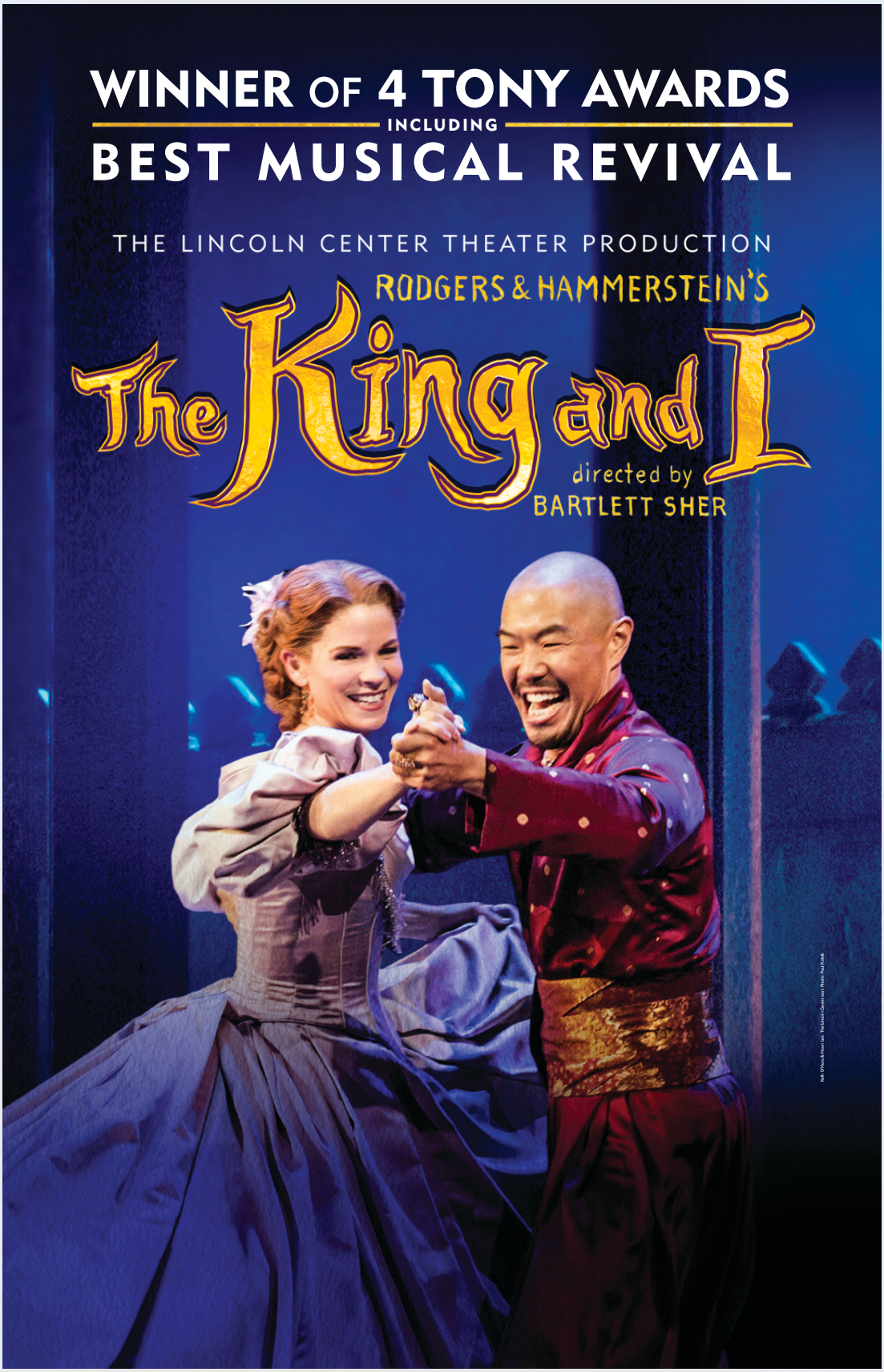

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

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Executive Director of
Development & Planning

in association with Ambassador Theatre Group
presents

RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S

The King and I

Music
Richard Rodgers

Book and Lyrics
Oscar Hammerstein II

Based on the novel *Anna and the King of Siam* by Margaret Landon

with

Kelli O'Hara Ken Watanabe

Ruthie Ann Miles Ashley Park Conrad Ricamora
Edward Baker-Duly Jon Viktor Corpuz Murphy Guyer Jake Lucas Paul Nakauchi Marc Oka

and

Aaron J. Albano Adriana Braganza Amaya Braganza Billy Bustamante LaMae Caparas
Hsin-Ping Chang Andrew Cheng Lynn Masako Cheng Olivia Chun Ali Ewoldt Ethan Halford Holder
Cole Horibe MaryAnn Hu James Ignacio Misa Iwama Christie Kim Kelvin Moon Loh
Sumie Maeda Paul HeeSang Miller Rommel Pierre O'Choa Kristen Faith Oei Autumn Ogawa
Yuki Ozeki Stephanie Jae Park Diane Phelan Sam Poon William Poon Brian Rivera
Bennyroyce Royon Lainie Sakakura Ann Sanders Ian Saraceni Atsuhisa Shinomiya
Michiko Takemasa Kei Tsuruharatani Christopher Vo Rocco Wu XiaoChuan Xie Timothy Yang

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Costumes
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Lighting
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Based on the
Original Choreography by
Jerome Robbins

Directed by
Bartlett Sher

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ORIGINAL
LINCOLN CENTER THEATER
CAST

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INTRODUCTION

> "Almost from the beginning of his career, Oscar Hammerstein had been dedicated to the idea of bringing seriousness to the musical stage. He was impassioned by finding something which was neither operetta nor escapism, something which had purpose and coherence, something that was unmistakably American, rather than European in tradition."

FREDERICK NOLAN, RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN BIOGRAPHER

Welcome to the teacher resource guide for *The King and I*, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's poignant musical portrait of two fascinating historical figures, Anna Leonowens and King Mongkut of Siam. *The King and I* chronicles a turning point in Siam's history. It is the early 1860s and the threat of western imperialism casts a shadow upon the country. King Mongkut must find a way for Siam to embrace modernity and take its place among the nations of the world while still honoring its traditions and maintaining its independence.

Set design model by Michael Yeargan for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *The King and I*

When King Mongkut hires an Englishwoman, Anna Leonowens, to provide a western education for his children and wives, they both are challenged to understand one another and find common ground amidst many cultural differences.

The King and I features a cast of more than fifty, among them five-time Tony Award nominee Kelli O'Hara from Lincoln Center Theater's award-winning revival of *South Pacific* as Anna, and Oscar nominee Ken Watanabe (*The Last Samurai*, *Inception*) as King Mongkut. Students will have an opportunity to experience one of the most successful musical plays in the history of American theater, as well as the work of two of musical theater's most renowned and beloved writers, as reimagined by award-winning director Bartlett Sher (*South Pacific*).

The King and I offers learning opportunities for students in areas related to:

- western imperialism and its impact on Asian countries in the 19th century;
- the historical significance of Anna Leonowens and King Mongkut of Siam;
- the work of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein and their contributions to the American theater; and
- the process of reviving a classic musical.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This resource guide has been created to help prepare your students to see *The King and I*. We also hope to direct you to resources that can further your classroom exploration of the play. We encourage you to print and share pages of this guide with your students. In each section, look for resources, including links to materials and videos available online, as well as discussion questions and suggested classroom activities that you can use before or after seeing the production.

The overall goals of this guide are to:

- connect to your curriculum with standards-based information and activities;
- reinforce and encourage your students to exercise critical and analytical thinking skills; and
- provide you with the resources to have an engaging and educational experience at the theater.

THE PLAY

OVERVIEW

Richard Rodgers, Dorothy Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Dorothy Hammerstein at *The King and I* film opening. Photo courtesy of Rodgers & Hammerstein, an Imagem company.

Soon after the enormous success of their musical *South Pacific*, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's wives enthusiastically recommended they consider a unique story about a strong-willed 19th-century Englishwoman as possible material for a new musical. The story of Anna Leonowens, as told in the best-selling 1944 novel *Anna and the King of Siam* by Margaret Landon, was a fictionalized account based on the memoirs of the real Anna Leonowens, a young widow who taught English to the wives and children of King Mongkut of Siam. Rodgers and Hammerstein resisted. Was there a dramatically interesting story buried within the historical facts and details of life at the court of Siam? It wasn't until they saw the film adaptation, a Hollywood hit starring Rex Harrison and Irene Dunne that they came around. The compelling relationship between the King and Anna, which had been drawn out of Landon's novel so effectively by the screenwriters, excited them. When the prominent English actress Gertrude Lawrence appealed to Rodgers and Hammerstein to write a musical version she could star in, they finally agreed, creating a musical play whose stage and screen versions would go on to win numerous awards, and which would become one of the most cherished works in the history of musical theater.

