



WALNUT STREET THEATRE

**A FUNNY THING
HAPPENED
ON THE WAY TO THE
FORUM**

STUDY GUIDE

SHOW SYNOPSIS

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM IS A NONSTOP LAUGH FEST IN WHICH PSEUDOLUS, A CRAFTY SLAVE, STRUGGLES TO WIN THE HAND OF A BEAUTIFUL, BUT SLOW-WITTED, COURTESAN NAMED PHILIA FOR HIS YOUNG MASTER, HERO, IN EXCHANGE FOR FREEDOM. THE PLOT TWISTS AND TURNS WITH CASES OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY, SLAMMING DOORS AND A SHOWGIRL OR TWO.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE THE SHOW

1. Have you ever seen a live play before? What is the difference between a play and a musical?
2. What do you think “A Funny Thing Happened on the way to the Forum” will be about?
3. Are comedies usually fast paced or slow?
4. What do you think will be the “funny” thing that happened on the way to the forum?



AFTER THE SHOW

1. What was your favorite part of “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum?”
2. Who was your favorite character? Why?
3. If you could play any of the characters, who would you choose? Why?
4. Do you think the speed of the play is an important aspect of telling the story?
5. How does the music of Forum fit into the story? Do the songs advance the plot? What do they contribute to the show as a whole? Comedy? Character development? Plot points? Explain.



THEATRE 101



Ever wondered how to put on a play?

There are many different elements that go into putting a show up on its feet. Please review the following with you students!

PLAYWRIGHT The playwright writes the script.

DIRECTOR The director is in charge of orchestrating the entirety of the production. They lead the actors, designers, and production crew to put on a show.

COSTUME What the actors wear during the show.

SCENERY Everything on stage (*except props*) used to represent the place at which action is occurring.

PROPS All physical items on stage with the exception of the scenery. This includes lamps, chairs, pens, paper, books, and more!

LIGHTS Stage lights illuminate the actors so that they look their best. The colors used, focus of the light, and amount of lighting can really set the mood and environment of a scene.

SOUND Everything that you hear during a performance that does not come from the actors.

ACTORS The actors are the people that perform the show on-stage.

AUDIENCE The lucky people that get to watch the show. New to being an audience member? Follow these rules and you will be a natural!

AUDIENCE RULES

- ◆ Unlike a movie, the actors are performing in front of you. They can see everything that you do. Talking, sleeping, poking your neighbor, or making noise during the performance distracts the actors and others around you.
- ◆ Don't bring electronics to the performance. The use of cell phones, cameras, computers, tablets, and video game devices are **STRICTLY PROHIBITED**.
- ◆ Use your better judgment on when to laugh, clap, and/or cry during the performance. But don't forget to clap at the end of the show!
- ◆ Stay in your seat during the performance.
- ◆ Make sure you go to the bathroom *before* the show starts.

DRAW IT!

A *Funny Thing happened on the way to the Forum* is called a **farce**. In theatre, a **farce** is a comedy that aims at entertaining the audience through situations that are highly exaggerated, extravagant, and thus improbable. Farce is also characterized by physical humor, the use of deliberate absurdity or nonsense, and broadly stylized performances

Draw a picture of your favorite scene where the characters from Forum used physical humor to tell the story.

STUDENT ACTIVITY: PARTY QUIRKS

Try this fun improvisation game to explore the creation and the comedy of exaggerated characters.

- Ask for a volunteer to be the person having the party—the host—and for 3 or 4 other students to be guests.
- The rest of the class sits in a group as the audience.
- Have the host wait outside the classroom, while the rest of the class chooses fun character quirks for the guests to portray. The quirks can be anything: a profession (cowboy, doctor, astronaut), a super power (X-ray vision), a famous person (Lady Gaga, President Obama), or a physical quirk (someone with poison ivy or narcolepsy). They must portray their character with their body, voice and interactions with the host and other guests.
- Once each guest knows what their quirk is, invite the host back in and instruct him/her to set up the space for the party. One by one, each guest arrives and interacts with the host and one another. The host should ask questions and try to figure out what their guests' quirks are.

