



Educational Guide



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THEATER OF THE STARS 


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1



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

How to Use This Guide2

**Breaking Down the
Standards for Learning.....2**

EXPLORATIONS

The Production.....3

Plot Synopsis.....3-4

Character Descriptions.....5

The Background6

From Movie to Musical6

Meet Irving Berlin.....7

What's Happening
in the World?8

That Was Then,
This Is Now9

Back Story Time.....10

Musical Passport.....10

Carol With A Cause.....11

Holiday Memories.....11

White Christmas
Fun Facts12

RESOURCES.....13

1

INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



Dear Educators,

Welcome to Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* Educational Guide! These materials have been generated to serve as a catalyst for educational enrichment beyond the performance.

Inside this resource you'll find a wide variety of research, questions, activities and worksheets that may either stand alone or work in sequence as a unit of study. Feel free to photocopy pages from this guide to distribute to your students. For easy navigation, we have structured the guide into two sections: Explorations and Resources.

The Explorations section of this guide provides information about the production and historical background along with corresponding suggested extension activities. Here you'll find the Plot Synopsis and Character Descriptions along with recommended enrichment activities. Additionally, articles shaping the historical context of *White Christmas* have been produced to give your students an understanding of the social and political landscape.

The Resources section provides information for delving deeper into the world of *White Christmas* with texts, videos, websites and more.

We hope that this guide and the dynamic performances will inspire your students to further explore the delightfulness of Irving Berlin and the holidays. Enjoy the Show!

BREAKING DOWN THE STANDARDS FOR LEARNING

The *White Christmas* Educational Guide supports learning in the following areas:

National Standards for Learning

- English Language Arts
- United States History
- Life Skills
- Technology
- Fine Arts

EXPLORATIONS: THE PRODUCTION

Plot Synopsis

ACT ONE

It's Christmas Eve in 1944, an Army Base on the Western Front during WWII. Soldiers Bob Wallace and Phil Davis decorate a skinny Christmas tree with army paraphernalia as they playfully joke around with Corporal Sheldrake (*Happy Holidays*). Their commander, General Waverly, interrupts and addresses the troupes, indicating that they should all seize the moment and enjoy the holiday.

Flash forward to 1954, Bob and Phil have one of the hottest song-and-dance acts on the road (*Happy Holiday/Let Yourself Go*). After their show, Phil tries to persuade Bob into going to a downtown club to see The Haynes Sisters. While Bob resists, Phil insists there is a girl he wants to set him up with, and that Bob should be open to a little romance in his life (*Love and the Weather*).

Bob and Phil arrive just in time for The Haynes Sisters' (*Betty and Judy*) performance (*Sisters*). After the show, Betty and Judy join Bob and Phil at the table. While Phil and Judy immediately hit it off, Bob and Betty struggle to connect. As Phil and Judy dance, they work up a plan to trick their partners into spending the holidays together in Vermont (*The Best Things Happen While You're Dancing*).

Phil is able to successfully fool Bob, and they both head to the train. However, when they run into Betty and Judy on the train, Bob realizes he's been tricked and is infuriated at the idea of spending the holidays in snowy Vermont (*Snow*).

The four arrive only to find out that it's unseasonably warm in Vermont. With the weather being what it is, the Inn they check into is completely deserted. Martha, an ex-vaudeville performer now managing the Inn, introduces them to the owner. It turns out to be General Waverly, Bob and Phil's commander in the war. The General introduces them to his granddaughter, Susan, and continues about his rounds. Martha then confides in Bob and Phil about the growing number of bills



for the Inn. She's been hiding the bills from the General in hopes of not crushing his spirit (*What Can You Do with a General?*).

Martha's concern for the General resonates with Bob and Phil. They decide to team up with the Haynes sisters and produce a show unlike any other in Vermont to bring attention to the General's Inn.

Everyone immediately gets hard at work to make the big Christmas Eve show a tremendous success. Bob and Phil secretly contact Sheldrake about getting all the troops from their old post to come and surprise the General.

