

ENHANCED STUDY GUIDE FOR

Disney

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL

ON STAGE!

© Disney

Book by

DAVID SIMPATIO

Music Arrangements and Adaptation

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Jamie Houston**



Disney's *High School Musical* Study Guide can be used in different ways:

BY THE SCHOOL

Schools are moving toward a more connected and universal approach to education by embracing cross-curricular learning. It is our hope at Music Theatre International that your production of *Disney's High School Musical* will not only impact the students and faculty directly involved with the musical, but also positively affect the school at large. In order to help you (the teacher or director) disseminate information to teachers in other departments, we have provided you a quick reference guide outlining topics that are relevant to different school subjects. We encourage you to copy these pages and offer them as a resource and springboard to your colleagues.

BY THE DIRECTOR

Directors can use this guide as a tool to help students acquire a deeper understanding of his or her role in the show by assigning some of the tasks found in this guide, or by encouraging cast discussions among groups while they are not actively participating in rehearsals. A series of theatre games are also provided that assist the students in making the transition from school to rehearsal, break down inhibitions, and improve performance focus. The warm-up activities done in groups also help promote the familial camaraderie that goes along with producing a musical.

Enhanced Study Guide for *Disney's High School Musical*
Written and adapted by Marty Johnson
Original Study Guide for *High School Musical* on Tour
Created by Disney Theatrical Group
Mariana Elder (Writer)
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THE HISTORY OF HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL

Producer Bill Borden wanted to make a contemporary but old-fashioned musical about a high school, inspired by classic musicals such as *West Side Story* and *Grease*. When given the green light by the Disney Channel to begin creating his movie, he hired writer Peter Barsocchini, a former journalist turned screenwriter, to write the script. Next, he invited a protégée of Gene Kelly, Kenny Ortega, to direct and choreograph.

Ortega filmed with a cast made up almost entirely of teenagers and *High School Musical* was shot in just twenty-eight days (a relatively short filming schedule) around Salt Lake City and Ogden, Utah.

The movie first aired on the Disney Channel in January 2006 and was an instant hit! Since its premiere, more than 100 million people have viewed the movie around the world. The movie also received multiple industry accolades including Emmy® Billboard Music and American Music Awards for both the movie and its soundtrack. The soundtrack itself was 2006's highest selling CD. The release of the DVD—including a karaoke and Dance-Along special edition—set historic sales records, selling 1.2 million copies in six days!

In 2006 the movie was adapted into a musical theatre stage show by Disney Theatrical Group, adding two brand-new songs entitled "Cellular Fusion" and "Counting on You." In addition to the stage version, *High School Musical* has been adapted into a concert tour, an ice show, a video game, and a book series!

THE CREATORS OF THE SHOW

DISNEY THEATRICAL GROUP (Producers)

Disney Theatrical Group (DTG) operates under the direction of Thomas Schumacher and is among the world's most successful commercial theatre enterprises. DTG produces or licenses live entertainment events that reach a global annual audience of more than 20 million people in more than 40 countries. DTG produces and licenses Broadway musicals around the world, including *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, Elton John & Tim Rice's *AIDA*, *TARZAN®*, *Mary Poppins*, a co-production by Disney and Cameron Mackintosh, and the recent Broadway stage adaptation of the beloved Disney classic, *The Little Mermaid*. The professional touring stage version of Disney's *High School Musical* will reach 60 cities through 2008. DTG also delivers live entertainment around the world through its license to Feld Entertainment, producer of *Disney on Ice* and *Disney Live!*, including *High School Musical: The Ice Tour* and *Playhouse Disney Live!*, both of which launched in fall 2007. In addition, DTG licenses musical titles for local school and community theatre productions through Music Theatre International.

