

“Broadway Musicals: A Jewish Legacy” (*Great Performances*)  
Viewing Guide

1. How did musical theater provide a unique opportunity for generations of Jewish songwriters? How did Broadway give them a voice? Was Broadway a place for transformation?
2. How was Yiddishkeit (Jewishness) the foundation of modern Broadway musical theater?  
Note the role of: Yiddish theater, Boris and Bessie Thomashefsky, Jewish songs
3. Describe how the songs written by George and Ira Gershwin reflected their *American* experience as the sons of Jewish immigrants. Is their music a cultural “melting pot?”
4. Note evidence of the Jewish/Black encounter in Gershwin’s music.
5. Why could Broadway be called a “little Jewish club?”
6. Discuss the immigrant experience that impacted the songs of America’s greatest songwriter, Irving Berlin.
7. Examine how Jewish songwriters struggled with the concept of assimilation. How did they try to fit into, yet challenge America?
8. Examine the universal themes of Broadway musicals like *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Cabaret*.
9. How did Stephen Sondheim shift the paradigm of the Broadway musical?
10. Why is it important to know American and world history in order to appreciate the “American songbook” created by Broadway musicals?
11. What does the Broadway musical say about America and its people?