STEPHEN SONDHEIM'S
A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM
COMEDY TONIGHT

SHAKESPEARE THEATRE COMPANY
FIRST FOLIO:
TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCE GUIDE
Consistent with the Shakespeare Theatre Company's central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this First Folio: Teacher and Student Resource Guide will prove useful to you while preparing to attend A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.

First Folio provides information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. First Folio contains material about the playwrights, their world and their works. Also included are approaches to explore the plays and productions in the classroom before and after the performance.

First Folio is designed as a resource both for teachers and students. All Folio activities meet the “Vocabulary Acquisition and Use” and “Knowledge of Language” requirements for the grades 8-12 Common Core English Language Arts Standards. We encourage you to photocopy these articles and activities and use them as supplemental material to the text.

The First Folio Teacher and Student Resource Guide for the 2013-2014 Season was developed by the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department:

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MOM's Organic Market
Ancient Rome. Three neighbors live in adjacent houses. In the center lives Senex, with his wife Domina, son Hero, and house slaves Pseudolus and Hysterium. To the left, the house of Marcus Lycus, who keeps slave-girls as courtesans; to the right, the house of the elderly Erronius, who has long been away, searching for his long-lost children.

One day, when Senex and Domina depart on a trip, Hero confides to Pseudolus that he loves Philia, a virgin in the house of Lycus. Pseudolus promises to help Hero in exchange for his freedom. An excellent liar, Pseudolus convinces Lycus that the cheerful Philia has picked up a “smiling” plague from Crete. Pseudolus offers to house her in Senex’s house, which would allow Hero to seduce her. Philia is adamant, however, that she give herself to her betrothed, the swaggering Captain Miles Gloriosus. Hero tells Philia the Captain will knock three times when he arrives. Pseudolus hatches a plan to use a potion to knock Philia out, tell Lycus she has died, and place her body on a ship headed for Greece. He sets off in search of “mare’s sweat,” the only ingredient missing from his potion.

Unexpectedly, Senex returns, knocking three times on his own door. Thinking he is Miles Gloriosus, Philia offers herself to Senex who, pleasantly surprised, instructs her to wait in the house. Pseudolus, seeing Senex has returned, sprinkles some of his newfound “mare’s sweat” on him and suggests he needs a bath. Senex, agreeing, instructs Hysterium to draw a bath in the long-abandoned house of Erronius. Incredibly, Erronius returns, having given up the search for his children. Desperate to keep him out, Hysterium tells Erronius his house is haunted – a story confirmed by the eerie sound of Senex singing in his bath. Erronius orders a soothsayer and Pseudolus pretends to be one, telling him he can banish the spirit by running around the Seven Hills of Rome seven times.

When Miles Gloriosus arrives to claim Philia, Pseudolus hides her on Senex’s roof and tells Lycus she has escaped. Lycus is terrified to face the Captain’s wrath, so Pseudolus poses as Lycus and tells Miles that Philia has disappeared. Suspicious, Miles insists his soldiers follow “Lycus,” but Pseudolus loses them in Rome’s winding streets.

Complicating matters, Domina returns from her trip, in disguise as a virgin, hoping to catch Senex in the act. Meanwhile, Pseudolus has convinced Hysterium to dress in drag and pretend to be Philia, “dead” from the plague. Unfortunately, Miles Gloriosus, who has returned from Crete, reveals there is no plague. The ruse destroyed, Miles and Senex pursue all three “Philia’s”: Domina, Hysterium and the actual Philia, all dressed in identical white robes and veils. Meanwhile, Lycus’ courtesans – mourners at Philia’s pretend funeral – have also escaped. Lycus’ eunuchs try to catch them. A madcap chase and pandemonium ensues.

