

Name: _____

Creating Choreography for Musical Theatre

This worksheet was created to accompany Episode 1 of Ovation Academy: Classes with Katy, and is designed to be used as a guide when creating your own original choreography. A sample of a completed worksheet based on the choreography in the video is included at the end. Feel free to refer to this if you need an example of how you could answer a question.

Use the steps in the video and the questions below to help you along as you create, and most importantly, **have fun!**

Name of Musical: _____

Name of Song: _____

STEP 1: Read the Script

What is the **setting**? (time period and location)

This show takes place _____

Who are the **main characters**?

The main characters are _____

What is the **plot**?

The story is about _____

When in the show does the song take place?

Right **before** this song, _____

Right **after** this song, _____

STEP 2: Listen to the Song

Who is onstage?

The characters onstage in this number are _____

What **part of the story** is it telling?

The part of the story that this song is telling is _____

What is its **purpose** in the show?

The purpose of this song in the show is _____

STEP 3: Research

What **cultural or period-specific styles** are this story rooted in?

The culture(s) and time period(s) that influence this story are _____

What are some important **characteristics of this style** of movement?

In this style of movement, it is important to remember that _____

STEP 4: Listen Again

What is the **tempo** of this song? Is it slow? Fast? Somewhere in between?

The tempo of this song is _____

What is the **time signature**? 4/4? 3/4? 6/8? 2/4?

The time signature of this song is _____

Are there any specific lyrics or beats I want to **emphasize** or accent musically?

Lyrics and/or beats that I want to make sure I emphasize include _____

What are the different **sections** in this song? (introduction, verse, chorus, bridge, instrumental)

The sections in this song, in order, are _____

STEP 5: Get moving!

Now it's time to get on your feet and try out some ideas! Try putting together a few sequences or combinations of moves, inspired by your research and everything you know about the song and the show. If you come up with anything you really like, be sure to write down some notes or record a video of yourself dancing so you don't forget it! You can use the space below to jot down any notes or draw pictures to help you remember.

STEP 6: Create pictures

If you're choreographing a number with more than one person, take some time to think about the **pictures**, or *tableaux*, you want to create onstage.

Where should the **focus** be during this number? Where do I want the audience to look?

(Remember that this might change at different times during the song!)

When the song **begins**, the focus should be on _____

In the **middle** of the song, the focus should be on _____

At the **end** of the song, the focus should be on _____

How can I create **depth** onstage? Can I put people on different levels so they are higher or lower? Can I put some people farther forward and some people more towards the back?

With the pictures in the song, I can create depth by _____

Feel free to use the blank space below to draw a few diagrams of ideas for pictures or formations for your number. Remember, the most important thing is to **tell the story**. Make sure the pictures you create help the audience understand the story and don't make them more confused!

STEP 7: Set It (Sort Of)

You're almost there! Now that you've done all of that background work, you're finally ready to make your plan. It's finally time to start deciding which of the combinations or sequences you created in step 5 you want to use and where you want to put them in the song, setting all of your pictures, and coming up with ways to connect it all together and make it flow. It's also okay to repeat moves! One trick that you can use is to repeat the same move, but in a different formation or stage picture.

Once you have a pretty good idea of what you want to do, make sure you record it in some way so you don't lose all of the hard work you've done so far. Do this in whatever way makes the most sense to you—you can write a list of notes, draw pictures or diagrams, or record a video of yourself.

Again, if you get lost, just remember that your job is to help **tell the story**. That's it! Don't feel like you have to make it too complicated or fancy. If the story is clear, you've done your job.

Finally, don't feel like you need to have it completely set in stone. **Have a plan, but be flexible!** You'll probably have to adjust things later to fit your actors' ability, to work better in the space you have, or just because you changed your mind, and that is perfectly okay. It's all part of the creative process.

I hope you had fun creating your own original choreography! I can't wait to see all your awesome work. Don't forget to **share your videos with us** so we can see what you've been working on!

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out at OvationTC@gmail.com, and I will get back to you as soon as I can.

Happy creating!

Katy

If you loved this activity...

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Take the choreography you created to the next level by teaching it to someone else! The best choreographers know how to explain it to someone else, and you only get better by practicing. If you want even more of a challenge, grab a couple family members and stage the number with multiple people. Now you can create those pictures you came up with in real life!

KEEP ON LEARNING

Every choreographer is unique, and the best way to learn is by hearing from lots of different ones. Here are a couple resources where you can listen to real Broadway choreographers talk about their process:

Hamilton choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler explains his use of choreographic themes: <https://youtu.be/VmYTsOrnWPO>

Wicked choreographer Wayne Cilento talks about needing to have a reason to dance and musical staging vs. choreography: <https://youtu.be/9LPISDN2ASA>

Newsies choreographer Christopher Gatelli discusses how character influences choreography and creating vocabulary: <https://youtu.be/a6j77q9ScAg>

Lion King resident dance supervisor Thea Barnes breaks down fusion of dance styles and transforming humans into animals through movement: <https://youtu.be/tc97XZLPAaA>