THE CREATORS OF THE SHOW (CONTINUED)

PETER BARSOCCHINI (Movie Screenwriter)

Peter Barsocchini wrote the Emmy® Award-winning Disney Channel Original Movie *Disney's High School Musical* for his daughter Gabriella and many of her friends (for whom he also named characters). Barsocchini has subsequently written *Disney's High School Musical 2* for the Disney Channel and is writing *Disney's High School Musical 3* as a feature film (expected fall 2008 release). He began his writing career as a music journalist in San Francisco, where he grew up. As a young journalist, he spent weekends backstage at the legendary Fillmore West, covering artists such as Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, the Kinks and Elton John. Current projects include films for DreamWorks, HBO and MTV. He now resides in Los Angeles and Pebble Beach, California.

DAVID SIMPATICO (Book)

While writing the book for *Disney's High School Musical*, David Simpatico drew on his own drama class experience. Simpatico honored his own high school drama teacher, Dorothy McLernon, by having Ms. Darbus be more sympathetic than her movie counterpart. In his theatrical writing, his experience spans numerous adaptations, including *Disney's Alice in Wonderland JR.* and *Aladdin JR.*, Truman Capote's classic *In Cold Blood* as well as his original musical *The Screams of Kitty Genovese*. Simpatico enjoys writing for younger and older audiences alike and was excited to write for *Disney's High School Musical's* next generation of theatre audiences. "For a lot of kids, *Disney's High School Musical* is their first experience with a story they can really relate to," Simpatico said. "The message is 'You can be whatever you want to be,' and it thrills me that I'm able to be a part of it."

BRYAN LOUISELLE (Music Arrangements and Adaptation)

Bryan Louiselle began his musical theatre career acting in a high school musical when he played Harold Hill in *The Music Man*. Since then, Louiselle has worn many musical hats as arranger, composer, lyricist, conductor and musical director. Since 2002, he has been the music supervisor, adaptor, and recordings producer for Music Theatre International/Disney KIDS, JR. and Theatre for Young Audiences musicals. Louiselle brought all this experience to *Disney's High School Musical*, where he serves as arranger, composer and musical director. He worked with bookwriter David Simpatico to adapt the film into the National Tour version as well as a shorter one-act version. In his theatrical writing, Louiselle's experience spans numerous adaptations, including *Disney's High School Musical 2* and *Aladdin* as well as *A History of Tom Jones*.

ORIGINAL SONGS by:

Matthew Gerrard & Robbie Nevil;
Ray Cham, Greg Cham & Andrew Seeley;
Randy Petersen & Kevin Quinn;
Andy Dodd & Adam Watts;
Bryan Louiselle;
David N. Lawrence & Faye Greenberg;
Jamie Houston

PLOT SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Disney's *High School Musical* opens in front of East High School after winter vacation as everyone looks forward to the New Year (*Wildcat Cheer*). Shy **Gabriella Montez** has just moved to town, and jock **Troy Bolton** is anticipating a successful basketball season. Troy and Gabriella met at a New Year's Party and were instantly drawn to one another—while singing karaoke! Back at school, Gabriella tells her new friend Taylor, the Science Club President, all about meeting this cute guy, while Troy tells his friends about this girl he can't get out of his mind (*Start of Something New*). However, neither mentions a new interest in singing!

In homeroom, drama teacher **Ms. Darbus** shares her disdain of cell phones by handing out detentions to several students, including Troy and Gabriella. In the hallway, Drama Club President **Sharpay** notices the star of the basketball team and the new girl looking at the poster announcing auditions for the new school musical and senses disorder in her world. She orders her twin brother **Ryan** to research Gabriella's background. The Jocks head to basketball practice, where Troy tries to concentrate despite his crush (*Get'cha Head in the Game*). Later in Ms. Darbus's detention, Troy discusses the audition with **Chad**, and Taylor shows Gabriella the printouts that Ryan planted in her locker, which detail Gabriella's genius. Despite her wish to break away from her old "Brainiac" role, Gabriella gives in to Taylor's pleas to join the Science Decathlon Team.