The King and I:

- Opened on March 29, 1951 and became the third Rodgers and Hammerstein musical to run for more than 1,000 performances on Broadway.
- Was the most expensive show in Broadway history at the time, costing $360,000; twice the cost of an average musical.
- Won Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Actress, Best Featured Actor, and Best Scenic and Costume Design.
- Was made into a film that won five Academy awards.
- Launched the career of actor Yul Brynner who went on to perform the role of King Mongkut over 4,600 times throughout his lifetime.

Anna Leonowens (Gertrude Lawrence) and her son Louis (Sandy Kennedy) leaving the ship of Captain Orton (Charles Francis) for their new life in Bangkok, in a scene from the original 1951 Broadway production of *The King and I*. Photo courtesy of Rodgers & Hammerstein, an Imagem company.

THE STORY

Act One

It is 1862 and Anna Leonowens and her son Louis are on the deck of the Chow Phya with Captain Orton approaching Bangkok where Anna will serve as a teacher to the wives and children of King Mongkut of Siam. The King's royal barge approaches and the Kralahome, the King's Prime Minister, boards the ship and addresses Anna. He informs her that she will be moving into the King's palace, as opposed to her own home adjoining the palace, as promised by the King. Incensed, but determined to honor her commitment, Anna grudgingly agrees to accompany the Kralahome to the palace.

In the palace of King Mongkut, the troubled King confides in the Kralahome about the challenges Siam faces as European countries continue to gain power and authority over surrounding Asian countries. They are interrupted by Lun Tha, an emissary from Burma who is studying one of the King's famous temples. Lun Tha is accompanied by Tuptim, a young woman who has been sent as a present for the King from the Prince of Burma. When the King leaves, Tuptim reveals through song that although she must obey her new master, she is in love with another man.

The King returns to his study. The Kralahome ushers in an angry Anna who attempts to address the matter of her housing agreement. The argument is interrupted by Lady Thiang, the King's head wife. The King refuses to honor the agreement and demands that Anna live in the palace. He leaves her with his wives who implore

her to stay and teach. Lady Thiang confides in Anna that she believes Tuptim is in love with another man which inspires Anna to reminisce about her late husband Tom. The King returns and the royal children are ceremonially presented to Anna.

While teaching, Anna unveils a modern map of Asia causing confusion in the classroom. When Anna explains what snow is, the classroom, led by the Prince Chulalongkorn, reacts with disbelief and consternation. The King enters the classroom, now in disarray, and has a heated confrontation with Anna regarding her place in the palace, which results in her resignation. Tuptim remains in the classroom after everyone has left and cautiously reunites with Lun Tha. It is revealed that they are lovers, and that Anna has been facilitating their secret meetings.

Alone in her room, Anna unleashes her anger to an imaginary King, trying to reconcile the conflicting emotions she feels toward him and the royal family. Lady Thiang visits and explains that European powers have their sights set on Siam and regard King Mongkut as uncivilized. She implores Anna to go to him and resolve their differences. Anna refuses at first, but after a heartfelt plea from Lady Thiang, she agrees.

Anna enters the King's study. The King dictates a letter addressed to President Lincoln to Anna. In addition, he expects Anna to honor the palace rule that no subject's head be higher than the King's. Anna reluctantly promises to do so, and gently asks him if there has been any news from abroad. He confirms what Lady Thiang has told Anna, and surreptitiously asks for Anna's advice. Anna suggests hosting a European-style party for the British delegation. The King agrees and calls his royal families and subjects in to share the news and begin preparations. It is clear that Anna will be staying on in Siam to help him with this endeavor. As he appeals to Buddha for help, he promises that he will, at last, honor his word and provide Anna with a house of her own outside the palace.

Kelli O'Hara, Ken Watanabe and company in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *The King and I*. Photo by Paul Kolnik.

Act Two

In the schoolroom, now a dressing room for the European-style dinner party that the King is hosting for Sir Edward Ramsay and his fellow British dignitaries, the wives struggle with their Victorian hoopskirts. Anna, the King, and Lady Thiang hurriedly make last minute preparations to ensure the success of the party. Sir Edward Ramsay enters. The King, Anna, and Ramsay depart and head to dinner.

Lady Thiang confronts Tuptim about her secret meetings with Lun Tha and tells her that he will be sent away that evening. Tuptim and Lun Tha have a stolen moment together and decide that they will escape from the King's palace together that evening. Anna comes looking for Tuptim and finds the two lovers together. Lun Tha tells Anna that they will be leaving that night.

Tuptim leads fellow performers from the royal palace in a traditional dance drama she has created based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a book Anna has lent her. Her play tells the story of a slave who successfully runs away from a tyrannical slave owner.

The party has ended and Sir Edward commends the King and Anna for a successful evening. Thankful for her help, the King gives Anna one of his rings as a gift. The Kralahome interrupts and requests that the King speak with the Secret Police who inform him that Tuptim is missing. The King returns and he and Anna engage in a discussion about their differing views on male and female roles. Their spirited exchange leads to Anna teaching the King to polka. Their dancing is interrupted by the Kralahome, who enters declaring that Tuptim has been caught.

Tuptim is brought before the King who is told that she was found on a Chinese sailing ship trying to escape with Lun Tha. The King prepares to whip Tuptim for her dishonor, despite Anna's protests. The King is unable to follow through with the punishment in Anna's presence. He flees the room. The Kralahome denounces Anna for making the King feel weak and Anna leaves the room in despair.

Captain Orton's ship has returned to Bangkok to retrieve Anna and Louis, while Chulalongkorn and Lady Thiang wait at Anna's house to tell her that the King has taken ill. When they arrive, Lady Thiang gives Anna a heartfelt letter from the King. Anna reads the letter and immediately goes to the palace to see him.

Anna sits by the bed of the King as the children come to say their goodbyes to her. Anna, aware that the King is dying and overcome with love and affection for the royal children and wives, decides to stay. The dying King asks Chulalongkorn to proclaim what he will do when he becomes King. Chulalongkorn declares that there will be no more prostrating on the ground to show respect for the monarch. Rather, men will bow while standing and women will curtsy. His father agrees. As Chulalongkorn continues with his proclamation, stepping into the role of King, King Mongkut dies.

THE CHARACTERS

Costume design sketches by Catherine Zuber for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *The King and I*.

ANNA LEONOWENS: a young widow from Wales who has agreed to a position teaching in the royal palace of the King of Siam; she is strong-willed and forward thinking and challenges the King's views and ways of ruling

LOUIS LEONOWENS: Anna's teenage son

KING MONGKUT OF SIAM: the ruler of Siam who has progressive ideas for his country but struggles with his desire to uphold Siamese traditions

LADY THIANG: the King's head wife and mother to Crown Prince Chulalongkorn; she is wise and patient and understands the complexities of the King's nature

PRINCE CHULALONGKORN: Lady Thiang and the King's opinionated and strong-willed teenage son; heir to the throne

THE KRALAHOME: the Prime Minister of Siam; the King's most trusted and powerful advisor

LUN THA: a young man from Burma who is studying the King's temple and is secretly in a relationship with Tuptim

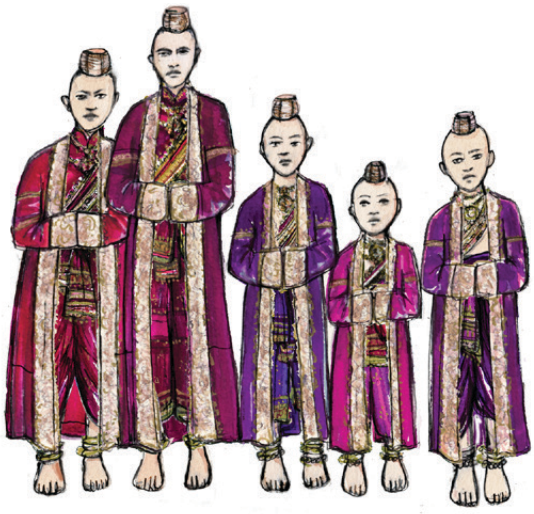
TUPTIM: a young woman from Burma who is presented to the King as a gift from the Prince of Burma; she is in love with Lun Tha

PHRA ALACK: the King's secretary

CAPTAIN ORTON: the British Captain of the Chow Phya, the ship that takes Anna and Louis from Singapore to Bangkok

SIR EDWARD RAMSAY: a British diplomat who Anna was romantically involved with in the past; he is an important player in the diplomatic game for friendship in Siam, and the King must win him over

ROYAL WIVES AND CONCUBINES



ROYAL CHILDREN

THE WRITERS

With Richard Rodgers composing the music and Oscar Hammerstein II writing the words, Rodgers and Hammerstein became perhaps the most successful writing team in the history of musical theater. Through a series of groundbreaking shows throughout the 1940s and 1950s, they changed the face of theater.

Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. Photo courtesy of Rodgers & Hammerstein, an Imagem company.

Richard Rodgers (1902-1979), achieved fame writing songs from the 1920s through the early 1940s, with lyricist Lorenz Hart. Together they wrote more than 40 lighthearted, sophisticated musical comedies, including *On Your Toes*, *Babes in Arms*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *I Married an Angel*, and *Pal Joey*.