During the preparations, it comes out that Martha had a big singing career before becoming an Innkeeper, and she wants to be a part of the show (*Let Me Sing and I'm Happy*).

Later that night, a troubled Susan tells Bob in confidence that she can't sleep because she's upset for her grandfather, the General. Bob tries to console her as best as he can (*Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep*). Once Susan falls asleep, Betty enters with a new perspective on Bob. They both become enchanted by one another and kiss.

The next day, Martha receives a coded message from Sheldrake that she completely misunderstands. She believes that Bob and Phil

EXPLORATIONS: THE PRODUCTION

are conspiring to take over the Inn rather than help the General. When Martha tells Betty this, Betty immediately confronts Bob. They misunderstand each other, and Bob is utterly confused by her furor. As Bob begins rehearsal, the General discovers all of the bills and understands the Inn is in trouble (*Blue Skies*).

ACT TWO

Phil and Judy rehearse their duet for the big show (*I Love a Piano*). After their rehearsal, Judy is alerted by Martha that Betty is packing to leave. They both fly to her and, rather than stop her, congratulate her for breaking it off with an untrustworthy song-and-dance man (*Falling Out of Love Can be Fun*).

When Bob and Phil hear that The Haynes Sisters won't be able to do their routine, and none of the chorus girls know how to do the number, they rehearse it themselves (*Sisters – Reprise*). After the number, Phil encourages Bob to chase after Betty to New York City.

Just as Betty makes her big solo debut, Bob enters and sits at a table (*Love, You Didn't Do Right by Me / How Deep is the Ocean*). After Betty's set, she and Bob clear up their misunderstanding. Sheldrake enters and sets up Bob with a spot on the show to invite the troops to the General's surprise performance (*The Old Man*).

Bob returns to Vermont, and when Betty doesn't come back with him, Susan auditions for the chance to be in the show (*Let Me Sing and I'm Happy – Reprise*).

It's Christmas Eve, the night of the show. Just as Phil asks Bob about Betty, she shows up at the Inn ready to jump back into the show (*How Deep is the Ocean – Reprise*). Martha escorts the unsuspecting General Waverly to the stage. Bob, Phil and Sheldrake receive him as he looks out to discover his surprise (*The Old Man – Reprise*). The General tells his men and their families how proud he is of them and that they have helped show him how to be happy as an Innkeeper rather than wanting to be a General. In a moment of triumph, the show begins (*White Christmas*) and Susan runs in to tell everyone that it is finally snowing. (*I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm*).

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

What Am I Seeing?

In preparation for your visit to see Irving Berlin's *White Christmas*, have your students use the internet to check out the official website for Theater of the Stars (www.theaterofthestars.com) and the National Tour of *White Christmas* (www.whitechristmasthemusical.com). Once on this resource, have your students peruse the websites for production pictures, videos and more. Students can also check out Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* the musical on Facebook (www.Facebook.com/WhiteChristmas-theMusical), Twitter (<http://twitter.com/IBWCtheMusical>), and the Irving Berlin Facebook Fan Page (www.Facebook.com/IrvingBerlin). Before attending the show, discuss what they expect to see at the performance. Have students create a list of predictions, and hold onto them. After the show, revisit these lists and see what comparisons emerge.



EXPLORATIONS: THE PRODUCTION

Character Descriptions

BOB WALLACE — A major singing star, he wears his fame easily and is a born leader, but has some trouble with social and romantic interactions.

PHIL DAVIS — A fun-loving clown, operator and incorrigible ladies man who is determined to see his friends happy.

BETTY HAYNES — The sensible, responsible half of the up-and-coming song and dance team, The Haynes Sisters. She is destined to be a star in her own right.

JUDY HAYNES — The younger, more ambitious, slightly scheming Haynes sister. While wholesome and adorable, she is flirty with a charm no man can resist.

GENERAL HENRY WAVERLY — A retired U.S. General, he's adjusting to civilian life in post World War II America.