The Captain’s troops round everyone up. His schemes revealed, Pseudolus appears finished – until Erronius, completing his trips around the Roman hills, arrives to discover that Miles and Philia both wear matching rings, marking them as his long-lost children. Philia’s betrothal to the Captain is obviously nullified by the miraculous revelation that she is his sister. Philia weds Hero; Pseudolus gets his freedom; Erronius is reunited with his children; a happy ending prevails for all – except for poor Senex and Domina, who are stuck with each other.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senex</strong></td>
<td>A wealthy old man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hero</strong></td>
<td>Son of Senex and Domina. In love with Philia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domina</strong></td>
<td>Wife of Senex, very jealous and suspicious of her husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philia</strong></td>
<td>A virgin in the house of Marcus Lycus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudolus</strong></td>
<td>A slave of Hero. Promises to help Hero win Philia’s heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hysterium</strong></td>
<td>A slave of Senex and Domina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Erronius</strong></td>
<td>An old man who owns a house next to Senex and Domina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Miles Gloriosus</strong></td>
<td>A warrior. Engaged to marry Philia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcus Lycus</strong></td>
<td>A buyer and seller of courtesans. Owns a house next to Senex and Domina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tintinabula</strong></td>
<td>A courtesan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vibrata</strong></td>
<td>A courtesan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gymnasia</strong></td>
<td>A courtesan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panacea</strong></td>
<td>A courtesan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Playwright Burt Shevelove, as he recalled it, was part of a late-night bull session among fellow playwrights and TV writers, where they discussed “the lack of low comedy on Broadway.” Plautus’ early comedies, he felt, could provide a template for all that was missing from the Broadway musical at the time—a form which was then defined by comparatively sophisticated shows like *South Pacific* and *My Fair Lady*. As Larry Gelbart, who would join Shevelove as co-writer on the musical that would soon bear the working title of *A Roman Comedy*, put it, Broadway’s development of “the musical comedy…had improved the quality of the former at the expense of a good deal of the latter…The Rodgerses and Harts and Hammersteins, the Lerners and Loewes, brilliant men of music and artists of great refinement, had created a vulgarity vacuum, a space we were happy, even anxious to fill.”

Among those similarly anxious to join Shevelove was a young songwriter, Stephen Sondheim, who by that point had had already penned the lyrics for *West Side Story* and tried his hand at television writing, but was itching to for a chance to premiere both his music and lyrics on Broadway. Sondheim saw great farcical potential in the Plautus plays Shevelove showed him.

The gestation of *Forum* was famously arduous, taking more than four years of writing—not quite non-stop, as the writers took on other assignments in the interim between beginning work in 1957 and the show’s first production in 1962, but rough going nonetheless. One hurdle was the behind-the-scenes work of courting producers and directors (Robbins got cold feet, George Abbott stepped in, Robbins returned to rescue a few ailing numbers, etc.), which in this case had the historically significant effect of essentially creating the musical workshop process.

Adding to the show’s hard sell was its unique conception; if Broadway was low-comedy-deficient, as *Forum*’s writers had diagnosed, it had accordingly little interest in taking their medicine. Shevelove recalled that, in an era of thematically meaty musicals, “it was difficult to explain to people what the intention of the show was,” and that the notion of a Broadway musical with a single set, let alone a single set of costumes, was considered perverse by the standards of the day.

Indeed, Sondheim’s brilliantly clever score was unlike anything heard on Broadway at the time, and certainly unlike anything he’s written since. The notion of musicalizing a farce wasn’t entirely novel but few farces, even many without music, sustain comic momentum as well as *Forum* does, and the music, far from gumming it up, only seems to smooth it along.

The key here may be that the show’s momentum doesn’t start at a fever pitch but builds masterfully over the course of the show; as Sondheim has pointed out, the first act is thick with songs, while the second act’s climax goes without a song for 20 minutes while the final chase unfolds. This, of course, is a familiar dramaturgical curve; think of the intense pile-up collisions that end many of Shakespeare’s comedies, typically after a series of sequences that include some refreshing pauses and reveries (indeed, often including a number of songs)...
In the case of *Forum*, these rests are as essential to the show’s mechanics as any of those carefully calibrated plot pieces; as Shevelove said, “Without the songs, the show would become relentless. It would exhaust you and you wouldn’t get any breathers, any savoring of certain moments.”