At the same time, Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960) found success writing the words for operettas, or "light opera," which had its root in 19th-century Europe. He collaborated with a number of composers, including Rudolf Friml and Sigmund Romberg. The shows he wrote include *The Desert Song*, *Rose-Marie*, and *The New Moon*. He tackled many challenging social issues in his work, including racism, as illustrated in the musicals *Show Boat*, written in 1927 with Jerome Kern, and *Carmen Jones*, an African-American version of Georges Bizet's tragic opera *Carmen*.

Rodgers and Hammerstein first collaborated in 1943 on *Oklahoma!*, a show that is widely considered to be the first true musical play, combining elements of musical comedy and operetta to create a more integrated, dramatic musical than had been seen before. Their subsequent works include *Carousel*, *Allegro*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Me and Juliet*, *Pipe Dream*, *Flower Drum Song*, and *The Sound of Music*. They also wrote the movie musical, *State Fair*, and for television, *Cinderella*, which was recently staged on Broadway. Their musicals won many honors, including a total of 35 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes, two Grammy Awards, and two Emmy Awards. Today, their musicals continue to be mainstays in high schools, community theaters, and professional theaters around the world.

Oscar Hammerstein II died in 1960, but Rodgers continued to write for the Broadway stage. *No Strings*, the first show he wrote without a partner, won Tony Awards for both music and lyrics. He followed it with *Do I Hear a Waltz*, *Two by Two*, *Rex*, and *I Remember Mama*, which opened on Broadway in 1979, only a few months before his death.

Learn more about Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's contributions to musical theater in the section **THE STYLE: CLASSIC AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER**.

The sections about Rodgers and Hammerstein and the history of American musical theater were drawn from Victoria Abrash's teacher resource guide for Lincoln Center Theater's production of South Pacific.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

American Musical Primer: Introductory Activity

Explore

Divide the class in half and have one group write MUSIC on the top of a blank piece of paper and the other group write THEATER. Give the class 2-3 minutes to answer the following about their word:

- Where can you see or hear it?
- What are some different styles?
- What are some ways it can engage you emotionally?

Have students share their responses and create a brainstorming list about music and theater. Discuss why and how these two forms might be combined, and allow students to share any experiences they have had seeing musical theater on stage or on film.

View

As a class, watch the first six minutes of Episode 1 of PBS' *Broadway: The American Musical* and have students take notes on what they **see**, **hear**, **learn**, and **have questions** about.

Discuss

- Why have musicals been so popular in 20th century America?
- What do they reflect about our country? Whose stories do they tell?
- In what ways is storytelling in a musical different from a play?
- What styles of music and dance do they incorporate?

Storytelling Through Song: Introductory Activity

View

Watch a video excerpt from the film version of *The King and I* in which Yul Brynner, as King Mongkut of Siam, sings the song "A Puzzlement." http://www.rnh.com/videos.html?video=185&gallery=136

As students are watching, have them take notes about the following aspects of the video:

- Setting: What is the setting or environment like? Where might it take place? When might it take place?
- People: Who do we meet? What is he doing?
- Style: What is happening that wouldn't happen in ordinary life?
- Conflict: What is the character conflicted about?
- Theme: Why is he conflicted?

Discuss

Have students share their notes with the class, and have students make predictions about what they think the musical is about.

Analyze

Provide students with a copy of the lyrics to "A Puzzlement."
http://www.songlyrics.com/the-king-and-i/a-puzzlement-lyrics/

Read the lyrics aloud as a class and discuss the following:

- Some of these lyrics aren't included in the film version. Why do you think the writers and film-makers chose to do that? Do you agree with their decision? What important information is lost?
- Why do you think the writers chose to have the King sing this song alone on the stage? How does that inform what he expresses in the song? How might it be different if he were singing it to another character?
- How does this song, which comes early in the show, help to define the King's internal and external conflicts?

To Explore:

Watch the trailer of the film version of *The King and I* following one of the introductory activities above. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfvpFluHQaA

Explore the comprehensive teacher and student guides for PBS' *Broadway: The American Musical*.
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/for-educators/

Explore the "Golden Years of Broadway" timeline and have students work in groups to research and do a brief classroom presentation on another show from that era.
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/timelines/1943-1959/

Common Core Connections:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

THE BACKDROP: DRAMATIZING HISTORY

THE SETTING: SIAM IN THE 1860S

Thailand (known as Siam until 1939) is a country in Southeast Asia bordered by Burma (Myanmar), Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. It is a monarchy under the rule of King Bhumibol Adulyadej that is currently governed by a military junta that took power in May 2014. Despite pressure from Europe, Thailand is the only Southeast Asian nation that has never been colonized.

1686 French Map of Siam, Wikimedia Commons; Public domain.

Political Background: Western Imperialism

In the late 19th century there was an intense rivalry between Great Britain and France for supremacy and power in Southeast Asia and Indochina, a peninsula in Southeast Asia that encompassed Siam, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, Burma, Laos, and Malaysia. Except for Siam, every country in Indochina was becoming a colony of a European power. The British Empire, which had colonized India, eventually extended its reach to Singapore and parts of Malaysia. The French laid claim to parts of Vietnam, Cambodia, and eventually Laos. After a number of wars, neighboring Burma had been forced to submit to British dominance. Knowing that Siam geographically offered a buffer zone between the British and French empires in Southeast Asia, King Mongkut moved forward strategically. While initiating progressive policies and reforms, he began inviting foreign diplomats to Bangkok for diplomatic talks, and opening up communication with leaders around the world such as Pope Pius IX, Queen Victoria, and U.S. Presidents Pierce, Buchanan, and Lincoln. He signed treaties that relinquished some power to European countries, but preserved Siam's sovereignty, such as the Bowring Treaty, which opened up trade with 12 European countries, including England. Throughout these volatile times, King Mongkut and his son and successor, Chulalongkorn, preserved Siam's independence. They adjusted to European pressures by making forward-thinking internal reforms and carrying out astute foreign policy, a practice referred to as "bending with the wind." Learn more about King Mongkut in the following section: **THE PEOPLE: ANNA AND THE KING**.

Traditions: Straddling Two Worlds

While King Mongkut was a highly educated man with a great interest in modern technology, the sciences, and foreign relations, he was conservative when it came to Siamese traditions, customs, and laws, such as the social hierarchy of the kingdom, polygyny, the absolute power of the King as monarch, and Buddhist reforms. How to adapt traditions and long-held beliefs to a changing world is a major thematic element in *The King and I*.

Polygyny

In Siamese culture, as in many other Asian cultures during the 19th century, it was customary for the King to have multiple wives and concubines (a woman who lives with a man but has lower status than his wives). The wives, concubines, their children, and their servants all lived in the royal palace together in a self-contained community. The palace area was usually large enough to contain gardens, lakes, shops, law courts, and even a police station. It is estimated that there were 3,000 or more residing in King Mongkut's court. He had 32 wives and 82 children at the time of his death at the age of 64.

Bunnag sisters and children sharing a meal on the veranda of the king's residence, Ruen Ton; U-M Library Digital Collections; Trans-Asia Photography Review Images.

Part of this tradition sprung from very specific views about women and their role in society, many views that still persist in countries around the globe. Women held the lowest place in the family and community. Generally, they were not educated or allowed to work outside the home. They were seen as objects that could be bought and sold for male pleasure and servitude. Daughters from poor families were commonly sold to rich men as concubines in exchange for money to support the rest of their family.

It was also politically advantageous for the King to have multiple wives, concubines, and children. Siam's many small settlements spread out across the vast country were governed by local leaders. By marrying the daughters of these leaders, the King was able to bind the small settlements together, and forge a royal family that could remain under his watchful eye, and produce a suitable heir to the throne. Reciprocally, the settlements provided the King with gifts in the form of natural resources, laborers, and taxes.

Slavery in Siam

The character Tuptim in *The King and I* comes directly from both the real Anna Leonowens' memoir (*Romance of the Harem*) and Margaret Landon's novel *Anna and the King of Siam*. The real-life Anna Leonowens was an outspoken critic of how women were treated in the King's palace. However, consensus among historians on slavery as an institution during the reign of King Mongkut has been contested. Older reports based on observations from European diplomats, the basis for most contemporary historical analysis, paint a picture of slavery that is at odds with more recent research.

In Siam unlike in America, there was no racial distinction between slaves and free persons. While some slaves were prisoners of war from surrounding territories or criminals, slavery was often a form of indentured servitude resorted to by civilians to rid themselves of crushing debt. Also, it is believed that a slave owner could be punished for torturing slaves, slaves could own and inherit property, and slaves could buy their freedom.

