictional publicity ‘tricks’ used in the story of CHICAGO and the way that the media report similar stories now. Was CHICAGO actually ahead of its time when it was first written in 1974? Now that we live in a media-savvy, media-obsessed world, is the hunger for sensational stories a good thing or a bad thing? How much responsibility should we take, as consumers, for what appears in newspapers? After all, we buy them.

Ask students to consider how they could ‘spin’ their own story to create a media frenzy, as Roxie does in CHICAGO. Provide them with a quote from the show to use as a stimulus (see ‘resources’ section).

Students should now create their own newspaper ‘front page’, with a headline and a sensationalised version of their own history. They should focus on taking one or two tiny events and adding to them to make them interesting and exciting to read. Remind them that their ‘audience’ is used to reading gossip and intrigue, so their front page must grab their attention and ‘make’ them read on!

## MEDIA STUDIES/PERFORMING ARTS

Interestingly, although CHICAGO has a reputation for featuring ‘star name’ performers such as David Hasselhoff and Denise Van Outen, it does not always do so. In terms of the ‘business’ of putting on a major West End show, a ‘star name’ is certainly more costly and if the show is selling purely on its reputation, this is money that Producers may not always feel that they need to spend. The show, after all, is a strong ensemble piece and works brilliantly with no ‘star name’ attached to it at all.

Of course, when a ‘star name’ does go into the show, the publicity opportunities are immense. Ask students to consider their own ‘wish list’ of celebrity performers. As a casting director on CHICAGO, they must consider the suitability of the artist for the part, as well as their potential in helping to ‘sell’ the production. Students should now design their own publicity campaign around the ‘star’ that they have chosen. They should design a CHICAGO poster, featuring a ‘tag’ line or slogan that is appropriate and that will engage their audience’s interest (see resources section for examples).

Students should remember that CHICAGO has a particular ‘image’ of black and white photographs with splashes of red text. Why is this? What message does it send out to the audience? More able students may like to experiment with manipulating images to create a CHICAGO-esque photographic poster that fits the unique ‘style’ of the show and the celebrity that they have chosen (see also following drama activity).

Having designed their poster, students may like to write a press release to herald the arrival of their new ‘star’ into the show. They should consider the strengths of the artist and how they can tailor their arrival to the particular requirements of this major West End success. Are the public likely to make any assumptions about the artist and their ability to perform the role that may need to be addressed up-front? Is there any particular link that can be made between the artist’s normal roles and CHICAGO?

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## ART & DESIGN / MEDIA STUDIES

More than almost every other West End show, CHICAGO has a defined image that is used as a tool for its marketing and publicity. As Roxie sings in the show, "who says that murder's not an art?"

Students of arts and design may be interested to deconstruct the CHICAGO images, the black and white photography, harking back to the 1920's, the vaudeville influences and the power and sexuality of the featured characters. Sometimes, characters are photographed against brick walls, or in dark back alleys. Period vehicles are used, as are policemen and press photographers from the time. In what way does this successfully create the 'mood' of CHICAGO? How is lighting used to enhance this mood?

Media Studies students will be interested in the marketing and advertising of the show and the creation of the 'brand' that is CHICAGO. In many ways, this show stands apart from the majority of other West End shows in terms of its advertising. How? How do the photographic images that are used engage the audience and make them want to see the show? In a modern world full of mass marketing in colour, why is black and white photography so powerful and what is the effect of the splashes of red text that are used?

Using digital cameras and photo manipulation software, set your students the task of creating their own version of a CHICAGO publicity photo. What elements will make the photo fit the brief that has been identified above? If you are able to make cross-curricular links with other departments, set up a CHICAGO photo shoot with students from performing arts subjects playing the parts of the CHICAGO characters.

As a mini-project, this task can be linked with the previous activity that focuses on marketing and publicity. Ask students to create a 'tag' line that fits their photograph and that could transform it into a poster for CHICAGO.

## RESOURCES

### STIMULUS FOR ENGLISH ACTIVITY

#### FROM RAZZLE DAZZLE - Lyrics by Fred Ebb

Long as you keep 'em way off balance,  
How can they spot you got no talents?  
Razzle Dazzle 'em  
And they'll make you a star!