After a series of awkward and painful auditions from other students with composer **Kelsi** at the piano (*Auditions*), Sharpay and Ryan sing their highly polished audition number (*What I've Been Looking For*). A shy Gabriella musters the courage to audition, and Troy steps in to sing with her when she doesn't have a partner (*What I've Been Looking For- Reprise*). The pair gets a callback, and the news spreads like wildfire across the school (*Cellular Fusion*). Sharpay feels threatened, as the lead role has always been hers. Her fury spills over to the lunch cafeteria, where cliques begin to disintegrate and the whole school erupts (*Stick to the Status Quo*).

ACT II

School announcer **Jack Scott** recaps the day's crazy events as an overwhelmed Gabriella and Troy find some quiet time in the Horticulture Garden on the school roof (*I Can't Take My Eyes Off of You*). But a storm is brewing downstairs as the Brainiacs and Jocks decide that Troy and Gabriella must be stopped before everyone abandons his or her place in the school. They convince Troy to dump Gabriella and avoid the audition (*Counting On You*). Gabriella overhears Troy via cell phone and decides to give him up as well (*When There Was Me and You*).

The next day Troy seeks out Gabriella to set things right. Meanwhile, Sharpay, determined to avoid losing her prized role in the musical, schemes to change the callback time to conflict with the Science Decathlon and the basketball championships. Chad and Taylor decide they should work together to help their friends.

The basketball championships, Science Decathlon and callbacks begin on Friday at 3^{PM}. Taylor engineers an electrical meltdown with her laptop, bringing the game and the Decathlon to a halt. Initially suspicious, Ms. Darbus eventually allows Gabriella and Troy to sing their callback song (*Breaking Free*). Troy and Gabriella land the lead roles and East High wins both the Science Decathlon and the basketball game as everyone celebrates in song and dance (*We're All In This Together-Reprise*).



Disney's High School Musical
Thomas Jefferson High School

CHARACTERS FROM HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL

TROY BOLTON is the star of the basketball team and son of Coach Bolton. While extremely dedicated to his teammates, his growing interest in Gabriella and the prospect of singing in the school musical distracts him from what his father believes he should be focused on, keeping his head in the game.

GABRIELLA MONTEZ is the new girl at East High School. While she tries to keep her brilliant math skills undercover, she finds herself drawn to Troy and auditioning for the new musical.

SHARPAY EVANS is the president of East High's Drama Club. She's used to getting all the lead roles and her way. She spends much of her time rehearsing or plotting ways to get Troy to like her. When faced with change in the social structure of her school, she is furious and does her best to get things back where they belong!

RYAN EVANS is Sharpay's sidekick and fraternal twin, younger by eight minutes—a fact Sharpay won't let him forget! He has starred opposite Sharpay in seventeen productions, but always seems to be upstaged by his sister.

CHAD DANFORTH is Troy's best friend and teammate. He is the head of the Jocks, loves basketball and has no interest in theatre or wearing leotards. He develops a crush on Taylor when they work together to help Gabriella and Troy.

TAYLOR MCKESSIE lives for science, thinks sports are for "morons," and is the president of East High's Science Club. As head of the Brainiacs, she hopes that befriending new student Gabriella will help her team win the prized Science Decathlon!

KELSI NIELSON is a quiet, hard-working pianist, lyricist and composer currently writing *Juliet and Romeo*, the new school musical. She helps Troy and Gabriella learn their audition music in order to help them win the roles that Sharpay and Ryan are assuming they will get.

MS. DARBUS is East High's "dramatic" drama teacher! She loves introducing students to the "magic" of theatre. She frequently fights with Coach Bolton over the relative importance of theatre and sports.

COACH BOLTON is Troy's father and the basketball coach. A former Wildcats team legend, he has high hopes for his team and even higher expectations for his star son.

CAREERS IN THEATRE

BOOKWRITER: Creates the plot and story of a musical and also writes the dialogue.

LYRICIST: Writes the lyrics for the songs.

COMPOSER: Writes the music for the lyrics and any other incidental music. The bookwriter, lyricist and composer all work together to shape the show.

PRODUCER: In charge of raising the money to fund the show and overseeing the budget. Sometimes a producer is a "creative producer" and oversees the whole production while offering feedback.