Read two contrasting articles here:

Slavery in Nineteenth Century Siam by R.B. Cruikshank
http://www.siamese-heritage.org/jsspdf/1971/JSS_063_2j_Cruikshank_SlaveryIn19thCenturySiam.pdf

Slavery in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand: Archival Anecdotes and Village Voices by Katherine A. Bowie
https://web.archive.org/web/20101012011414/http://kyotoreviewsea.org/slavery1.htm

Religion: Buddhism

Buddhism is a major global religion with a complex history and system of beliefs. Historians believe that it began in India between the 5th and 6th century B.C.E. According to Buddhist tradition, Siddhartha Gautama (later known as the Buddha) is the founder of Buddhism. He was born the son of an Indian warrior-king and lived in a palace at the foothills of the Himalayas. He was provided with all the privileges of his royal lineage, but was not allowed to leave the grounds of the palace. One day, he escaped and went into the local town where he was confronted with poverty, death, and suffering. He wanted to understand more about life, why human beings suffered, and how one could help to relieve suffering in the world. He renounced his princely title and became a monk, depriving himself of worldly possessions and committing himself to a search for that which is everlasting or eternal. His search culminated when he was 35 years old and meditating under a tree. Siddhartha experienced what the Buddhists call "enlightenment": being awakened to the true nature of things without worldly illusions. From that point forward he became known as a Buddha, a title that means "awakened one." He spent the next 45 years sharing his wisdom and creating a community of followers.

Buddha Shakyamuni or Akshobhya, the Buddha of the East Tibet, 11th-12th century. Gilt copper; sculpture. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; www.metmuseum.org.

Just as Christianity is a theology that has many different branches or denominations, so, does Buddhism. In Thailand, the majority of the population practices a form of Buddhism from the Theravāda school (meaning "The Teaching of the Elders"), which is considered to be one of the oldest divisions of Buddhism. Other popular forms of Buddhism practiced around the world include Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism.

Read Tamara Loos' essay, *King Mongkut's Siam* in the Lincoln Center Theater Review for a broader perspective on Siam in the 1860s. http://issuu.com/lctheater/docs/tki.forissuu/4

BEYOND SIAM

While Western European powers were conquering and dividing lands across Asia and Siam was trying to defend its borders and cultural integrity, the United States was embroiled in its own conflict.

Slavery in America

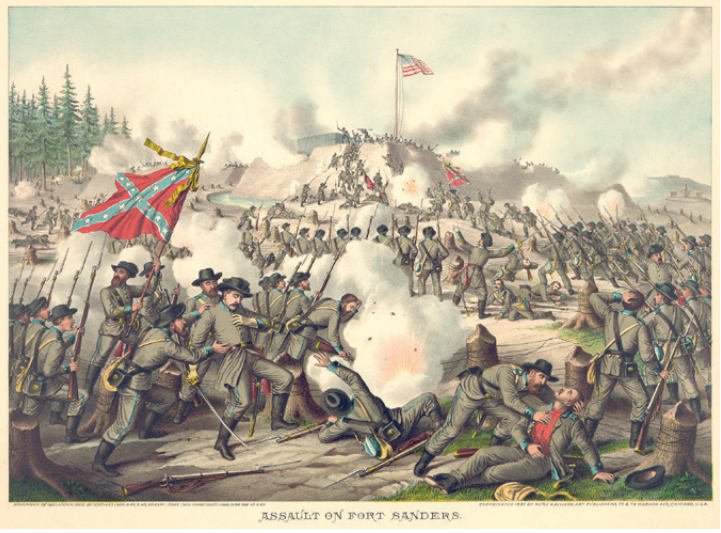
When the United States was first colonized by Europeans it needed laborers to work the vast, harsh land. White servants (mostly poor Europeans) who paid their passage to North America with indentured labor, eased, but did not solve the problem. In the early 17th century, the settlers in North America turned to African slaves as a cheaper, more abundant labor source than indentured servants. After 1619, when a Dutch ship brought 20 Africans to the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia, slavery spread throughout the American colonies. While it is impossible to give accurate figures, some historians have estimated that six to seven million slaves were involuntarily brought to the New World during the 18th century alone, and sent to work on large farms where labor-intensive cash crops such as tobacco and cotton could be grown.

Explore comprehensive resources on slavery in America from PBS.
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/living/history.html

The Civil War

Almost two hundred years after the first slave ships arrived, Abraham Lincoln was elected president. He was the first Republican president to run on a platform pledging to keep slavery from extending into any more United States territories. Seven states in the South, where slavery was most concentrated, responded by seceding and forming a new nation: the Confederate States of America. The incoming Lincoln administration refused to recognize the legitimacy of the secession.

On April 12, 1861, the Southern Confederates at-



Assault on Fort Sanders. Kurz & Allison, 1863; painting, The Library of Congress. (LC-DIG-pga-01839)

tacked the Northern Union soldiers at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, beginning what would become one of the largest and most destructive conflicts in the western world prior to World War I. After four years of fighting and the loss of 625,000 lives, the war came to an end on April 9, 1865, when the Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to the North at the Appomattox Courthouse.

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring that all slaves "are, and henceforward shall be free."

View a timeline of the Civil War. http://www.civilwar.org/150th-anniversary/this-day-in-the-civil-war.html

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Background

Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly, is an anti-slavery novel by American author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Published in 1852, the novel is credited with galvanizing the abolition movement. Stowe, an active abolitionist who hid runaway slaves in her Maine home, felt powerless to combat a system she believed to be unjust and immoral. When the U.S. Congress passed the Compromise of 1850, which included the Fugitive Slave Act that required all citizens to help catch fugitive slaves or risk jail time or fines, Stowe put her outrage and writing talents to use.

Uncle Tom's Cabin Theatrical Poster, c1878. Library of Congress. (LC-USZC4-11152)

To compose *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe drew upon her personal experience as an abolitionist, asked friends and family to send her first-hand accounts of slave treatment, and read numerous freedom narratives and anti-slavery newspapers. The first installment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared on June 5, 1851 in the anti-slavery newspaper, *The National Era*. In 1852 the serial was published as a two volume book. It became a best-seller in the United States, Britain, Europe, and Asia, and was translated into over 60 languages.

Overview

Uncle Tom's Cabin begins in Kentucky and contains two main story lines, a number of subplots, and many characters. In the first story line, the main character is Uncle Tom, a black slave who is sold to pay off his owner Mr. Shelby's debt. Tom is faced with the decision of whether or not to run away and decides that to do so would put the rest of his family at risk of being split up. Tom is taken from his family and brought to New Orleans where he rescues a young white child, Eva, from drowning. Out of gratitude, her father purchases

Tom and he becomes the family's valued coachman. After the deaths of Eva and her father, Tom is sold to the cruel Simon Legree who eventually whips him to death.

The second story line focuses on the characters George, his wife Eliza, and their infant son, Harry. Like many slave families, they are living apart because George is the property of one owner, and Eliza and Harry are the property of another owner (Mr. Shelby). Mistreated by his owner, George decides to escape to Canada. He plans to travel alone and then purchase his wife and son's freedom. After George escapes, Eliza discovers that Mr. Shelby plans to sell little Harry along with Tom to settle his debt. She decides to run away with Harry. Eliza and Harry are pursued by slave catchers, and Eliza must cross the semi-frozen Ohio River in order to reach the shore of the free state of Ohio. Eventually the Harris family is reunited and they flee together to Canada.

Explore comprehensive information, resources, and lesson plan ideas about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Harriet Beecher Stowe, in the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center's Educational Guide*. https://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/worxcms_files/HBSC_teachers_guide_no.pdf

THE PEOPLE: ANNA AND THE KING

Anna Leonowens

The real Anna Leonowens was a multicultural, multilingual woman with a comprehensive understanding of Eastern religion and culture from her years growing up in India and traveling throughout Asia. She was born in 1831 in Ahmednagar, India, to Thomas Edwards, a poor British soldier stationed in Bombay, and Mary Glascott, an Anglo-Indian woman. Her father died before she was born and her mother remarried an Irish soldier. During her teenage years, the family spent time in Yemen where her stepfather was stationed. Anna also traveled with her missionary tutors who took an interest in her and convinced her parents to allow her to accompany them to Egypt and Palestine. At the end of 1849, the family returned to India, settling in Poona, where she married her childhood sweetheart, Thomas Leon Owens, a civilian clerk in the army.

After living in Perth, Australia for a number of years, Thomas, Anna, and their two young children moved to Singapore, where Thomas became ill and died. At the age of 28, Anna was left an impoverished widow with a young daughter, Avis, and a son Louis. In order to support her children, she started a school in Singapore for children of British officers. It was not financially successful, but helped to establish her reputation as a teacher.

Throughout this time, Anna had little to no contact with her family, and made efforts to conceal her racial background. She did so to protect herself and her children, who she believed would have greater opportunities if their mixed-race heritage was unknown. She presented herself as an English aristocrat, which would serve her well with her next teaching endeavor.

In 1862, Anna accepted an offer that was made by the Siamese consul in Singapore to teach the children and wives of King Mongkut of Siam. She served in the court, both as an educator and the language secretary to the King for almost six years. She left Siam for England in 1867, a year before King Mongkut died.