MARTHA WATSON — Once a musical comedy star, now the manager at the General's Inn, she has a very dry, wisecracking sense of humor.

SUSAN WAVERLY — The General's granddaughter; she is an outgoing and lovable kid who is wise beyond her years.

RALPH SHELDRAKE — An army buddy of Bob and Phil who now serves as a major television executive with the Ed Sullivan Show.

RITA AND RHODA — Bob and Phil's two star chorus girls; they are brash, attractive and fun, although perhaps not the smartest entertainers.

EZEKIEL FOSTER — The ultimate taciturn New Englander who takes life at a very slow pace.

MIKE — Bob and Phil's stage manager who has a tendency to be over-dramatic and completely hysterical.

ENSEMBLE — Bob and Phil's chorus kids.

ARMY RANKINGS (Highest to Lowest)

The main male characters in *White Christmas* all know each other from serving in the military together during World War II. Below is a list of military rankings from highest in command to lowest, to help you and your students understand the hierarchy.

General of the Army (5 Stars)

General (4 Stars)

Lieutenant General (3 Stars)

Major General (2 Stars)

Brigadier General (1 Star)

Colonel

Lieutenant Colonel

Major

Captain

First Lieutenant

Second Lieutenant

Sergeant Major

Command Sergeant Major

Sergeant Major

First Sergeant

Master Sergeant

Sergeant First Class

Staff Sergeant

Sergeant

Specialist

Corporal

Private First Class

Private

EXPLORATIONS: THE BACKGROUND

From Movie to Musical

In 1954, the film version of Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* first debuted with tremendous success earning its place in film history as the "highest grossing film of the year." The movie featured a starry veteran cast led by Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney and Vera-Ellen. In fact, Bing Crosby's version of the song "White Christmas" is the best-selling single of all time, having sold upwards of 50 million copies.

In preparation for your students' trip to see the stage version of Irving Berlin's *White Christmas*, watch the original movie in class (if time won't allow, show your class just a couple of scenes). After watching the film, ask your students to come up with similarities and differences between movies and live musical theater.

What is the purpose of a song in Musical Theater? What role does it play in telling the story? How does it "improve" on simply speaking the words?



THINKING FURTHER — Have your students try their hand at adaptation! Working in pairs, ask your class to choose a scene from one of their favorite holiday films (preferably one without a musical number, like *ELF*, *Charlie Brown Christmas*, *The Christmas Story*, etc.). Then have them complete the following steps in adapting it for the stage:

1. Write the dialogue from the scene out.
2. Find a moment in the scene where the emotions are highest and insert a song for at least one of their characters to sing. The song can be from popular music, a song that they rewrite the lyrics to, or a completely original song written by the students.
3. Think about where your scene takes place. How will you convey the setting to your audience? Draw a ground plan of your proposed set.

While this should be a creative and fun project, be sure that students understand that these scenes will be shared with you and their classmates.

Have your students present their stage adaptations and simply enjoy!



EXPLORATIONS: THE BACKGROUND

Meet Irving Berlin

Born Israel Beilin in a Russian Jewish *shtetl* in 1888, he died as Irving Berlin in his adopted homeland of New York, New York, USA, in 1989. Songwriter, performer, theatre owner, music publisher, soldier and patriot, he defined Jerome Kern's famous maxim: "Irving Berlin has no place in American music. He *is* American music." Berlin wrote over 1200 songs, including "White Christmas," "Easter Parade," "Always," "Blue Skies," "Cheek To Cheek," "There's No Business Like Show Business," "Alexander's Ragtime Band," and "God Bless America." He wrote the scores to more than a dozen Broadway musicals, including *Annie Get Your Gun*, and provided songs for dozens of Hollywood movie musicals. Among his many awards and accolades were the Academy Award for "White Christmas," a Congressional Gold Medal, a special Tony Award and commemoration on a 2002 U.S. postage stamp.

In exploring the century-long contributions of Irving Berlin on the world (and, more poignantly, America) have your students compose an essay on the life and influence of Irving Berlin on American history.