Annie: It's the Hard Knock Life, From Script to Stage - Quite a bit longer, but a fascinating documentary following the creative process of the most recent revival of Annie, with a lot of focus on choreography. Choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler offers an interesting look at how to create something entirely new within the framework of a classic, well-known story, and how to work through mistakes and frustrations to create a final product: <https://youtu.be/rYUHPe31dLY> (For choreography segments, start at 17:07, 30:10, 35:42, 40:12, 45:52, and 50:38)

Creating Choreography for Musical Theatre

SAMPLE

Name of Musical: **Moana Jr.**

Name of Song: **Where You Are (Part 1)**

STEP 1: Read the Script

What is the **setting**? (time period and location)

This show takes place **3,000 years ago in the islands of Polynesia.**

Who are the **main characters**?

The main characters are **Moana, the demigod Maui, Moana's father Chief Tui, Moana's mother Sina, Moana's grandmother Gramma Tala, the goddess Te Fiti, and the Chief Ancestors.**

What is the **plot**?

The story is about **Moana's journey across the ocean to find Maui and get him to restore the heart of Te Fiti in order to save her island of Motunui.**

When in the show does the song take place?

Right **before** this song, **Chief Tui and Sina catch Moana at the edge of the water and tell her that she needs to return to the village and to remember that she has a responsibility to her village as the next great Chief of Motunui.**

Right **after** this song, **Moana's friends Pua and Hei Hei enter and show her blackened coconuts because they are worried about what is happening to the island.**

STEP 2: Listen to the Song

Who is onstage?

The characters onstage in this number are **Moana, Chief Tui, Sina, and the villagers (including dancers and weavers).**

What **part of the story** is it telling?

The part of the story that this song is telling is **Chief Tui, Sina, and the villagers are teaching Moana about the culture and traditions of her island and why she is meant to stay there.**

What is its **purpose** in the show?

The purpose of this song in the show is **to convince Moana to stay on the island and focus on her responsibilities as the future Chief of Motunui and to not venture out onto the sea.**

STEP 3: Research

What **cultural or period-specific styles** are this story rooted in?

The culture(s) and time period(s) that influence this story are **traditional Polynesian dance forms.**

What are some important **characteristics of this style** of movement?

In this style of movement, it is important to remember that **the upper body remains still, with the neck and fingers long. Knees are bent, with the hips and arms moving fluidly to mimic the movement of the ocean, and feet stay connected to the floor. The hands tell the story and move with meaning, and the eyes follow the motion of the hands.**

STEP 4: Listen Again

What is the **tempo** of this song? Is it slow? Fast? Somewhere in between?

The tempo of this song is **somewhere in between fast and slow, with a steady, rhythmic beat.**

What is the **time signature**? 4/4? 3/4? 6/8? 2/4?

The time signature of this song is **4/4.**

Are there any specific lyrics or beats I want to **emphasize** or accent musically?

Lyrics and/or beats that I want to make sure I emphasize include **every time Chief Tui or the villagers say “make way,” as well as the downbeats on “we make” and “ha ha!”**

What are the different **sections** in this song? (introduction, verse, chorus, bridge, instrumental)

The sections in this song, in order, are **introduction, first verse, and first chorus.**

STEP 5: Get moving!

Now it's time to get on your feet and try out some ideas! Try putting together a few sequences or combinations of moves, inspired by your research and everything you know about the song and the show. If you come up with anything you really like, be sure to write down some notes or record a video of yourself dancing so you don't forget it! You can use the space below to jot down any notes or draw pictures to help you remember.

STEP 6: Create pictures

If you're choreographing a number with more than one person, take some time to think about the **pictures**, or *tableaux*, you want to create onstage.

Where should the **focus** be during this number? Where do I want the audience to look?
(Remember that this might change at different times during the song!)

When the song **begins**, the focus should be on **Moana, Chief Tui, and Sina**.

In the **middle** of the song, the focus should be on **the villagers and how they interact with Moana**.

At the **end** of the song, the focus should be on **Moana and Pua and Hei Hei as they enter**.

How can I create **depth** onstage? Can I put people on different levels so they are higher or lower? Can I put some people farther forward and some people more towards the back?

With the pictures in the song, I can create depth by **placing villagers in different locations around the stage doing different tasks, such as dancing, weaving baskets, and hauling in fish. I can have some people sit towards the front of the stage and others stand or sit on boxes near the back of the stage, and I can have Moana and her parents weave through the different people in the village as they sing to her.**

Feel free to use the blank space below to draw a few diagrams of ideas for pictures or formations for your number. Remember, the most important thing is to **tell the story**. Make sure the pictures you create help the audience understand the story and don't make them more confused!

STEP 7: Set It (Sort Of)

You're almost there! Now that you've done all of that background work, you're finally ready to make your plan. It's finally time to start deciding which of the combinations or sequences you created in step 5 you want to use and where you want to put them in the song, putting all of your pictures together, and coming up with ways to connect it all together and make it flow. It's also okay to repeat moves! One trick that you can use is to repeat the same move, but in a different formation or picture.

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