A few years later she moved to New York City where she began writing articles for magazines about her experiences in Siam. These were expanded and became her first published memoir, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, which brought her immediate fame, but also great scrutiny for what was believed to be a "sensationalized" version of King Mongkut's court life and an unflattering portrayal of his character. Nevertheless, she proceeded to write a second memoir *The Romance of the Harem* that was published in 1873 and which spotlighted the slave girl Tuptim. These works were never embraced in Thailand and great objections have been made by the people of Thailand for what they believe to be an inaccurate portrayal of King Mongkut and his court.

Anna Leonowens. Photo courtesy of Wheaton College, IL. SC-38.

Anna travelled throughout the United States giving lectures about her writing and teaching experiences, and advocating for western education and women's rights. She eventually settled in Canada where she actively promoted educational initiatives for women and joined the suffragette movement. She died in 1915 at age 83.

Thirty years later, Margaret Landon came upon Anna's memoirs and decided to use her story as the inspiration for a semi-fictional novel. Landon's novel, *Anna and the King of Siam*, became a best-seller in The United States. A film version premiered in 1949 starring Irene Dunne and Rex Harrison, two of Hollywood's brightest stars at that time.

Learn more about Anna Leonowens in Frances Wilson's essay *Woman Adventurer* in the Lincoln Center Theater Review article. http://issuu.com/lctheater/docs/tki.forissuu/17

King Mongkut of Siam

King Mongkut was born in 1804 and groomed to become king, but when his father died, the royal accession council chose his older and more experienced half-brother to reign. At 20 years old, King Mongkut became a Buddhist monk and took a vow of poverty. As a monk he learned firsthand about life in Siam, something that was unusual for a ruler at that time. He also met missionaries and foreigners during these years, from whom

he learned a great deal about technology and science. He became proficient in English and accomplished in astronomy.

In 1851, when he was 47 years old, his half-brother died and he was chosen to be enthroned. During his reign he initiated a policy of learning about the West, and became adept at modernizing and adapting Siam to a world dominated by Western imperialist powers, earning the nickname "The Father of Science and Technology." One of his many innovations was to bring American and English teachers, such as Anna Leonowens, into his palace to educate his wives and children. In addition, King Mongkut:

- Hired western soldiers to train Siamese troops in western-style combat.
- Hired the American educator Dan Beach Bradley, Anna's predecessor in the palace, to educate the royal families and reform the Bangkok printing press, printing and publishing Siam's first newspaper.
- Promoted the construction of canals, roads, and ships.
- Began minting coins.
- Hired Europeans as political advisors.
- Signed the Bowring Treaty opening up trade with European countries.

An exceptional astronomer, he correctly predicted the exact time and location of a solar eclipse that was going to occur on the coast of Siam on August 28, 1868. He invited the governor of Singapore and other European dignitaries to watch the eclipse with him. Unfortunately, while they were encamped to watch the eclipse, he and Chulalongkorn contracted malaria. Chulalongkorn recovered but King Mongkut died.

Top: King Mongkut and Prince Chulalongkorn, Wikimedia Commons; Public domain. Bottom: King Chulalongkorn and Queen Saowapha surrounded by their sons; U-M Library Digital Collections; Trans-Asia Photography Review Images.

Chulalongkorn succeeded King Mongkut to the throne and expanded on his father's reforms. Chulalongkorn reigned for 42 years, introducing significant social reforms, including the gradual abolition of slavery.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Uncle Tom's Cabin Revisited: Reflection Activity

Read

As a class, read the overview of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in this guide and the excerpt provided in the Lincoln Center Theater Review. http://issuu.com/lctheater/docs/tki.forissuu/21 Have students write a few paragraphs detailing their first impressions of both, and then have them share their impressions with the class. Following this discussion, have students read playwright Katori Hall's essay *What's in a Name?* from the Review. http://issuu.com/lctheater/docs/tki.forissuu/22

Discuss

- What was the author's first experience with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?
- What relevance did it have for her as a young African-American girl?
- What relevance does it have for her now?
- How does she use her personal experience with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to explore bigger questions about race?

Write

After students have seen the performance, have them reflect back on these pieces of writing, as well as "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" ballet, and write a reflective essay that explores their own interpretation of the story, and how they personally connect to it.

From Page to Stage: Close Reading Activity

Read

Have students read Chapter 1 of Margaret Landon's novel *Anna and the King of Siam* http://www.exodusbooks.com/Samples/Harper/4613Sample.pdf and identify the characters, setting, and conflict. Discuss what makes this chapter dramatic. What are the most exciting, engaging, and emotional moments?

Write

Divide students into small groups and have them work collaboratively to write a short dramatic scene adapted from these two pages of text. Once it has been written, have them read and perform their scenes with music. Would there be singing in this opening scene? If so, what kind of songs? Who would sing them? Would there be dancing?

Reflect

After the performance, have students compare the opening scene in *The King and I* to the opening chapter in Landon's book and their own scenes. Discuss the changes the writers made and reflect on why they might have made them.

To Explore:

- Learn more about Thailand on *The World Factbook*: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/th.html
- Read an excerpt from one of Anna Leonowens' memoirs in the Lincoln Center Theater Review. http://issuu.com/lctheater/docs/tki.forissuu/23
- Watch and compare the trailers for the original film *Anna and the King* and the 1999 remake. Discuss how they compare to the musical version of the story.
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBEj5_h6y7A 1946 film
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6Vmyk-nmoo 1999 remake
- Read President Lincoln's letter in response to King Mongkut's offer to send elephants to the U.S. during the Civil War. http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/primarysources/lincoln-rejects-the-king-of.html

Common Core Connections:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

THE STYLE: CLASSIC AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER

> **"Dick and I stay very close together while drawing up the blueprint of a play. Before we start to put words or notes on paper we have agreed on a very definite and complete outline, and we have decided how much of the story shall be told in dialogue and song. We try to use the music as much as we can."** OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN MUSICAL

The King and I is one of the best examples of a unique American art form: the mus we know it evolved out of many traditional forms of entertainment from all over tion of those forms into the musical happened right here in New York City, and Rodgers and Hammerstein, creators of *The King and I*.

Rodgers & Hammerstein postage stamp 1999 © United States Postal Service. All rights reserved.

Music and theater have always been an integral part of the American cultural l group that arrived brought its own entertainments to add to the mix. Musical theater forms that originated in Vienna, London, Ireland, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere all found new life in the United States. Home grown musical forms sprang up in New Orleans, the West, and throughout the rest of the nation. And in the 19th century, uniquely American forms of theatrical entertainment began to emerge from this mix.

The modern American musical has roots in a range of musical entertainments. Revues were popular shows made up of unrelated sketches and songs, like *Saturday Night Live*. Many different kinds of revues, including minstrel shows, burlesque, vaudeville, and variety shows were designed to amuse an audience with popular music, broad humor, and showgirls.

Operetta had its roots in Europe. It involved lighthearted, usually romantic stories and was geared to an urban audience. Oscar Hammerstein II spent two decades as a masterful writer of lyrics for operettas before teaming up with Richard Rodgers.

Early American musical comedy grew out of vaudeville. Richard Rodgers was a leading composer of musical comedies for twenty years before he began to work with Oscar Hammerstein II.

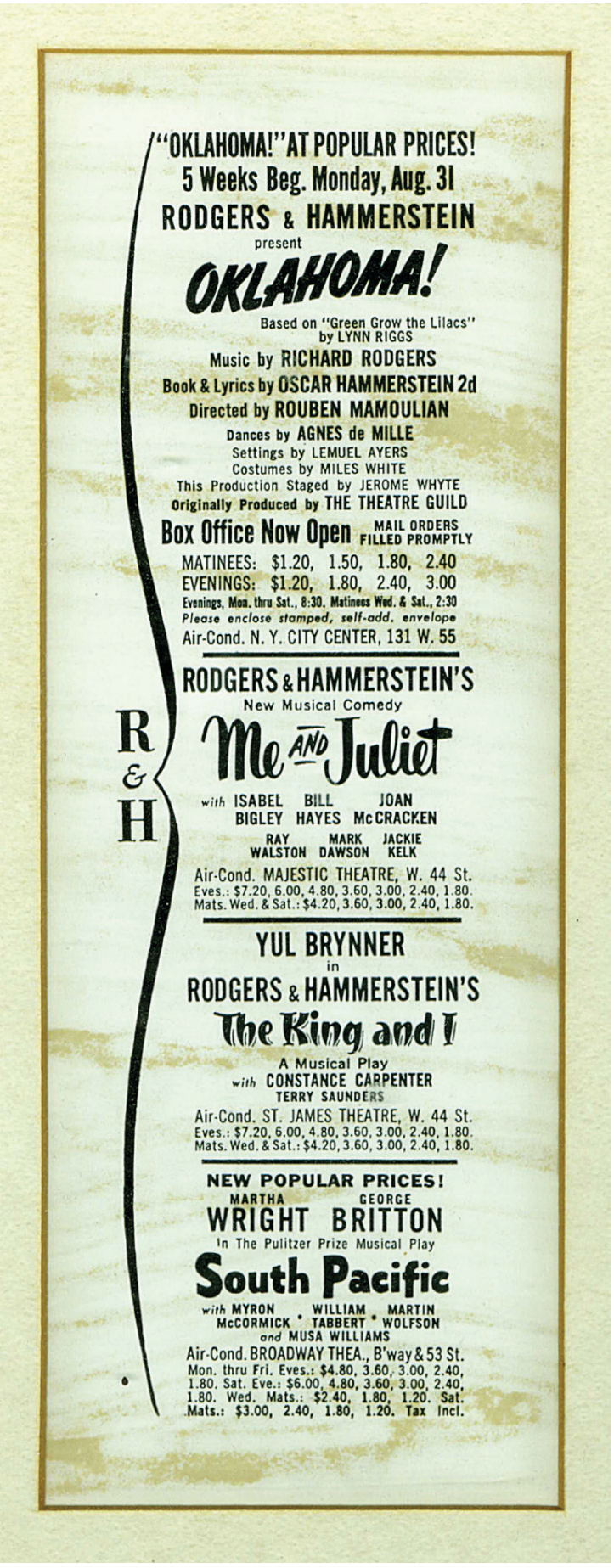
Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, all of these forms began to come together in new and interesting ways. But it was only when Rodgers and Hammerstein got together that the more serious, artistic, and integrated form known as the "book musical" came into being.