Some Hit Songs by Irving Berlin Include:

Alexander's Ragtime Band (1911)

I Love a Piano (1915)

**The Girl on the Magazine Cover
(1915)**

What'll I Do? (1924)

Blue Skies (1926)

Puttin' on the Ritz (1930)

Easter Parade (1933)

**I've Got My Love to Keep Me
Warm (1937)**

God Bless America (1938)

Happy Holiday (1942)

White Christmas (1942)

**Anything You Can Do (I Can Do
Better) (1946)**

**There's No Business Like Show
Business (1946)**

**Steppin' Out with My Baby
(1947)**

Sisters (1953)

EXPLORATIONS: THE BACKGROUND

What's Happening in the World?

Photocopy this page for your students.

Discover what's happening in the world at the time *White Christmas* takes place. Use the key below to complete the following word search. After completing the word search, circle any terms that you don't know. Once the entire class is finished, discuss:

1. What do these terms mean? 2. How they might relate to Irving Berlin's *White Christmas*.

WORD KEY: General • Corporal • Captain • Telegram • Train • Switchboard • Vaudeville • Snow Ensemble • Vermont • Ed Sullivan • Irving Berlin • Ethel Merman • Television • Broadway Belt

D	N	A	V	I	L	L	U	S	D	E	I	T
R	T	V	C	S	N	O	W	N	Z	R	V	E
A	N	A	P	O	T	I	D	C	V	U	N	L
O	O	U	F	W	R	U	A	I	J	S	V	E
B	M	D	G	F	Q	P	N	T	E	S	N	G
H	R	E	U	N	L	G	O	M	P	I	M	R
C	E	V	H	R	B	D	B	R	A	A	Y	A
T	V	I	I	E	Q	L	G	R	A	T	C	M
I	P	L	R	V	E	X	T	R	U	L	T	S
W	T	L	E	B	Y	A	W	D	A	O	R	B
S	I	E	T	E	L	E	V	I	S	I	O	N
N	S	O	C	L	A	R	E	N	E	G	B	W
E	T	H	E	L	M	E	R	M	A	N	T	U

EXPLORATIONS: THE BACKGROUND

That Was Then, This Is Now

Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* takes place in the 1950s, when times and technology were certainly different than they are today. Here's some of the "cutting-edge" technology of the time:

TRAINS

In the 1950s, everyone wanted to travel by train. Commercial air travel was in its infancy and incredibly expensive, so trains provided people with the means to travel across the country in a convenient, inexpensive and enjoyable way. Many trains included parlor cars, which encouraged socializing between the passengers. Some trains even had sleeping cars with beds and dining cars complete with full restaurants. Today, trains are used more often for commuting to and from work, rather than vacation travel. However, companies like Amtrak still offer full service train travel to passengers hoping to remember a simpler time.

TELEGRAM

Telegrams were the fastest way to deliver information in a hurry; they were like the e-mails or faxes of the early 1900s. To send a telegram, you would go to a telegram operator (like Western Union), and the operator would then send your message electronically via a telegraph to a different operator in another city. This second operator would write out the message and have it hand delivered to the intended recipient. It seems like a lot of work, but for a long time it was the quickest way to get a letter, contract or even a birthday greeting from one place to another.

TELEPHONE

Using the telephone in the early 1900s was different from the phones we know and love today. First of all, there was no such thing as

a cellular phone or even a cordless phone. To make a call, you would pick up the phone in your house, which alerted your local switchboard operator. You would tell the operator who you wanted to talk to, and then the operator would manually have to connect you with your intended person via plugs similar to stereo cables. While this system worked well for many years, it allowed nosy operators to eavesdrop on other people's conversations. Eventually phone technology caught up with the demand to provide people with more privacy.



EXPLORATIONS: THE BACKGROUND

Back Story Time

Background information about the lesser characters in a story is intentionally not provided so that the audience will focus their attention on the main characters. However, these "back stories" also make the characters more interesting and fun to watch.