There’s an irony in Sondheim making his Broadway songwriting debut with a show in which the songs function more as diversions than as meaty musical scenes in themselves, since the latter approach is the one he learned directly from Oscar Hammerstein II. He seems to view the *Forum* score, in fact, as something of an revolt—a necessary Oedipal rebellion against his elder’s influence, perhaps, but also something he’s never quite fully embraced as his own. (The show got Tony Awards for its book and direction, but not even a nomination for his score, which seems to have stung him lastingly.) Certainly every show he’s written since *Forum* has advanced the Hammerstein agenda, in the sense of ever refining and intensifying the dramatic substance the musical form can bear. But the formal playfulness of the *Forum* songs, both in their lyrical dexterity and their musical daring, would become a signature Sondheim trait.

Indeed, if some of his later work is characterized by a tension between hefty substance and overweening style, and by a musical-dramatic personality as strong as any opera composer’s, there is no such baggage attending the utter delight and agility of his songs for *Forum*. The lyrics are full of wordplay of a grace and precision that easily match the book’s elegant construction. And apart from the pumping compah of the opener, “Comedy Tonight,” and the tittering showstopper “Everybody Ought To Have a Maid” the show’s music has a curiously ageless quality that dovetails nicely with the librettists’ insistence on avoiding anachronism. It’s true that the overarching style and diction of the entire work place it clearly in the American mid-century, a time when our culture’s ancient vaudeville, Yiddishkeit, and minstrel traditions were morphing into television sketch comedy and the sitcom. But the discipline and sophistication of *Forum*’s creators in using those traditions as frames, not as the picture itself, have ensured that *Forum* has a timelessness that may just outdo Plautus himself.

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**Stephen Sondheim on the Music of *Forum***

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 bragart 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.*

**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?
Teaching Comedy: A How-To Guide
By Hannah Hessel Ratner

Shakespeare Theatre Company Master Acting Class teaching artists’ share their thoughts on helping others make people laugh.

Know What’s Funny.
Sabrina Mandell, who teaches clowning and physical comedy, likes starting class with showing examples of things she finds funny. The video clips and demonstrations help students realize what they already know: “I think that we all essentially understand comedy we just haven’t ever really thought about it. It’s important to get people realizing what’s funny and why, so they can discover how to recreate that.” She is clear that it’s not about recreating the pros: “I don’t believe there’s a right way to do something. When it works, everyone will acknowledge that it works. There’s a consensus about what’s funny. People have different takes but generally, if people laugh, it works.”

Teaching artist Wyckham Avery is always nervous about the first day: “My biggest fear teaching comedy is that I won’t be funny myself—totally ruins the credibility.”

Have No Fear.
One of the most important tools a comedian can have is the ability to push beyond societal norms. Mark Jaster, who teaches mime and physical comedy alongside Sabrina, notes that in order to do comedy, “One has to be willing to go there first and some people just have a talent for it.”

In order to feel comfortable moving beyond boundaries, different teachers follow different practices. Sabrina likes pushing her students to open up emotionally: “The realization that laughter and crying live right next door to each other—when you open yourself emotionally, you can suddenly start to access all of them.” Another option is to push the students to experience fear in order to move beyond it. Wyckham’s clown teacher taught using fear: “We were being yelled at and dodging tennis balls being hurled at us onstage.”

Be Precise.
All the teachers agree that as Resident Teaching Artist Jim Gagne states, “In drama there is room to play loose. In comedy you have to be precise.”

For Wyckham teaching comedy is all about precision. She tells her students the key to comedy is “making things crisp and clean and well timed.” Teaching timing, however, is not easy. “Some students have a talent for timing,” shares School Programs Manager Vanessa Hope, “it’s hard to cultivate…you need lots of time for them to learn and practice.”