As the game goes on, the host should try and guess each guest's quirk. If he/she guesses correctly, the audience applauds and that guest must improvise a reason to leave the party. Once all the guests have left the round is over.



DERIVATION AND Meaning of Names

Proteans: taking on different forms. From the Greek sea god Proteus who could change his shape at will.

Pseudolus: from the Greek pseudo meaning false.

Domina: from the Latin dominus, to be lord and master.

Errorius: from the Latin erroneus meaning wandering.

Geminae: named for the constellation twins in the Northern Hemisphere.

Marcus Lycus: from the Latin licentia meaning dissoluteness; lacking moral discipline.

Hysterium: from Greek hystera (womb); a nervous disease of the womb.

Panacea: from Greek panakeia (all healing); remedy for all diseases.

Philia: from Greek philos, loving.

Senex: from the Latin senectus meaning old.

Tintinabula: from the Latin tinnire, to ring.

Vibrata: from the Latin vibraire, to vibrate.

Miles: from Latin milia for the number 1000.

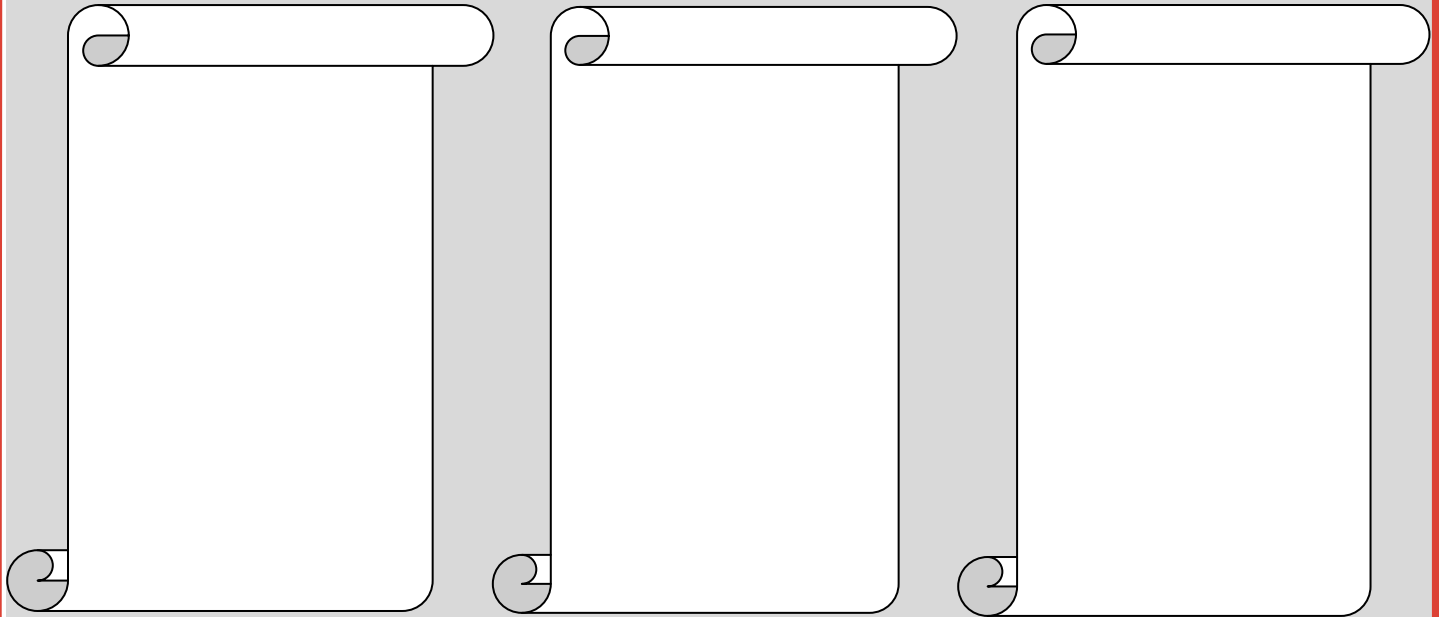
Gloriosus: from Latin gloria; glory.