Use your imagination to create a back story for each of these characters.

SUSAN WAVERLY

Why is Susan in Vermont and where are her parents?

RALPH SHELDRAKE

How does an army corporal end up a TV producer on the 'Ed Sullivan Show'?



EZEKIEL FOSTER

Tell me why his parents decided to name him Ezekiel, and what did they name his siblings?

Musical Passport

Just as in American culture, the holidays are celebrated differently around the world. As a class project, have your students work in groups to identify two different countries, excluding the United States. Once each group has selected their countries for exploration, let them know they will be responsible for creating a 'Holiday Edition Tourism Guide' for these countries, which they will present to their peers. This should essentially be a sales pitch explaining why people should spend the holidays in their country.

The holiday tourism guide should include the following for each country:

1. Where the country is located in relation to your school;

2. Popular holiday traditions;

3. How the country celebrates or honors the holidays;

4. Why their classmates should travel to the country;

5. And at least one popular holiday song. (Encourage your students to bring in this song to play for the class.)

Schedule a presentation day, and let your students educate each other on popular holiday traditions around the world. Be sure that every group member speaks at least once during his or her presentation.

After all the groups have presented, hold a Global Holiday Party in your classroom. You can use all the music your students brought in as the party mix!

EXPLORATIONS: THE BACKGROUND

Holiday Memories

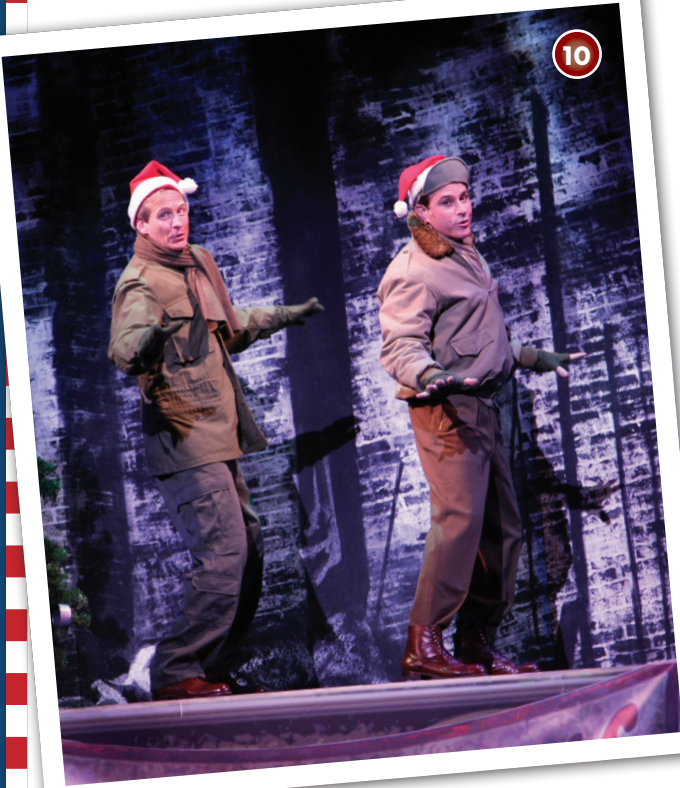
Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* is considered by many to be an ideal representation of the classic American Christmas holiday. Even though Berlin's childhood holiday experiences were not the same as those famous song lyrics, Berlin was still able to capture the holiday spirit through his imagination and insight into American culture.

Have your students write a poem that celebrates their holiday memories or represents their view of an ideal holiday. Ask your class to individually write a list of their top ten favorite aspects or memories of the holiday season. These can be memories of special foods that are served during the holiday, fun times they have had playing in the snow, etc. Once everyone has finished, have them arrange their responses in poem-form.

When the poems have been completed, have student volunteers share their poem with the class. (Note: These can also make great hallway displays! You can have your students draw a picture to support their poems. Or, have them bring in photos and make a class collage.)

Did You Know?