DIRECTOR: The creative leader for the production. He or she collaborates with the writers, designers and actors to transform what's on the page to the stage. Also "blocks," or arranges the actors in the space of the stage, to tell the story.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Teaches and directs the score to the actors. Also often conducts the show through its run.

CHOREOGRAPHER: Creates and arranges the dances in the show.

DESIGNERS: Work with the director to visually and aurally tell the story through their respective designs which include the set, costumes, lighting and sound.

ACTORS: Use their voices and bodies to portray characters and work in rehearsals and at home to learn their lines, songs and blocking.

STAGE MANAGER: Schedules and organizes all parts of rehearsals, takes notes and "calls the show" (gives cues to the set crew and lighting and sound operators during performances).

ORCHESTRA / BAND: A full orchestra, or perhaps a small band, plays live music to accompany each musical theatre show. It is led by the conductor.

MARKETING STAFF: In charge of media and public relations. They also create newspaper, web, radio, and television advertisements and posters.

HOUSE MANAGER: Manages the "house" or audience. He or she supervises the ushers, merchandise and concessions.

BOX OFFICE MANAGER AND STAFF: Runs the ticket sales, keeps receipts and records of sales, and creates "house maps" to ensure that every member of the audience has a seat.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

CAREER OPTIONS

Objective:

To explore career options in the field of theatre and entertainment beyond performing.

Preparation:

Review the Plot Synopsis, Characters in Disney's *High School Musical*, and Careers in Theatre sections from this guide.

Group Exercise:

Ms. Darbus and Coach Bolton each oversee one of East High School's extra-curricular activities, but neither of them could succeed at their jobs without help from other people. Divide your class into two groups. One group will focus on a professional theatre performance and the other will focus on a professional basketball game. Each group will brainstorm the number of people/occupations that are involved in making their event happen. Encourage your students to think beyond the obvious by reminding them about marketing, fundraising, audience services, etc. Once each group has finished, compare the two lists to see how many occupations overlap.

Written Exercise:

Ask each student to write an essay that addresses the following questions:

"Imagine you are able to land your 'dream job.' What would it be and why? Now imagine your job must involve working in the world of professional theatre. How can your "dream job" work in conjunction with the world of professional theatre?" (For example, fashion designer could try to work in costume design.)

Expanding the Exercise:

Imagine your classroom has been asked to be completely responsible for producing a new musical at your local performing arts center. Have your students each pick jobs from the Careers in Theatre page based on their interests. Each student should then create a plan of action for their specific role, highlighting both what they will accomplish and how they will accomplish it.

STATUS QUO / SELF-IDENTITY

Objective:

To understand how the status quo can both help and hinder an individual's self-identity.

Preparation:

Review the Plot Synopsis found in this guide. Next, find and play a copy of the song "Stick to the Status Quo" for your students. Finally, revisit the definitions of status quo and self-identity with the class.

Discussion Exercise:

Discuss with your students how and why something becomes part of the status quo. Discuss both positive and negative examples of the status quo in the world and in your school.

What are the pros and cons of a group or individual going against the status quo. Does the status quo shape an individual's self-identity? Does a person have to go against the status quo to establish their self-identity? Again, have your students try to find both positive and negative examples of how status quo can shape self-identity.

Written Exercise:

Have your students pretend a new student has come to your school. Students should write a character description for their new classmate that contains information about general characteristics, physical looks, clothing style, family, where he or she moved from, classes and extra curricular activities he or she signed up for, etc. The character analysis should be as descriptive as possible. When complete, have each student list the ways this person would both complement and contrast with the status quo in your school.

Students should swap papers with another class member. They should read each other's descriptions of their new student and see if they agree or disagree with that person's list and assessments about the status quo.

Expanding the Exercise:

Have your students create a character description of themselves that goes beyond characteristics. Have them look over their description and identify qualities they have in common with the people they talk to and hang out with the most. Determine whether these qualities have created or established a status quo for their group. Encourage them to find characteristics about themselves that don't fit into the status quo. Are these characteristics they like or dislike?