STUDENT ACTIVITY: THAT'S MY JAM!

Unlike some other musicals, the songs in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* serve to inform the audience about the characters rather than assist in moving the plot forward. Songs like "Free," "Lovely," and "I'm Calm" all reveal information about the personalities and inner hopes and dreams of the characters who sing them. What contemporary songs might also help to reveal information about some of the characters in this musical?

Ask your students to identify songs and specific lyrics that mirror the personality traits of 3 of the characters in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and fill out in the scrolls below!

Three blank scroll templates arranged horizontally. Each scroll is a white rectangle with rounded corners and a small circular tab at the top left and bottom left, suggesting it can be rolled up.

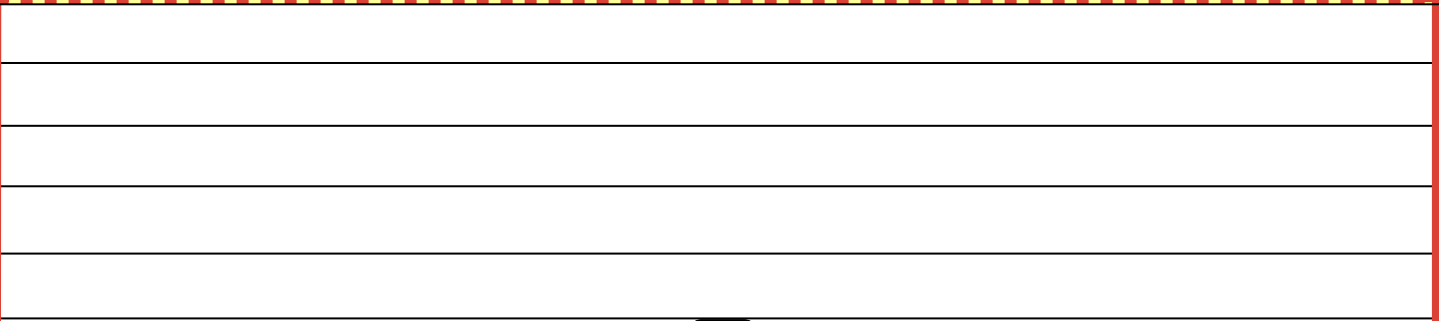
STUDENT ACTIVITY: BONUS

What is your personal theme song? Choose a song and share it with the class.

Explain: What does this song express about you as a person?

Which of your qualities does it reflect?

How does this song show who are you (rhythm, lyrics, sound)?

Five horizontal lines for student writing, stacked vertically. Each line is a simple black line on a white background.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

“LOVE I HEAR”

Composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim has said musical comedies require songs made funny by character and situation—not necessarily by witty and clever lyrics. In *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Sondheim thinks his funniest songs have simple lyrics and a musical style to match the character singing. Do the following exercise to explore how musical style and intonation connect to character and story:

- Have students stand in a circle.
- Choose one student to start.
- Have each student walk up to another student and SING the lyric “Have you done the dishes?” in a musical style and melody of their choice.
- The student being asked the question must SING the lyric “Yes, I did the dishes” or “No, I did not do the dishes” in the SAME musical style and melody the question was asked.
- The students switch places.
- The student to start the duet takes the other student’s spot in the circle.
- The student who has lost a spot finds a NEW student to sing to.
- The student must SING the lyric “Have you done the dishes?” in a NEW musical style and melody.
- Repeat until all students have participated

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What does Sondheim mean by the sentence, “Farces are express trains; musicals are locals”? Why is the speed or pace of a play important? Does it affect how the story is told? How? Are comedies usually fast-paced or slow? What about tragedies? Why do you think this is?