Sabrina thinks it is possible to teach comedic timing. “It’s a slow process,” she says “you can develop it as a muscle by becoming aware and then by playing and seeing what works. With rigor! Exercise.” She talked about an exercise that Mark learned in high school. The assignment is to enter a room in a comedic way. It’s all about the timing. “People just worked and worked and eventually they figured out what gets the laugh.”
Encourage Playing.
Sabrina made clear that “personally, I don’t set out to teach comedy, I set out to remind people how to play.” Mark talks about creating a lab “in which to explore the mysteries, a lab in which I share and continue my own discoveries and exploration.” For him it’s a balance between the play and the analysis. He wants to create a space where comedy can be constructed and deconstructed.

Never Expect A Laugh.
You have a room full of students and they want so badly to make each other laugh. Teachers have to remind their students that playing comedy is still about telling a story. “The stakes,” Vanessa notes, “need to remain as high for a comedic character as they do for a dramatic one, but the consequences are different.” Jim agrees adding a favorite quote from a teacher friend of his: “In drama you throw the dishes down, in comedy you throw them up.”

Using precise timing and being open will help evoke laughter, but to be a comedic actor, you must play the scene with authenticity, not thinking about what will or won’t get the laugh. “The final step,” Jim says, “is getting a laugh.”

Now it’s your turn!

- **Know What’s Funny**: Put together a collection of pictures, quotes, cartoons, movie clips that you find funny. What about them is funny to you? Share them with someone else—do they find them funny as well?

- **Be Precise**: Move just one part of your body at a time, keeping the rest of your body still; “look to your left,” “raise your right arm” “raise your eyebrows” etc. How does it feel to only have one part of your body in motion at a time?

- **Encourage Playing**: Sit in a circle with a group of peers. The only thing you have to do in the circle is laugh. Allow the exercise to go on for at least a minute if not longer. When the laughing subsides discuss whether or not you started really laughing at some point? If so, when and why?

- **Never Expect A Laugh**: Each student takes a turn calling everyone over to them saying only “look at this.” Once they are surrounded by the other students their only goal is to keep everyone there. They must do this entirely with their face. They are not allowed to speak or move their bodies. Those watching can decide when they get uninterested and turn away. After everyone gets a chance talk about the experience: did anyone make you laugh? Why?

Master Acting Class teacher Mark Jaster encourages playing during their last session of Physical Comedy.
Plautus used similar character archetypes in all of his plays. Some are even named for the type they represent: “miles gloriosus” refers to a braggart soldier; “senex iratus” means a lusty old man. Some other Roman archetypes with their Latin names:

- **servus callidus** = the clever servant = Pseudolus
- **meretrix** = the beautiful young woman = Philida
- **adulescens amator** = the young lover = Hero
- **leno** = seller of slaves and courtesans = Lycus
- **matrona** = domineering older woman = Domina

All of Plautus’ plays—and scholars know there were many, though most are lost today—place these stock characters in different situations and allow the chaos to unfold. Instead of realistic human beings, these stock characters are tools of the plot, helping to further the story and enhance the comedy through jokes associated with each archetype. *Forum* is actually based on several of Plautus’ original comedies, with plots and characters woven together in surprising ways.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Read some of Plautus’ plays, or research them: *Amphitryon, The Pot of Gold, The Captives, The Braggart Warrior, and The Twin Menaechmi*. Do you recognize any plots or characters that appear in *Forum*?
- Why do you think Plautus would use the same characters over and over? Why do you think the writers of *Forum* used them?
- Do you recognize any of these archetypes in modern-day TV shows or movies? Where?
something dramatic, something erratic

Musical theatre uses dance and movement to help tell the story. In *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, actors use movement to quickly become many different characters and bring moments of the story to life. How can students use their own movement to interpret specific lyrics from the musical’s opening number “Comedy Tonight”?

Have students walk around the classroom, moving continuously and filling the entire space. Coach students to find movement based on specific lyrics from “Comedy Tonight”. You can choose your own from the song, but here are some good examples:

- Something peculiar
- Something convulsive
- Something that’s gaudy
- Something appalling
- Something repulsive
- Something that’s bawdy
- Something appealing

Place students in groups. Assign each group one of the lyrics or have them choose one themselves. They should keep their choice secret from the other groups. Ask the students to devise movement as a group inspired by the lyric, and then prepare a short performance for the class.