THE MESHING OF SCIENCE, PHYSICAL FITNESS & THEATRE

Objective:

To examine and determine the connections between the worlds of science, physical fitness and theatre.

Discussion:

Discuss with your students the roles of science, sports (physical fitness) and theatre in today's society. While the three areas function in their own way, there is definitely some common ground between them. What similarities immediately come to mind? Are there students in your school who participate in activities in more than one of these areas? Do they have specific skills that allow them to do this? Can any of these skills transfer between the three mediums?

Exercises:

Have your students divide up into three groups and assign one group basketball, another group science and the third group theatre. Ask each group to brainstorm and collect adjectives or qualities that describe professionals (or students) who excel in their assigned field. Have a member of the group record the ideas their group comes up with. After students have created their list, have them share it with the entire class. As a class, create a number of charts that diagram the following:

- A chart highlighting the principles of science found in basketball (e.g. angles, muscle uses, adrenaline)
- A chart comparing the similarities between basketball and theatre (e.g. teamwork, performing in front of an audience, communication skills)
- A chart comparing the similarities of physical demand in basketball and theatre (e.g. breath support, coordination, stamina)
- A chart highlighting how science contributes to the world of theatre (e.g. technical support, lighting, paint mixing)

Create a large diagram with three overlapping circles. Label each circle as one of the following: Theatre, Science or Physical Fitness. Transfer the information from the above charts to see if there are any items that are in all three subject areas.

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY HISTORY

Objective:

To learn about and appreciate the history of your high school and community.

Preparation:

Have students work with the school librarian to gather yearbooks from your school's history. Locate local historians or neighborhood individuals who might have information on what your school was like in the past. Students can also consult veteran teachers on their school's history.

Exercise:

Have your students study your school's yearbooks to determine what extra-curricular activities were offered 10, 20, 50, etc. years earlier. Create a timeline with the different activities.

As a class, compare and contrast your current student clubs and organizations with their historical counterparts. Look at numbers of students involved, boy to girl ratios, types of activities, etc. Have each student research and find a member of one of the student organizations from the past to ask them for details about what it was like "back in the day." Encourage these school historians to speak to the current group of students.

Expanding the Exercise:

Who were the student leaders of the school 20 years ago? Have students look through the yearbook and identify the captain of the basketball team, president of the drama club, captain of the math league, etc. See if the class can locate and contact any of these individuals who are still living in your area. A student, or group of students, should interview the individual about their time in high school and how this helped shape the person they are now.

Written Exercise:

Have students identify a current student and his or her parent or grandparent who both participated in the same activity at your school, like Coach Bolton and his son Troy from Disney's *High School Musical*. Students should interview both of them and write an essay comparing and contrasting the historical differences in the school and the school activity the pair participated in.

CONFLICT & RESOLUTION

Objective:

To stimulate students's interest in engaging positive conflict resolution practices.

Preparation:

Go over the Plot Synopsis of Disney's *High School Musical* found in this guide.

Written Exercise:

Coach Bolton and Ms. Darbus argue during the show about which specific activity is more important to the high school, basketball or drama club. Coach Bolton even believes his athletes should be able to miss their detention because of an upcoming important basketball game. Have your students write a letter as if they are either Coach Bolton or Ms. Darbus and they are writing to the other individual. The letter should highlight the reasons they feel that their activity is important to the high school, and it should be professionally and respectfully written.

Exercise:

By staging a mock trial in your classroom based on the argument above, students can learn both the judicial process and conflict resolution practices. Divide your students into three groups: the Drama Club, the Basketball Team, and the Judge and Jury.

The Drama Club and Basketball Team students should prepare arguments on why they feel their activity is more important than the other. Instruct them to come up with clear, concise facts and stay away from generalization. The Judge and Jury should agree on questions for each group that address the relevance of these activities in high school education.

Stage your trial and let both the Basketball Team and the Drama Club state their arguments. Next the Judge and Jury will ask their questions. After their questions have all been answered, the Judge & Jury must make a decision on who has the strongest argument.