THE BOOK MUSICAL

In 1943, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II collaborated for the first time on *Oklahoma!*, widely considered to be the first book musical. *Oklahoma!* told a narrative story with more depth and more dimensional characters than seen before. It also fully integrated dialogue, song, music, and dance to tell the story. During this first collaboration, the writers agreed on the following:

- The songs would grow out of the plot.
- Spectacle and dance would only occur when appropriate to the story.
- The characters would grow and develop as the play unfolds.

While this might seem fairly standard to contemporary theater audiences, this was a revolutionary approach to musical theater writing in 1943. However, Rodgers and Hammerstein were willing to take this risk. Hammerstein explains:



Rodgers and Hammerstein Four Show Ad. Photo courtesy of Rodgers & Hammerstein, an Imagem company.

"We both realized that such a course was experimental, amounting to almost a breach of an implied contract with a musical comedy audience. I cannot say truthfully that we were worried by the risk. Once we made decisions, everything seemed to work right and we had the inner confidence people feel when they have adopted the direct and honest approach to a problem."

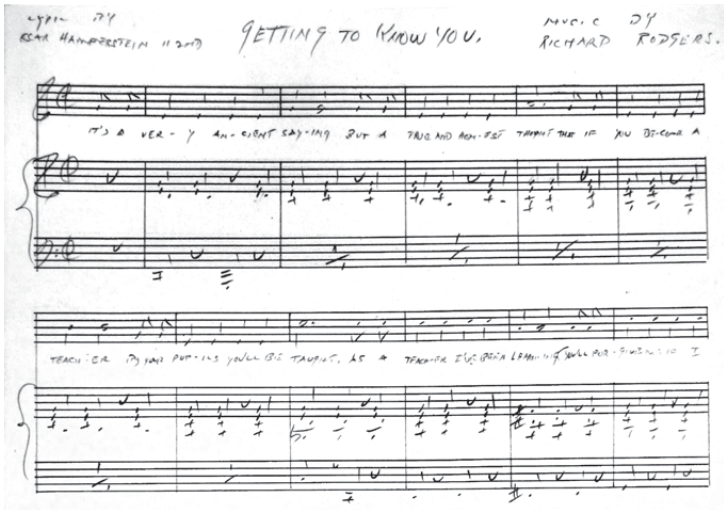
Their risk-taking paid off when *Oklahoma!* opened to standing ovations and awed crowds who had never seen a musical quite like it. Many musical historians consider this production the beginning of the golden age of musical theater. The team followed this breakthrough show with many others, including *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS

At its best, the book musical seamlessly integrates elements of music, theater, and dance. The following section looks at the building blocks of these elements more specifically, and how Rodgers and Hammerstein worked with them when they collaborated.

Music

When they began their collaboration, Rodgers and Hammerstein decided to write differently than they had with their previous collaborators. Going forward it was decided that Hammerstein would write lyrics to the songs first, and then Rodgers would put music to them; an approach they both preferred. Working this way would allow Rodgers to base the type of music he wrote on Hammerstein's lyrics, assuring that the music would be informed by the plot and the characters' actions, mood, and emotions as they organically occurred in the story.



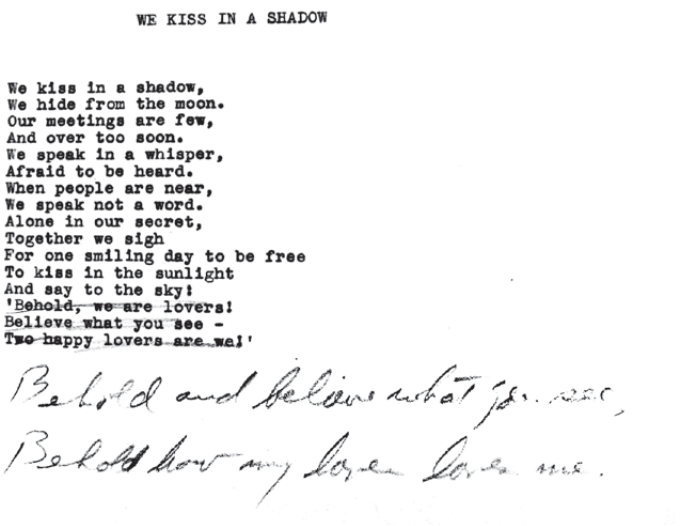
Richard Rodgers handwritten sheet music for *The King and I* song "Getting to Know You." Photo courtesy of Rodgers & Hammerstein, an Imagem company.

- **Score:** the written melodies and musical notations that are sung by the performers and played by the orchestra
- **Composer:** the person who writes the score and decides how to tell the story through music
- **Lyrics:** the words of the songs that are used to move the story forward and provide insight into a character's actions, motivations, and emotions
- **Lyricist:** the person who writes the lyrics
- **Orchestrator:** the person who enhances the composer's score with specific musical parts for different instruments that will comprise the orchestra

Theater

In addition to the spoken dialogue, in a book musical the lyrics and music don't just entertain, they move the story forward, dramatize pivotal moments in the plot, and like Shakespeare's soliloquies, reveal the character's inner thoughts, feelings, and motivations. It is also important to note that the integration of spoken dialogue, music, and lyrics provided an excellent platform for Rodgers and Hammerstein to explore more serious themes in their work than was possible in early types of musical theater.

- **Libretto:** the "book" of the musical; the full text that includes all the dialogue and lyrics
- **Librettist:** the writer of the libretto/book



WE KISS IN A SHADOW

We kiss in a shadow,
We hide from the moon.
Our meetings are few,
And over too soon.
We speak in a whisper,
Afraid to be heard.
When people are near,
We speak not a word.
Alone in our secret,
Together we sigh
For one smiling day to be free
To kiss in the sunlight
And say to the sky!
'Behold, we are lovers!
Believe what you see -
Two happy lovers are we!'

Behold and believe what you see,
Behold how my lover loves me.

Oscar Hammerstein's typed lyrics for The *King and I* song "We Kiss in a Shadow." Photo courtesy of the Rodgers & Hammerstein, an Imagem company.

Dance

Jerome Robbins was a classically trained ballet dancer who was emerging as a successful Broadway choreographer when he was approached by Rodgers and Hammerstein to choreograph *The King and I*, and specifically, the "Small House of Uncle Thomas" ballet. Robbins was faced with the challenge of telling a crucial part of the play's story using a form of dance he had no experience with. Robbins set about researching and learning as much as he could about Siamese dance. He began by viewing sculptures and reading books on Asian arts and theater. He couldn't find much about Siamese dance, so he explored Asian dances from neighboring countries like Cambodia and Laos. He began working with a trained classical Cambodian dancer in order to learn the specifics of the style. He then held intense sessions with his dance ensemble in order to pass on these techniques. He initially struggled to choreograph in this distinct style that was so foreign to him and his dancers. It took some encouragement from Rodgers who advised him to "use the Siamese movement, but don't become a slave to it." Ultimately, he succeeded in fusing his own storytelling background and choreographic style with the traditional form in order to create a unique, evocative, and compelling ballet that serves the story and has become an iconic part of musical theater history.

- **Choreography:** the dances and movements the choreographer creates and the performers perform that tell aspects of the story and heighten the emotions of a song
- **Choreographer:** the person who creates the dances and physical movements the performers do in the show

Putting it Together

Once the musical has been written the group of collaborators expands to include all of the people who bring the written work to life on the stage. In the case of LCT's production of *The King and I,* this is a group of over 100 people! Some of these roles include:

Christopher Vo and company in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *The King and I*. Photo by Paul Kolnik.