Have each group share what they created. The rest of the class can vote or guess which lyric belonged to each group.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How is movement connected to story and character? What stories did you see emerge from what each group performed? What characters?
- What specific movements did you see that gave you information about the song lyric? What parts of the body did the group use to make the specific lyric come to life?

After seeing the show, ask students: Did you find any of your physical interpretations of the lyrics in the show? How did the musical use dance and movement to help tell the story?
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:
- Which musical styles did students explore? Pop? Rock? Opera? Country? Broadway? How did students know which melodies belonged to each style? Which musical styles or moments were the funniest? Why?
- What kinds of characters and stories started to emerge? What made the duets funny or serious? What did we learn about the characters or situations from specific musical choices?
- Listen to a song excerpt from A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. What does the musical style tell us about the character?

After seeing the show, ask students: What songs were the funniest? What about the musical style or character and situation made the song funny?

Classroom Activities

“Love I Hear”

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
- Host: How did you know what the quirks were? What did the guests do to show you who they were?
- Audience: Was the game funny? What specifically? The characters? The interaction between them? The Host’s reaction? What else?
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 each of the characters in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

Here are a few examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hysterium</th>
<th>Hero</th>
<th>The Courtesans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Basket Case” by Green Day</td>
<td>“Hold On, We’re Going Home” by Drake</td>
<td>“Royals” by Lorde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have the time To listen to me whine About nothing and everything All at once I am one of those Melodramatic fools Neurotic to the bone No doubt about it</td>
<td>I got my eyes on you You're everything that I see I want your heart, love and emotion endlessly, I can't get over you You left your mark on me I want your high, love and emotion endlessly</td>
<td>My friends and I—we've cracked the code. We count our dollars on the train to the party. And everyone who knows us knows That we're fine with this, We didn't come for money… And we'll never be royals. It don't run in our blood That kind of luxe just ain't for us.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now, choose songs for these characters:

Pseudolus
Domina
Senex
Philia
Marcus Lycus
Miles Gloriosus
Erronius

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Explain each of your choices. What does each song tell you about the character? What traits or qualities does the song highlight? Does it tell the whole story of the character?

- What made you choose each song? Was it the sound of the music? The lyrics? Why?

- **For further exploration,** ask your students to choreograph a dance/movement piece to one of the verses in a song they have chosen. The students’ movements should also reveal information about the character. This activity will most likely work best if students are working in groups.

**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)?
Classroom Activities

Pass the Character

- Stand in a circle and create a frozen image of a “larger than life” character with your body. Examples include: Tarzan, WWE wrestler, Lady Gaga, Santa Claus, Queen Elizabeth, Quasimoto, etc.

- Once everyone has created a frozen picture of a character, mill around the room as your character and explore how that character moves. This exercise is not about verbal communication so there should be no talking or noises as you walk.

- Once it seems like everyone has a clear character split the class up into two groups and stand on opposite sides of the room.

- With a volunteer from each group, walk toward one another as your character and when you pass by one another you are going to switch characters. Each person should switch characters at least once.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What was it like to take on someone else’s character?
- What was it like to see someone play a character you created?
- When an actor takes on another actors character do they become mirror images of what was done originally, or do they put their own style into it?

Simple Scenarios

Partner into pairs of two. Each pair gets a simple scenario from the list below. Improvise the scene once. Repeat the improvised scene, but this time, no dialogue is allowed—you can only tell the story physically. Present both versions of the scene to the rest of the class.

Scenario #1: An Old Man and his Servant: Zanni, the servant, is very hungry and keeps trying to eat. Every time he is about to eat his dinner, his master gives him a new task.

Scenario #2: The Lovers: A young boy and a young girl fall in love at first sight. They discover their fathers are enemies and will never let them marry. They decide to run away together.

Scenario # 3: The Lovers and their Servants (this scenario requires a small group of students): A young boy and a young girl each ask their servant to deliver a love letter to their enamored. The servants mess this up.