Finally, allow each group to reconvene and come up with a solution that will address as many of each group's concerns as possible. They should then share their solutions with the rest of the class.

Expanding the Exercise:

Following the trial, discuss if there really is a conflict between basketball and drama. Is this a problem that needs a trial or a professional mediator? Can the two groups successfully co-exist in one school? How much overlap of students participating in both activities do you have in your school?

STORYTELLING

Objective:

To reinforce all of the basics of storytelling, whether it is in the form of a novel, movie or musical.

Preparation:

Have students read the Plot Synopsis found in this study guide, or if it is available, read the script for the stage adaptation of Disney's *High School Musical*. Next watch the movie of *High School Musical*.

Discussion Exercise:

As a class, compare the plot and characters from the stage adaptation and the movie. Identify the key differences between the two pieces. How do these differences help in telling the story? How does the medium (stage or film) affect how the story is told? Discuss why some things from the movie do not appear in the stage adaptation. Are there reasons these scenes or characters might have been omitted or changed?

Written Exercise:

Have your students select one of the supporting characters from the show. Have them rewrite the story of Disney's *High School Musical* with that character as the main character. The story should cover the same period of time, contain the same basic conflict of theatre vs. basketball vs. Science Decathlon, and end with the whole student body working together. Students should write their story like the Plot Synopsis found in this guide. Remind students to make sure it is clear who the main character is.

Expanding the Exercise:

Have students create a scene that would take place in their new version of the story and write dialogue for the characters. Have them listen to sample conversations from the movie and stage adaptation to help create dialogue that sounds specific for each character. Once the scene is written, have students read it out loud for the rest of the class.



Disney's *High School Musical*
Thomas Jefferson High School

HISTORY OF STAGE MUSICALS AS MOVIE MUSICALS

Objective:

To gain a historical perspective on how movie musicals are often connected to events happening in the outside world.

Preparation:

Make copies of the list on page 15 for all of your students.

Research & Discussion Exercise:

Movie musicals became very popular in the 1930's and most major film studio released original musicals as fast as they could be written. The demand for musicals continued through the 1950's when Broadway shows began to be adapted into movies. While movie musicals are still being made, the numbers sharply decreased in the 1970's.

Have your students research what was happening in the United States's history at the times when movie musicals were most popular and when they started to decline. Is there any logical correlation between the events? Why are movie musicals somewhat popular again now?

Expanding the Exercise:

Sweeney Todd and *Chicago* are recent examples of older musicals that have been adapted into movies. Ask your students: Why do you think it took so long? Is it something about the subject matter of the stories? Have your students research the time frame when both stories were written and determine if they are timeless tales or if timing helped in the telling.

Written Exercise:

Have your students research one of the movies listed on page 15. Have them examine the success of both the commercial theatrical run of the show and the movie. Have students analyze the data and try to conclude what worked and didn't work in each medium. Finally, students should write a paper explaining their findings and how they reached their conclusions.

MUSICAL	BROADWAY OPENING	MOVIE PREMIERE
<i>Brigadoon</i>	1947	1954
<i>Oklahoma!</i>	1943	1955
<i>Guys and Dolls</i>	1950	1955
<i>Carousel</i>	1945	1956
<i>The King and I</i>	1951	1956
<i>South Pacific</i>	1949	1958
<i>West Side Story</i>	1957	1961
<i>The Music Man</i>	1957	1962
<i>Gypsy</i>	1959	1962
<i>My Fair Lady</i>	1956	1964
<i>The Sound of Music</i>	1959	1965
<i>Oliver!</i>	1963	1968
<i>Hello Dolly</i>	1964	1969
<i>Fiddler on the Roof</i>	1964	1971
<i>Cabaret</i>	1966	1972
<i>Grease</i>	1972	1978
<i>Annie</i>	1977	1982
<i>A Chorus Line</i>	1975	1985
<i>Evita</i>	1979	1996
<i>Chicago</i>	1975	2002
<i>Phantom of the Opera</i>	1988	2004
<i>Rent</i>	1996	2005
<i>The Producers</i>	2001	2005
<i>Dreamgirls</i>	1981	2006
<i>Sweeney Todd</i>	1979	2007

THEATRE GAMES FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

When students first begin to act, they may feel a bit self-conscious or nervous. A good director knows this and takes the time to help them get to know each other so they may lose their inhibitions about performing. Theatre games are a useful tool to develop the trust and comfort level students need to rehearse and perform effectively. The following are suggestions for games you might use as you begin your work on Disney's *High School Musical*.