Stephen Sondheim is one of the most prominent composers and lyricists in twentieth-century musical theatre. In addition to *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, he wrote the music and lyrics for many famous plays including *West Side Story*, *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Gypsy*. Here’s some of what he has to say about *Forum*, one of his earliest works:

“Farce is a play with broadly drawn characters who find themselves in uncomfortable situations which, when seemingly solved, lead to further and more uncomfortable situations. As in every play, the situations arise from character, but characters in a farce, like those in a traditional musical comedy, are one-dimensional, one adjective-one noun personalities: the conniving slave, the lecherous husband, the braggart warrior.”

*Farces are express trains; musicals are locals. Savoring moments can be effective while a farce is gathering steam, but deadly once the train gets going. That’s why the songs in *Forum* are bunched together in the first half of the first act, where there is more exposition than action, and then become scarcer and scarcer, until eventually in the last twenty minutes before the *Finale* there are no songs at all.”*

TIPS ON HOW TO GET A LAUGH

LIKE THE SHOW? LET US KNOW!
SEND LETTERS OR DRAWINGS TO:
WALNUT STREET THEATRE
ATTN: EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
825 WALNUT ST.
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107



Know What’s funny.
Have no fear.
Be Precise.
Encourage Playing.
Never Expect A Laugh.



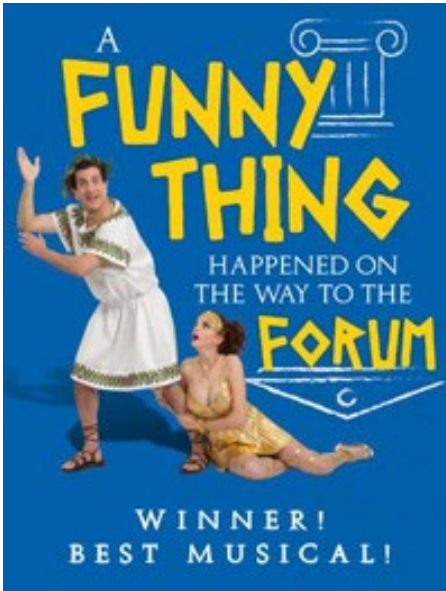
WALNUT STREET THEATRE

BIOGRAPHY

Walnut Street Theatre has the unique distinction of being the oldest, continuously operating theatre in the English-speaking world, having served Philadelphia audiences for over 200 years!

Today, under the direction of Producing Artistic Director Bernard Havard, Walnut Street Theatre is in its 35th season as a self-producing, non-profit theatre company. Walnut Street Theatre continues to entertain and enlighten diverse audiences with high quality theatrical programming. With more than 50,000 subscribers, the Walnut is also the most subscribed theatre company in the world!

Last season, **172,000** children and adults were impacted by the Walnut's Education Programs: including our theatre school with classes for kids and adults, Camp Walnut, Our Touring Outreach Program to local schools and our artist in residency programs.



WALNUT STREET THEATRE EDUCATION STAFF

FUN FACTS

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION	THOMAS QUINN
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION	ASHLEY KERNS
EDUCATION PROGRAMS ASSOCIATE	ELIZABETH ELLIS
EDUCATION PRODUCTION ASSOCIATE	STEPHANIE SINTEFF
RESIDENT TEACHING ARTIST	JASMINE HAMMOND
EDUCATION APPRENTICE	AINE LAFFERTY
ACTING APPRENTICES	HALLIE HARGUS
	SARAH OWENS
	LADARREUN TAYLOR
	DANIEL WISNIEWSKI

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM'S ORIGINAL 1962 BROADWAY RUN, WON SEVERAL TONY AWARDS, INCLUDING BEST MUSICAL AND BEST BOOK!

CREATIVE TEAM

DIRECTOR	FRANK FERRANTE
CHOREOGRAPHY	MICHELLE GAUDETTE
MUSIC DIRECTION	JOHN DANIELS
MUSIC	STEPHEN SONDHEIM
LYRICS	STEPHEN SONDHEIM
BOOK	BURT SHEVELOVE LARRY GELBART

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