Scenario #4: The Captain: A soldier comes to a foreign city with his servant. The Captain brags about how he has fought bravely in a war. The servant either backs him up or reveals the true version of the story. The soldier then sees a mouse, and they are both scared away.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did you improvise your scene?
- Did you have a real life example to pull from?
- What was it like to tell the story without words? What did you have to focus on?
- Audience, which scene was more interesting to watch? Why?
- What made each scene funny? Why?
RESEARCH & WRITING

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum is based on the Roman comedies by Plautus. Pick one of the following topics to research and learn more about the roots of this musical. Try to answer: What characteristics does Forum share with Plautus’ plays? Plot? Character? Tone? Purpose? What does learning about Plautus’ world tell you about Forum?

- Plautus and his works
- Roman theatre in the days of Plautus
- Greek New Comedy

Forum is also part of an important American musical theatre tradition. Pick one of these topics to research to learn about Forum from a different point of view. Try to answer: What makes Forum different from other musicals of its time? What qualities does it share with them?

- Broadway shows of the 1950s and 1960s
- Stephen Sondheim
- Farce

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 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.

From The MTI Study Guide for A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum:

- Farce is intended to induce laughter by using exaggeration rather than trying to imitate life. What are some examples of the way in which the authors of Forum exaggerate reality to lead their audience to laugh?
- Farce offers its audience reassurance that Man can take his beatings and survive by demonstrating unexpected strengths and coping skills. How does Pseudolus demonstrate this in Forum? Can you think of other comic heroes who demonstrate this?
- Plautus had little interest in social satire and tended to concentrate on ridiculous situations without exploring the significance inherent in them. Is there any exploration of social significance in Forum? Should there be?
- On the basis of the events and situations in Forum, what aspects of human nature and the human experience that were comic in 254-184 B.C. are still comic now?
- In Roman comedy, plot is more important than character; characters are only needed to act out the intricacies of the plot. Is this true of Forum? How much do you know in depth about any of the characters? Do you need to know more than the authors tell you?
Resource List

On Plautus and Roman Comedy

On the American Musical

Websites
- Shakespeare Theatre Company—http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/education
  AsidesOnline: In-depth information about our productions
- In Search of Shakespeare: Shakespeare in the Classroom—http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/
  The companion website to Michael Wood’s four-part PBS series *In Search of Shakespeare*, this site includes extensive research about Shakespeare’s life and works, as well as interactive features.
- Folger Shakespeare Library—http://www.folger.edu
  Includes excellent resources for further reading about Shakespeare, as well as fun games and information designed specifically for students and teachers.
  Information from the PBS documentary, *Broadway: The American Musical*.

Standards of Learning

The activities and question sequences found in the Folio supports grade 8-12 Common Core standards in English Language Arts. Primary content areas addressed include but are not limited to:

**READING LITERATURE**
- Key Ideas and Details
- Craft and Structure
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
- Range of Reading and Complexity

**WRITING**
(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-12.2 )

**SPEAKING AND LISTENING**
(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8-12.1 )

**LANGUAGE**
(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-12.3,4, 4 )
Theatre Etiquette

The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance.

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below:

Before you go:

- *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* takes place before cell phones and other fun technology existed. Please help us create the environment by turning off your cell phone and other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.). Not only will it be historically inaccurate, but it can be very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The lights from cell phones and other electronic devices are also a big distraction, so please no text messaging.

- We’re sure that you would never stick your gum underneath your chair or spill food and drinks, but because this theatre is so new and beautiful, we ask that you spit out your gum before entering the theatre and leave all food and drinks in the lobby or the coat check.

- We don’t want you to miss out on any of the action of the play, so please visit the restroom before the performance begins.

During the performance:

- Please feel free to have honest reactions to what is happening on stage. You can laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance. However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.

Thoughts about the importance of being an audience member from Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way.

As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it ... You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh with or grieve as well as to understand people, lives and cultures different from your own.”