#### TAG LINES

The following are examples of 'tag lines' used during the West End run of CHICAGO:

From Hollywood to Chicago	(for Hollywood actress Brooke Shields)
Out of the Blue	(for former boy band member Duncan James, of the group 'Blue')
Kelly Osbourne Rocks	(for the daughter of rock star Ozzy)
Cooking up Trouble	(for Jennifer Ellison, who had just won TV show 'Hell's Kitchen')
The Ice Queen Cometh	(for Suzanne Shaw, who had just won TV show 'Dancing on Ice')



# “LET’S ALL STROKE TOGETHER”

**Many vocational qualifications, such as the BTEC in Performing Arts and the Diploma in Creative and Media, require students to research and understand the process of putting on a show from a production point-of-view as well as from the perspective of performers. They must understand, for instance, the difference between a Stage Manager and an Assistant Stage Manager, as well as the nature of the relationship between a theatre owner and tenant.**

**Many questions of this nature can now be researched on the internet (see links section), but you and your students may find it useful to gain a specific insight into the running of CHICAGO, particularly in terms of roles that are less easy to find out about elsewhere.**

## COMPANY MANAGER

Company Manager Tim Richards has been with CHICAGO for its entire run in London.

The Company Manager is the Producer’s representative in the theatre. In the case of CHICAGO, the Producers of the show are based in New York, so it is crucial to have an effective manager who looks after the show on a day-to-day basis.

That day-to-day responsibility on a show such as CHICAGO is to ensure the smooth running of the show. During the day, cast members sometimes phone in sick, or on a dance-heavy show such as CHICAGO, occasionally with injuries. The Company Manager must then phone the ‘swing’ and understudies to let them know that they will be performing at that day’s performance.

The Company Manager is in the theatre before and during every show and it is his responsibility to organise holiday rotas, payroll, rehearsal schedules (such as understudy and cast change rehearsals), to deal with any problems as they arise and to generally try to keep the show running happily and efficiently.

The role of the Company Manager includes liaison with all of the creative and technical Heads of Department, including the Stage Manager, the Sound department, Wardrobe, Wigs, the Resident Director, the Musical Director and the Dance Captain, as well as members of the cast.

## DANCER, SWING & UNDERSTUDY

Adelle Young is a ‘Swing’, as well as being an understudy for Roxie Hart and Assistant Dance Captain.

Unlike all of the other roles in a show such as CHICAGO, a ‘swing’ does not have their own part (or ‘track’) to learn. Instead, they learn a range of different parts from the show so that they can ‘go on’ at short notice to cover illness or injury. This is a tall order, as it involves learning numerous dance routines, dialogue, songs and movements, often from the point-of-view of various different characters. Different ‘swings’ study these requirements in a different order, depending on their individual method, but it is crucial not to get mixed up. It’s a little bit like revising for exams.

The Dance Captain and Assistant Dance Captain are both performers in the show, who hold an additional responsibility for ensuring that the dance side of a show like CHICAGO stays fresh and that each and every member of the audience sees a show that feels like a first night. Of course, choreography sometimes has to be changed, particularly if a performer is ‘off’, and the responsibility for ensuring that everybody knows where to stand (and move) so that the show is unaffected falls to the Dance Captain and his Assistant.

Dancers in CHICAGO have to have a strong technical background. They must look after their bodies to a high standard and must have at least three years training in specialist performing arts schools. CHICAGO is stylistically different to any other show in the West End, so a complete range of performing arts skills are needed

to be successful in it – dancing, acting and singing, as each and every cast member plays an individual character. Once in the show, many cast members continue to take dance classes, particularly ballet, to keep themselves in shape for the rigorous eight shows per week. Every performance must be given to the highest standard and commitment must be mental as well as physical. For instance, cast members are directed to sit at the side of the set, watching the action during the show, which is a reflection of being confined in a prison cell. Whilst they are not the main focus of attention at these points, they must stay engaged with the action, truthful to the scene, as they can always be seen!

The Dance Captain and his Assistant are also responsible, along with the Resident Director, for rehearsing new cast members, most of whom will have come through a painstaking audition process. All of the disciplines required for the show will have been tested, but for CHICAGO, even this is not enough. Each individual must stand out from the crowd and suit the highly stylised nature of the show. The creative team will also be looking for an ensemble that gels together; the overall 'look' of a show like CHICAGO is crucial.

## MARKETING

Bob Bucci is Vice President of Marketing for CHICAGO worldwide. He is based in New York.

People often say that the original version of CHICAGO in 1975 was ahead of its time. The subject matter of how celebrity and the media affect all of our lives was not the same in 1975. When the revival started on Broadway in 1996, the world was at the start of what is still driving society today; media, exploitation, getting away with it. All of these elements are part of our everyday lives now. This supports the story of CHICAGO much more than it ever could have in 1975; things were simpler then.

