

THE SOMEWHERE PROJECT

A West Side Story Companion

Classroom Supplement

In celebration of Carnegie Hall's 125th anniversary season, the Weill Music Institute (WMI) launches The Somewhere Project, a citywide exploration of *West Side Story*. As part of the project, WMI has partnered with Soundfly to produce an eight-part interactive online companion course that is available to users around the globe free of charge. These videos explore the history and social issues that inspired *West Side Story* and include practical instructions from professionals on all facets of performance, including songwriting, dance, acting, audition preparation, and much more.

This classroom supplement is meant to accompany the materials in the Soundfly course and to open meaningful and rich opportunities for learning in arts, ELA, and social studies classrooms. We have made an effort to connect these classroom prompts to Common Core capacities that emphasize textual evidence, comprehension, and critique and understanding of other perspectives and cultures. It will be important that you can view some of the Soundfly videos referenced in the prompts. Access the entire course online at soundfly.com/WestSideStory.

PART ONE

Exploring “Somewhere”

Objective: Examine the power of the song “Somewhere” through a close reading of the text, listen to the way that composer Leonard Bernstein set the text to music, and use creative prompts to explore personal responses to the song and its ideas.

Analyze the Lyrics of “Somewhere”

- The song “Somewhere” is sung in Act II of *West Side Story* as the lovers Tony and Maria meet secretly following the violent rumble during which Maria’s brother was killed. Below are the lyrics of “Somewhere.” Read them aloud.

*There’s a place for us,
Somewhere a place for us,
Peace and quiet and open air
Wait for us
Somewhere.*

*There’s a time for us,
Someday a time for us,
Time together with time to spare,
Time to learn, time to care,
Someday!*

*Somewhere.
We’ll find a new way of living,
We’ll find a way of forgiving,
Somewhere ...*

*There’s a place for us,
A time and place for us.
Hold my hand and we’re halfway there.
Hold my hand and I’ll take you there
Somehow,
Someday,
Somewhere!*

Music by Leonard
Bernstein, lyrics by
Stephen Sondheim.

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Discussion/Writing Prompts

- Having only read the lyrics, what does this song mean to you?
- Does “Somewhere” resonate in particular ways in your life? How?
- How are the concepts of refuge and escape relevant today?
- As a group, examine the lyrical structure and devices.
 - The word “Somewhere” is repeated five strategically placed times.
 - “Hold my hand” builds to the climax of the song.
 - Rhyming words: where/air/spare/care/there, living/forgiving
 - The universal quality of the lyrics—no specific character names are used, and the song falls outside of the dramatic time of the play.

Listen to “Somewhere”

-  Listen to the song on a recording or at [youtube.com/watch?v=37EtJ0tnOA8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37EtJ0tnOA8). Revisit the above prompts to see how the music impacts your responses.

Prompts for Music Classrooms

- Pay special attention to the distinctive opening interval for the lyrics “There’s a ...” (minor seventh). What impact does this interval have?
- What do you notice about the shape of the melody as it moves toward its climactic ending?
 - The melody uses a repeated ascending major second on the final “Somehow, Someday, Somewhere!”—a kind of musical cousin to the minor seventh.
- What happens to the instrumentation as the song progresses?

Connect to the Story of “Somewhere”

- Watch the Soundfly *West Side Story* Companion video about the song “Somewhere” at soundfly.com/courses/west-side-story-companion/lessons/16.

Discussion/Writing Prompts

- At the end of this video, the narrator asks “Is there a place where love can flourish, without hate and intolerance? And can I help bring the world to that place?” What do you think about this sentiment?
- What kind of “place for us” can you imagine for your school or community? What can you do to help move toward that place?

Creative Prompts

- We encourage you to respond creatively to the song “Somewhere.” You can do so on the Soundfly website at the bottom of each video page. Or tag your response on social media using **#SomewhereProject**.

Quick response options:

- Write a brief social media post including a link to the video of “Somewhere” that explains your thoughts about the song.
- Write a review of or a response to the song, comparing performances, perhaps listening to one of the many covers of the song by artists as diverse as The Supremes, Dave Brubeck, and others.

Ways to dive deeper:

- Write and post a poem in dialogue with the lyrics of “Somewhere.” Add your point of view to its exploration of refuge and escape.
- Write a song that responds to the questions that “Somewhere” raises. Record and post your song.

PART TWO

Considering the Social Issues in *West Side Story*

Objective: Grapple with the social issues that *West Side Story* raises through analysis of the song “Gee, Officer Krupke” and creative prompts that suggest artistic ways of responding to contemporary social issues.

Examine the Social Issues in *West Side Story*

- In addition to being a beautiful and heartfelt work of musical theater, *West Side Story* was one of the first musicals to engage with the tough issues of the day, including gang violence, immigration, social inequality, and sexism.
- Watch this video featuring artist Charles Burchell as an introduction to the social themes of *West Side Story*: soundfly.com/courses/west-side-story-companion/lessons/8.

Explore “Gee, Officer Krupke”

- One of the pieces from *West Side Story* that best raises major questions about social issues is the song “Gee, Officer Krupke.” In the song, the Jets, who are high-school aged, impersonate different adults who have strong opinions about why “young people today” are in trouble. In making fun of the institutions that define and diagnose them, these young “hoodlums” demonstrate a keen understanding of how disempowered they are to control their own stories.
- 👁 Watch this video of “Gee, Officer Krupke” to see this social critique in action: youtube.com/watch?v=j7TT4jnnWys.

Discussion/Writing Prompts

- What does this piece of art reveal about the relationship between young people and the police or authority in general?
- Do you think there could have been another way for these young people to express their discontent with their treatment? What makes their response so effective?

Investigate How Art Can Make a Difference

- Creative work has always been an effective way for artists to raise social issues and comment on their cultures and societies.
- 👁 Watch this video of Charles Burchell discussing the ways that artists today are using their art to address important social issues: soundfly.com/courses/west-side-story-companion/lessons/10.

Discussion/Writing Prompts:

- What does Charles mean when he says that “good art reflects our own humanity back to us”? Is there anything else in our lives that can serve this same purpose?
- What are some social issues that are important to you, and how can you raise them without an “agenda to save the world”?
- How are the artists you admire for their message creating conversation within your community?
- What does conversation look like between artists? Can you think of any art that is in direct response to another piece of art?

Creative Prompts

- We encourage you to respond creatively to the social issues that are important to you. You can do so on the Soundfly website at the bottom of each video page. Or tag your response on social media using **#SomewhereProject**.

Quick response options:

- Take a self-portrait photo that represents the way you want to be seen by the rest of the world.
- Write a short statement in which you declare who you are and what is important to you.

Ways to dive deeper:

- Create a piece of art that directly addresses a social issue that is important to you. It can be a poem, video, drawing, song, play, or dance. Remember to think about Charles’s five tips for engaging with a social issue in your art.
- Imagine an interview with an artist you admire for the values espoused in his or her art. What kinds of questions would you ask the artist? How do you think he or she would respond?