Getting to Know You

A warm-up activity to get your cast members comfortable with each other

1. Ask your students to walk quickly in random directions around the rehearsal or performance space, turning their noses up at each person they meet and giving that person the cold shoulder.
2. Ask the students to slow down a little and to make eye contact with each person they encounter, holding it for as long as possible before making eye contact with the next person they encounter.
3. Ask them to continue walking, and to give a little nod of recognition to each person whose path they cross.
4. Ask them to continue walking and to say "Hello" and to wave to each person they pass.
5. Ask them to continue walking and to say "Nice to see you" and to give a little bow to each person they meet.
6. Ask them to continue walking, and to give a "high five" to each person they meet.
7. Ask your students to suggest other forms of greeting. Each student might greet the others as a jock, a brainiac, or as character from Disney's *High School Musical*.

Focus Circle

A physical warm-up to help actors develop a sense of focus

1. Arrange the students in a large circle, leaving enough space between them to allow for movement.
2. Choose one student to begin the exercise.
3. Explain to the cast that the student may make any physical movements, and that the other students must mimic these movements exactly.
4. Call out the name of another student. That student then takes over the lead, choosing a physical movement that the other students must mimic.
5. Continue this process until all students have had an opportunity to lead the group in movement.

Character Development Circle

An improvisation exercise to develop character

1. Seat the cast on chairs that have been arranged in a circle. Designate one chair to be the "character seat."
2. Explain to the cast that the actor in the "character seat" must answer questions from the other cast members in a way that will start to define a character of that actor's choosing.
3. Tell the student directly to the left of the actor in the "character seat" to ask a question of the actor. The first question should always be "What is your name?" The actor should then answer with the name of his or her chosen character.
4. The next student (to the left) asks a question of the actor in the "character seat." The actor responds once more as the chosen character.
5. Continuing to the left, each student asks a question of the actor in the "character seat." The qualities of the actor's character will begin to emerge from how the actor answers each question.
6. When everyone has asked a question of the actor in the "character seat," have all of the students move one seat to the left so a new cast member sits in the "character seat."
7. Continue the process, with the following proviso: each person who has moved from the "character seat" must stay "in character" for the rest of the game, playing the character he or she created while in the "character seat." He or she will thus ask questions of the other students as the character he or she created earlier.
8. Suggest the cast keep a record of how many characters they have created over the course of the show, and discuss which ones they found most challenging to create.

The Machine Game

An exercise to develop concentration skills and create an awareness of the connection of physical motion to fellow cast members

Choose one student to stand at the center of the playing space to begin the game. Instruct the student that he/she is one part of a large machine. Have the student choose one movement and a noise to go with that movement and to perform that noise and movement continuously as if they were a machine in operation. (For example, a student begins this game by lifting their right arm over their head and pulling down on an imaginary cable, and with each downward pull the student says, "Pop!") Explain to the cast that a person must join the machine one at a time, adding on to any of the machine's places that inspire them. (For example, when the next student is ready he/she joins the first student and takes a hold of that student's left arm and cranks it each time saying "Kerchunck".) Instruct all of the students to join the machine with the specifications that the person joining must physically attach themselves to some part of the machine. All machine movements are to continue working until the last student has joined and the instructor says, "Freeze."