When CHICAGO was revived in 1996, the advertising team established a brand for the show which continues to be the basis of the marketing of the show worldwide. The design and photos that are used in advertising are shared with the marketing teams all over the world and are referred to when new photo shoots are done, in order that the specific world of CHICAGO is maintained. Each country uses different techniques to sell and market shows and so marketing strategies in all countries are created with respect to how their audiences are reached and served. It is important to take into account cultural differences within each market to shape a campaign that is true to the show, but that serves the needs of the market and reaches the widest possible audience.

Celebrity casting works, predominantly due to the themes within CHICAGO. However, it is crucial to maintain the integrity of the show first and foremost. With each casting choice that is made, the marketing team work to find the "hook" or "angle" to use in advertising each star within the CHICAGO brand. There is a bit of Roxie, Billy and Velma in every celebrity that is cast. This is used in all marketing and sales efforts.

Everyone involved with the production works together to cast the show at all levels; celebrity through to ensemble. Each actor is put through a work session to ensure that they are up to the task. Press and advertising is discussed at length with each new "star" to make sure that the unique reach that each performer brings to the show is captured. The campaign for Brooke Shields differed greatly from Ashley Simpson. Kelly Osbourne's campaign was executed in different ways from Alison Moyet's or Gaby Roslin's. All effective, all different, all customised, all true to the brand of CHICAGO.

Casting helps to keep the show fresh in the minds of the public. Each time a new person comes into the show, a series of things are done to create a campaign around them. This campaign is launched prior to them starting performances and gives the show something new to say in advertising and in the press.

Key to the success of CHICAGO is that everyone on the team works tirelessly to keep the show in the best shape that it can be. Resident directors, stage managers and all creative teams are constantly looking to make sure that a top level performance is given each night, 8 shows a week.

What makes CHICAGO work is the power of the score and the way that the story is told through dance and music. The goal of every member of the team is to achieve a faultless performance each night, wherever the show is playing in the world.

Marketing a musical is vastly different in today's world. There are so many options to explore and use to get the message across. Budgets are small and shows have to look to maximize all of their efforts. This comes with its challenges as we live in a world where lives are busier than ever. All of the efforts of the marketing team look to find that "hook" or that "unique experience" that only live theatre can give.

# “HERE’S A FEW PARTIN’ SHOTS”

**Here, you will find a selection of useful links and resources to support you in your teaching in relation to CHICAGO the Musical.**

## WEBSITES

[http://www.chicagothemusical.com/uk\\_site/](http://www.chicagothemusical.com/uk_site/)

Official website for CHICAGO the Musical in the UK.

[http://www.chicagothemusical.com/index\\_new.html](http://www.chicagothemusical.com/index_new.html)

Official website for CHICAGO the Musical in the US.

<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/backstage>

Backstage section of the National Theatre website provides a wealth of information about jobs in the theatre industry.

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/aboutthesc/AboutTheRSC.aspx>

The website of the Royal Shakespeare Company includes an overview of roles involved in the theatre production process.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

Online encyclopaedia Wikipedia contains information about CHICAGO the Musical as well as general theatrical information including roles and responsibilities in the theatre.

## BOOKS

CHICAGO – A MUSICAL VAUDEVILLE, Vocal Selections – Hal Leonard Corporation (ISBN 978-1903692271)

CHICAGO – Maurine Watkins & Thomas H Pauly – Southern Illinois University Press (ISBN 978-0809321292)

## CDs & DVDs

CHICAGO the Musical – Original London Cast Recording (RCA)

CHICAGO the Musical – 1996 Broadway Cast Recording (RCA)

CHICAGO the Musical – 10th Anniversary Box Set (2 CD & 1 DVD) (Sony BMG)

Chicago – 2002 movie version with Catherine Zeta Jones & Renee Zellweger (Disney Studios)

Cabaret – 1972 movie directed by Bob Fosse and starring Liza Minnelli (Prism Leisure Corporation)

All That Jazz – 1979 autobiographical movie by Bob Fosse, starring Roy Scheider & Jessica Lange (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment)

Fosse – 2001 release of the 1999 Broadway show celebrating the work of Bob Fosse (Warner Music Vision)

Sunset Boulevard – 1950 movie about 'celebrity' directed by Billy Wilder and starring Gloria Swanson (Paramount Home Entertainment)

## ADDITIONAL DANCE RESOURCES

Frontline (2004) by Henri Oquike

Brahmsiana/Johannes Brahms (2006) by Bill Evans

The Car Man (2000) by Matthew Bourne

Hour upon the Stage (2007) by David Parker & The Bang Group