

CATS

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

A series of activities to engage Key Stage 3 students with the musical and dramatic elements of *CATS*

Musical styles in *CATS*

Towards the end of 1977, Andrew Lloyd Webber began to set *Old Possum's Book Of Practical Cats*, a collection of poems by T.S Eliot, to music. In the musical, the unique personalities of the CATS in Eliot's poems inspire the style of each song.

Andrew Lloyd Webber and his creative team also drew upon some of Eliot's unpublished writings and elements of a poem called 'A Rhapsody On

A Windy Night', to create a continuous storyline that linked the poems together.

The show is 'through-composed', this means that the musical is sung all the way through and there is no spoken dialogue. Other examples of Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals which are also 'through-composed' include **EVITA**, **Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat** and **Jesus Christ Superstar**.

THE OLD GUMBIE CAT

This song is written in a 1930's revue style, which originally consisted of a series of short, light and fast-moving songs or dances linked by a topical idea or theme.

- Listen out for the verse which is followed by an upbeat chorus – can you spot where the chorus comes in? How does the music change here? (different tempo).
- Which instruments are used to accompany the song? (solo clarinet, piano, kit, muted trumpets etc).
- How do the voices in the chorus imitate the style associated with 1930's jazz? (fanfare close harmony singing)

Near the end of the song, Munkustrap removes Jennyanydots's suit, revealing a bright orange and yellow flapper style costume underneath.

- How would you describe the style of the music in this section? (Jazz band, big, brassy etc).

MACAVITY: THE MYSTERY CAT

Macavity (also called the Mystery Cat, the Hidden Paw and Napoleon of Crime) is a master criminal, but in the poem he is too clever to leave any evidence of his guilt. Lloyd Webber noted that 'Macavity ... is obviously a take-off on Moriarty'.

The blues is the name given to a style of music created by African-Americans at the end of the 19th century. Blues music was originally performed by one singer accompanied by guitar or banjo and then gradually other instruments were introduced including drums, saxophones or pianos.

Most blues songs:

- have four beats in a bar
 - are built on the 12-bar blues form
 - use three four-bar phrases
- Listen to the song. How would you describe the texture of the accompaniment?
 - Which instruments can you identify and how are they used for great effect? e.g. The brass instruments can play very soft (with a mute) or explosively.
 - Listen to the chorus – can you spot the three four-bar phrases? What happens at the end of this sequence?

The music and the dance choreography are closely related. Can you spot how they interlink with each other?

See the production here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGQzKpqhDrs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvelBpOZi-w>



CATS

Hit songs from the musicals

GRIZABELLA

Memory is a nostalgic song. Grizabella is remembering her glorious past while declaring that she wishes to start a new life. Sung briefly in the first act and in full near the end of the show, *Memory* is the climax of the musical, and has been recorded by a number of artists all over the world.

- 🎵 Listen to the song and discuss with the class why they think this song became so popular.
- 🎵 Can the class identify any other ballad songs in pop music?

What is a ballad?

'Memory' is typical of the 'ballad' style:

- a ballad is a poem or story set to music
- it relates a story or mood over the course of several verses
- the tempo is generally slow
- it is often of a serious or introspective nature
- it can include a key change to heighten the emotion
- it is usually sung by one person or character

Create a CATS character



- 🎵 Why are these songs so successful? What is it about them that attracts the listener?
- 🎵 Do you have a favourite song from a musical? Can you put into words why you like it?

Listening activity

- 🎵 Listen to the following examples of hit ballads from other musicals by Andrew Lloyd Webber and see how many of the features of a ballad you can identify.

- *Don't Cry For Me Argentina* from *Evita*
- *Music of the Night* from *The Phantom of the Opera*
- *I Don't Know How to Love Him* from *Jesus Christ Superstar*
- *Love Changes Everything* from *Aspects of Love*

Choose a song from *Cats* and work in pairs to create a choreographed piece set to the music that incorporates cat-like personalities and movements. Each pair must design and define their own Jellicle cat that includes a name, a way of moving, coat-pattern, unique personality and individual talent.

1 Look at the characteristics of cats

In pairs, explore physically the idea of cats washing, playing, sleeping, fighting, climbing and stretching, using just your heads, arms and upper body.

2 Create a scene

Combine two or three of these movements to create a short scene. For example, two cats are asleep and they gradually wake up and stretch.

3 Create a personality for your cat

Is your cat sleepy or playful, friendly or mysterious, old or young? Create cat-like postures and movements that communicate your cat's characteristics. Use the entire body, and combine fast and slow actions.