- **Director:** the person who oversees all aspects of the production, including coaching the performers, staging the scenes, and integrating all the musical, dance, and design elements into one coherent whole
- **Musical Director:** the person who teaches the performers the music and works with the composer, orchestrator, and conductor
- **Performers:** the actors, singers, and dancers who play the characters in the show
- **Conductor:** the person who conducts the orchestra
- **Orchestra:** the musicians who play the score during the show
- **Designers:** the people responsible for designing the sets, props, costumes, lighting, and sound

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Musical Moments: Writing Activity

Have students choose a novel, play, film or short story and follow the steps outlined below:

- Choose three moments they would musicalize if they were adapting it into a musical.
- Decide what types of songs they would use in those moments (fast, slow, romantic, dramatic, comic, etc.).
- Decide which characters in the story would sing the songs.
- Decide if there would be dancing in the songs, and if so, what style of dance.

After students have gone through this process, have them choose one musical moment and experiment with writing a song. This can be done by:

- Using a song they already know and rewriting the lyrics to fit their story's musicalized moment.
- Creating a spoken word piece that connects to their musicalized moment.

Have students share their musical moments with the class.

The Book Musical: Viewing Activity

Before the performance, review the criteria listed on page 23 in this resource guide that Rodgers and Hammerstein agreed upon when they began collaborating, and which became the foundation of the book musical.

As the students are watching the performance, have them find one example of each criteria to report back on after the show.

To Explore:

- Watch an interview (or read the transcript of the interview) journalist Mike Wallace conducted with Oscar Hammerstein in 1958 in which he discusses race, sentimentality, politics, and religion.
  http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/multimedia/video/2008/wallace/hammerstein_oscar_t.html
- Read Laurence Maslon's essay "Elements of the Musical" on the *Broadway the American Musical* website, and explore the resources available on that site.
  http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/essays/elements-of-the-musical/
- Read an interview with Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein about collaborating.
  http://www.rnh.com/news/798/THE-ART-OF-COLLABORATION-Rodgers-Hammerstein-Reflect

Common Core Connections:

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

Kelli O'Hara as Anna Leonowens and Ken Watanabe as The King in Lincoln Center Theater's production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *The King and I*. Photo by Paul Kolnik.

BEHIND THE SCENES: REVIVING A CLASSIC

Revival: a new production of an old play or similar work
Classic: serving as a standard of excellence; of recognized value

MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY

INSIGHTS FROM THE CREATIVE TEAM

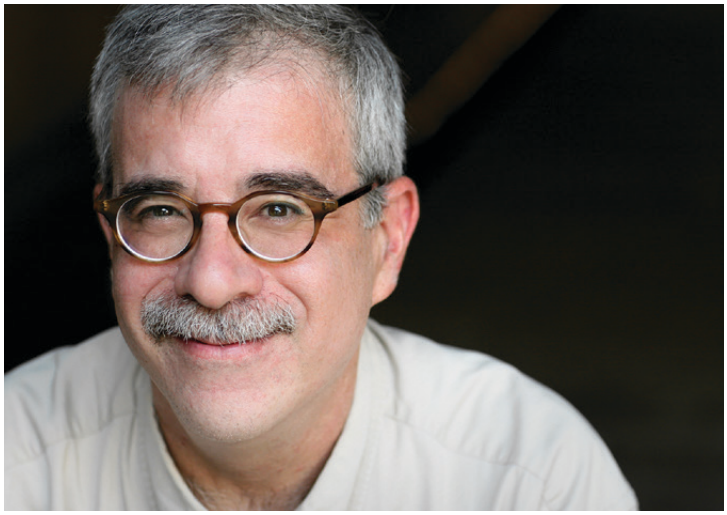

Photo of Ira Weitzman by Laura Marie Duncan.

Ira Weitzman, the Mindich Musical Theater Associate Producer at Lincoln Center Theater, has played an integral part in bringing this revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I* to the stage. Weitzman has spent a lifetime developing and producing musicals, new and old. From 1978 to the present, in collaboration with André Bishop, he developed the premieres of musicals by such artists as Lynn Ahrens, Jason Robert Brown, William Finn, Stephen Flaherty, Adam Guettel, Michael John LaChiusa, James Lapine, Craig Lucas, Terrence McNally, Joshua Schmidt, Stephen Sondheim, John Weidman, Alfred Uhry and many others, as well as notable revivals of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* and *South Pacific*. In addition, he developed the original productions of *Violet*, *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*, *The Spitfire Grill* and *My Life With Albertine* as well as the revival of Moss Hart and Irving Berlin's *As Thousands Cheer*. He served as the Director of the Musical Theater Program at Playwrights Horizons, was the Artistic Director of the WBAI Free Music Store, City Center's Encores!, and Producer of Lincoln Center's American Songbook concert series. In 2009, Mr. Weitzman received the Lucille Lortel Award for Sustained Excellence Off-Broadway.

Before rehearsals began for *The King and I*, Weitzman shared insights into the process of reviving this classic

musical.

After spending over thirty years in the musical theater industry, much of that time developing new musicals, what is it like being a part of this revival of *The King and I*?

I was raised on Rodgers and Hammerstein's original cast albums as a kid. They gave me a sense of the possibilities of what "grown-up" musical theater could accomplish. LCT's Artistic Director André Bishop and I share that early Rodgers and Hammerstein influence. In the 1990s we produced a beautiful, revelatory revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's second musical, *Carousel*, directed by Nicholas Hytner in the Vivian Beaumont Theater. In 2008, we staged the first Broadway revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's fourth show *South Pacific*, originally done in 1949. It was a distinguished and gorgeous production directed by Bartlett Sher. This year, in 2015, we are completing a trilogy of Rodgers and Hammerstein revivals with *The King and I*. Our approach, particularly under the direction of Bart Sher, is to revive these shows with as fresh an eye as we would apply to a new show, while being reverent of the material. The amazing thing about Rodgers and Hammerstein is that their work is still relevant and resonant to today's audiences.

Can you explain a bit about how you've been working with the artistic team to prepare for this production?

In preparation for rehearsals of *The King and I*, we held two workshops. The first was a week spent with actors reading the script of the show in order to examine the text itself. It was the first time Kelli O'Hara, who is playing Anna Leonowens, and Ken Watanabe as the King had the opportunity to explore the material. Though they have completely different backgrounds we were excited that they have a real chemistry together as their characters should have.

The other workshop was held to stage Jerome Robbins's second act ballet (and the centerpiece of the show), "The Small House of Uncle Thomas." We gathered twenty dancers, two singers, a pianist, a terrific percussionist, as well as our choreographer Christopher Gattelli and director Bart Sher to adapt Robbins's choreography from the traditional proscenium staging to the three quarters thrust stage of the Beaumont. In a thrust stage such as ours, the challenge is always to present the work so it can be seen from all angles since the audience virtually surrounds the stage. It was a thrilling and productive ten days spent working on an iconic musical theater set-piece.

There are many other things that go into the preparation for a production of a big musical such as *The King and I*. There are months of auditions to find the 51 actors who will make up the company including children to play all the princes and princesses; dancers and singers for the ballet and ensemble, as well as the principal characters. We also spent time hiring the best musicians for the live orchestra of 29 players under the musical direction of Ted Sperling. Many meetings were held with Bart's design team: Michael Yeargan (sets), Catherine Zuber (costumes), Donald Holder (lights) and Scott Lehrer (sound). Each of these people have departments who will carry out the work that ends up onstage and a great deal of time and planning goes into their preparation and design. Ultimately the show needs to run like a well-oiled machine made up of hundreds of

people and that takes a lot of coordination.

Have there been any changes made to the script and/or score? How has the team gone about making the changes?

There's a lot of material that was cut from *The King and I* before it originally opened on Broadway in 1951. The first performance out-of-town was four hours long! Most of the cuts were for the best but there are lines here and there that we want to try to incorporate. We combed through every draft of the script to see if there was useful material that could serve to deepen the characters and the themes of the show. For example, we discovered some lines between the King and the Kralahome (the Prime Minister) which detail Siam's place in Asia at the time. It gave the King an importance politically that we thought might help the audience understand Siam in the 1860's.

The King and I 1951 Broadway Sheet Music. Photo courtesy of Rodgers & Hammerstein, an Imagem company.

There's also a fun exchange from Margaret Landon's book (*Anna and the King of Siam*, on which the musical is based) between Anna and the King when they first meet. It's a little sparring match back and forth to set up the relationship of these two strong-willed characters. The King asks Anna quite bluntly how old she is. "One hundred and fifty three," she replies! "What year were you born?" he quickly retorts. She responds with the correct year without missing a beat. For some reason that dialogue, which is also in the film version of the musical, was omitted in the stage script and we are aiming to reinstate it. Who knows if the added lines will remain in the production after all is said and done, however it's an important part of the process of discovery to include some of the extra material as we approach rehearsals.

You've said before that one of the first musicals you fell in love with as a kid was Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*. Do you remember your first experience with *The King and I*?