Tell-A-Story Tag

An exercise to develop concentration skills and create awareness of the connection between telling a story and physical motion (as a precursor to blocking)

1. Choose one student to be "it."
2. Explain to the cast that the person who is "it" must tell a story while pursuing other students.
3. When the person who is "it" tags another student, the new student must take up the telling of that story as he or she pursues the other students and tries to tag another cast member.

Create a Character

An exercise to develop a three dimensional character

1. A leader chooses a group of character traits (such as “shy”, “silly”, “bossy”, and “impatient”) and writes the character traits on 3 X 5 cards, one trait for each card.
2. Each actor chooses a card at random. The leader then suggests a situation (such as “waiting for a school bus that is late”).
3. Each actor tries to behave as a character with the trait he or she has chosen might behave in the situation specified by the leader.

Triangle Trade

An exercise to develop improvisational skills within the framework of a timed section of music

1. Choose three actors, or divide your cast into three groups of equal number.
2. Position the three groups at the corners of an imaginary triangle within the rehearsal or performance space, so each group can see clearly what the other groups are doing.
3. Designate one group the “beginning,” one group the “middle” and the last group the “end.”
4. Have the groups listen to a very short segment of music, which could be music from the show.
5. After the groups are familiar with the selection, have the first group improvise the beginning of a scene set to the musical selection. After they have performed for the appropriate amount of time, call out “Middle!” The first group freezes in place.
6. The second group picks up where the first group left off, playing the same characters and beginning the middle section of the scene in the same positions in which the first group is frozen. Let the “middle” group play the scene for the appropriate amount of time before calling “End!” This is the cue for the final group to bring the scene to a conclusion.

Read My Mind

An exercise in exploring the subtext of a scene

1. Try to schedule a full cast read through of the script early in the rehearsal process to help each student get an idea of the full show.
2. Divide the group into pairs of students.
3. Give each pair a section of dialogue from the show (make sure the section consists of dialogue between two characters).
4. Ask each pair to read through the dialogue a couple of times and let the partners decide who will read which role.
5. Have two actors in each pair face each other.
6. After partner #1 speaks his or her first line, have partner #2 comment on what has been said by partner #1, before speaking his or her next line. Partner #2 should comment on what partner #1’s previous line means in the context of the show, including why partner #1’s character chose to speak as he or she did. There might be a hidden agenda behind lines one character speaks to another in a scene; the characters may not always say what they mean! This hidden agenda is known as subtext.
7. Partner # 1 in turn listens to partner #2’s next line and comments on that line before speaking his or her next line.
8. Continue until the section of dialogue has been completed. This exercise will encourage students to think about what motivates the characters in the show as well as the subtext behind each scene. They will begin to better understand the relationship each character has with the others and will quickly gain deeper insight into their individual roles. You might also repeat this exercise using pantomime instead of spoken comments.

Change Your Status

An exercise to develop more complex characters through improvisation

1. Write the numbers 1 through 10 on 3X5 cards, one number on each card. Shuffle the cards, face down.
2. Choose a group of ten actors and have each actor pick a card at random. Ask each actor to look at the number written on the card, but to hide it from the other students. Tell them they will be playing characters that are defined by the number on their individual cards. The actor with the "number one" card plays a character that is extremely weak and submissive. The actor with the "number ten" card plays a very powerful, persuasive person. The numbers in between denote characters with progressively dominant personalities (keeping in mind "number one" is the weakest and most submissive personality and "number ten" is the most powerful, persuasive personality).
3. Have the members of this group walk around, interacting with each other in a manner that befits their "number." This section of the exercise is best carried out in silence.
4. The remaining cast members should study these interactions. They should try to line up the ten actors in order from weakest to most dominant.

Live Eye

An exercise to develop improvisational skills

1. Select one student to play a television interviewer.
2. Select various cast members to play the interviewees. Give them a setting (e.g., a New York City street during the Depression) and ask them each to come up with a character that might be found in that setting. Have the interviewer ask questions of the characters.
3. Announce "Ten seconds to go!" to cue the interviewer to wrap up the interviews.
4. Continue this exercise until several students have had a chance to play the interviewer and all participants have become comfortable ad-libbing in character.