Berlin's "God Bless America" was first published in 1938 and shortly thereafter, The God Bless America Fund was established. Berlin established this fund "to benefit America's youth" and dedicates all royalties from the song to it. To date, the Fund has generated over \$10 million to support the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of America



Carol With a Cause

In *White Christmas*, Bob Wallace and Phil Davis surprise the General with a dedicated holiday performance for the community. Organize a performance of your own! Have your students bring in the lyrics to their favorite holiday songs and teach them to each other. Then, schedule a time for your class to go caroling either throughout your school or community. As a way to give back to the community, you can even fundraise for a local or national cause (i.e. Toys for Tots, Salvation Army, Community Food Bank, etc.) as they carol. See how much money your students can raise for charity!



WHITE CHRISTMAS *Fun Facts*

- Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* gave its stage world premiere at the St. Louis Muny in 2000. It was revised and premiered in San Francisco in 2004 and played engagements over the next few holiday seasons in Boston, Los Angeles, Detroit, Toronto, and several major cities in Britain.
- Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* premiered on Broadway for the 2008 Holiday Season, where it broke box office records, and returned to Broadway for the 2009 holiday season.
- The song "White Christmas" is the best-selling Christmas song of all time. The Bing Crosby recording of "White Christmas" is the best selling record of all time.
- The song "White Christmas" won the 1942 Academy Award for Song of the Year. Irving Berlin received the Oscar from...himself.
- Irving Berlin lived for 101 years, and wrote over 1200 songs.
- In 2002, Irving Berlin was commemorated on a United States postage stamp.

RESOURCES

PRODUCTION BASED WEBSITES

www.whitechristmasthemusical.com – The official website for the National Tour of *White Christmas*.

www.theaterofthestars.com – The official website for Theater of the Stars, Atlanta's choice for family entertainment.

www.itheatrics.com – Official website for iTheatrics, music theater education consultants.

www.facebook.com/WhiteChristmasthemusical – The official *White Christmas* the musical Facebook fan page.

http://twitter.com/IBWCtheMusical – Follow Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* on Twitter.

www.irvingberlin.com – The official website of the Irving Berlin Music Company.

www.facebook.com/irvingberlin – The official Irving Berlin fan page at Facebook

TEXTS

Irving Berlin: A Daughter's Memoir by Mary Ellin Barrett (Simon & Schuster, 1994)

Irving Berlin: A Life in Song by Philip Furia (Schirmer Books, 1998)

Irving Berlin's Show Business by David Leopold (Harry N. Abrams, 2005)

White Christmas: Story of an American Song by Jody Rosen (Scribner 2001)

Irving Berlin and Ragtime America by Ian Whitcomb (Limelight Editions, 1988)

Irving Berlin: Songs from the Melting Pot The Formative Years, 1907-1914 by Charles Hamm (Oxford University Press, 1997)

VIDEO / DVD

A&E Biography: Irving Berlin – The Story of an American Song (1999)

***White Christmas*: DVD anniversary edition** (2009); **premiere Blu-ray edition** (2010) – Paramount Home Entertainment

RECORDINGS

Irving Berlin's White Christmas: The Musical (Ghostlight, 2006)

Irving Berlin's White Christmas (Motion Picture Soundtrack Recording) (Musicrama/Koch, 1954)

Photos by V. Tanner from the 2007 TOTS production of Irving Berlin's *WHITE CHRISTMAS*

1. The entire *White Christmas* cast
2. Tom Galantich and the Ensemble
3. Kristen Beth Williams and Marla Schaffel
4. George McDaniel and Karen Murphy
5. Karen Murphy, Kristen Beth Williams and Marla Schaffel
6. Kristen Beth Williams, David Engel and Ensemble
7. The entire *White Christmas* cast
8. Karen Murphy
9. *The White Christmas* Ensemble
10. Tom Galantich and David Engel
11. Kristen Beth Williams, David Engel and Ensemble

Photo of Irving Berlin on Page 7 is courtesy of Irving Berlin Music Company/Imagem

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