I fell in love with *South Pacific* through the original cast recording. I first saw *The King and I* as a movie on television. It used to air regularly (albeit cut to shreds to fit in commercials and such) on the afternoon program that I watched when I got home from elementary school. They seemed to recycle the same movies so by the time I was in middle school I had seen *The King and I* at least a dozen times! It always made me cry at

the end. I was so moved by Anna's acceptance of the King's greatness, humanity, and her love for him as he lay dying. It got me every time. I first saw it onstage in the 1970s Broadway revival with Yul Brynner who by then had "trademarked" the role. I still cried at the end.

Could you share some thoughts on why Rodgers and Hammerstein were such influential (and successful) musical theater writers? And why their work is still so relevant today?

Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote popular musicals with serious themes which have appealed to people of all generations. That is certainly true of the three shows of theirs we have produced. *Carousel* is about spousal abuse and the importance of community to the individual. *South Pacific* is a love story set in World War II against a background of racism. *The King and I* is about the modernization of an ancient culture as it takes its place among the other nations of the world. These important themes are conveyed by compelling stories with great scores that entertain as well as enlighten. That is what makes them relevant to so many people today.

Richard Rodgers was an incomparable melodist whose distinctive harmonies seem to speak unconsciously to the human heart. Oscar Hammerstein II was an innovator whose work helped shape the modern musical by integrating the book, songs, dance, and direction all in service of a cohesive story. Their influence while they were alive and writing was pervasive throughout America and the world not only on audiences but on the creators of musical theater as well. Their legacy continues by the huge number of performances of their shows that are produced each year professionally, as well in community theaters and schools.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

> **"In order to live up to the scale of its ambition, we have to go both backward and forward in time. It's like having one foot in the past as deeply as we can, one foot in the present, and our eyes looking out as far ahead as we can to see how it resonates."** BARTLETT SHER, DIRECTOR OF *THE KING AND I*

Back in Time: Design Activity

Brainstorm

As a class, brainstorm and create a list outlining what makes something a *classic*, and have students provide examples of what they consider to be classic pieces of literature, music, art, film, etc.

Research

Have students choose a classic story they have read (i.e. *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, etc.) and research basics about the author, the time period, the setting, and the political, social, and cultural context of the story.

Explore

As a class, read the interview with *The King and I* director Bartlett Sher, costume designer Catherine Zuber, and scenic designer Michael Yeargan, found in the Lincoln Center Theater Review. http://issuu.com/lctheater/docs/tki.forissuu/8 Using the following quote from the article as a starting point, have students answer the questions that follow about their story:

> "From my point of view, setting parameters for the design really had to do with how to represent the key questions in the piece that were most resonant at the time it was written in the 1950s and what questions are most resonant now." (Bartlett Sher)

- What key questions and themes does your classic story explore?
- Which of those themes are most relevant today?
- What visual images come to mind when you think about the story, questions, and themes?
- What colors, shapes, and symbols do you see?
- What sounds do you hear?

Design

Have students choose to focus on either costume design or scenic design and do the following:

- **Costumes:** Find three pieces of visual or aural research that they feel captures the essence of their story and its themes and create a page of sketches and notes detailing specific costume ideas for at least three of the main characters.
- **Scenic Design:** Find three pieces of visual research or music that they feel captures the essence of their story and its themes and create a page of sketches and notes detailing ideas for the furniture, props, and scenic pieces in the play.

Present

Have students share their research and design ideas with the class.

To Explore:

- Read an interview with Ira Weitzman about developing musicals on Playbill.com online. http://www.playbill.com/features/article/a-life-in-the-theatre-ira-weitzman-155614
- Watch an interview with set designer Michael Yeargan about the process of designing for the theater. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY7D9BkKhW8

Common Core Connections:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

EXPLORING THE ISSUES

"Great classics come back to us when we need them the most." BARTLETT SHER, DIRECTOR OF *THE KING AND I*

THEMATIC ELEMENTS

Below you will find thematic elements, discussion questions, and activities that can be used to launch a classroom exploration of *The King and I's* themes and prompt classroom conversations about how this play resonates with students' personal lives and experiences.

LEADERSHIP AND POWER

"That man has power, and he can use it for you or against you." (Captain Orton, Act I)

- What are the qualities of a strong leader? What qualities do you think were expected in a strong leader in the 1860s?
- Do you think that King Mongkut is a strong leader? Why or why not?
- Do you think Anna is a powerful woman? Why or why not?
- What internal conflicts does King Mongkut have with power and leadership? What external conflicts and challenges does he face?
- What conflicts do Anna and King Mongkut have with each other surrounding power?

MODERNIZATION VS. TRADITION

"He wish to be a new-blood king with Western ideas, but it is hard for him." (Lady Thiang, Act I)

- In what ways is King Mongkut progressive in his ideas and thinking? In what ways is he bound to tradition?
- Why might King Mongkut and the Kralahome want to maintain Siamese traditions and customs? Why is it important for Siam to make changes?
- In what ways does Anna challenge King Mongkut and the Kralahome's traditional views?
- What kind of ruler do you think the King's father was? Why?
- What kind of ruler do you think Chulalongkorn will be? Why?

SLAVERY

"I do not know anything but that you are my servant." (King Mongkut, Act I)

- How does King Mongkut feel about slavery in America? How does he seem to feel about slavery in Siam?
- How does King Mongkut treat his royal wives and servants? What does he expect from them? Why?
- How does King Mongkut initially treat Anna? How does this change throughout the play?
- What are Anna's views on human dignity and the rights of the women in the palace?
- How does "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" ballet illuminate the issue of slavery in the play? Why do you think the creators used dance to explore this issue?

A WOMAN'S PLACE IN SOCIETY

"A woman is a female who is human, designed for pleasing man, the human male." (King Mongkut, Act II)

- How would you define feminism?
- Is Anna a feminist? What principles of feminism does she uphold and how does she show her interest in the rights of women?
- Where and how does she depart from your idea of feminism?
- How do Lady Thiang and Tuptim view their roles in the royal palace? How do they view Anna?

FRIENDSHIP DESPITE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

"Haven't you noticed, suddenly I'm bright and breezy? Because of all the beautiful and new things I'm learning about you." (Anna, Act I)

- How do the following pairs of characters find common ground despite coming from different cultures? In what ways do they help each other grow and learn?
  - Anna and King Mongkut
  - Anna and Lady Thiang
  - Anna and Tuptim
  - Louis Leonowens and Prince Chulalongkorn

Jon Viktor Corpus and Jake Lucas in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *The King and I*.
Photo by Paul Kolnik.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Issues Investigation: Critical Analysis Activity

Before the performance, provide students with a copy of the handout on page 39 in this guide and have them choose one item from each of the following lists:

Characters

Anna
King Mongkut
The Kralahome
Lady Thiang
Tuptim
Prince Chulalongkorn

Issues

Leadership and power
Modernization vs. tradition
Slavery
A woman's place in society
Friendship despite cultural differences

As they watch the performance, students should look for the different ways their character is challenged by the issue they are focusing on. They can write notes on their handout during intermission or directly after the performance. Students will be looking and listening for:

- What their character *says* about the issue.
- What their characters *thinks* and *feels* about the issue.
- What their character *does* about the issue; the actions they take.
- What the other *characters* say about their chosen character in relation to this issue.

Words of Wisdom: Close Reading/Poetry Activity

Provide students with a copy of Malala Yousafzai's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech found in the Lincoln Center Theater Review. http://issuu.com/lctheater/docs/tki.forissuu/13

Read

Read the speech aloud as a class, assigning different students to each paragraph, and discuss the content of the speech.

Discuss

- What do we learn about Malala Yousafzai in this speech?
- What changes does she hope to see happen in her lifetime? What is she fighting for?
- How does her speech relate to *The King and I*?

Choose

Provide students with a blank piece of paper and have them choose and write three words from each paragraph of the speech that are meaningful to them.

Write

Using the words on their paper, have students create a poem or spoken word piece that explores the issues the Malala Yousafzai discusses in her speech. Have students share their pieces with the class.

Reflect

Read the New York Times Op-Ed piece by Nicholas Kristof, *What's So Scary About Smart Girls?* that *The King and I* director Bartlett Sher drew upon for inspiration and discuss how it connects to both the musical and Malala Yousafzai's speech. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/opinion/sunday/kristof-whats-so-scary-about-smart-girls.html?_r=0

To Explore:

- Explore the life and work of Malala Yousafzai on her organization's website. http://www.malala.org/
- Explore a timeline of significant moments in the struggle for women's rights in the United States on the *Annenberg Classroom* website.
  http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/Files/Documents/Timelines/WomensRightstimeline.pdf

Common Core Connections:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

ISSUE INVESTIGATION WORK SHEET

CHARACTER: _____

ISSUE: _____

What does my character *say* about the issue?
What does my character *think* or *feel* about the issue?
What does my character *do* about the issue? What actions do they take?
What do the other characters *say* about my character in relation to this issue?

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