

**How did four blue-collar kids become one of the greatest successes in pop music history?**

**Have we got a story for you.**



# JERSEY BOYS

The story of Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons

**Discovery Guide**  
*For Teachers*

***This Discovery Guide is designed to help you and your classes delve deeper into the world of Jersey Boys. It contains materials for your students, as well as suggestions for activities and assignments that are related to some of the important concepts your class might study in relation to this show.***

## **Why Study Jersey Boys?**

*Jersey Boys* is a classic story: the local boys who made good. However, it is also a true story of four guys in a particular time and place—blue collar America in the mid-twentieth-century. This combination makes it an ideal piece for use in English, Drama and History classrooms. However, educational possibilities extend far beyond those subjects, as the show offers connections to Economics, Health, Physical Education and more.

## **Language**

The language, while strong, is authentic and will ring as true to students, as it does to other audience members. The dialect used in the show provides an excellent example of a non-“standard” home language, and can spark discussion about how we use language. Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice both speak differently than the characters in the play, but they recognized the importance of dialect and used it to create realistic portrayals of the individuals in the show.

Students can make presentations about the dialects in which they or their family members speak. This simultaneously allows the students to practice speaking about a topic on which they are experts and to learn about the wonderful complexities of the English language from their classmates. This may lead into an assignment asking students to interview someone with a different background and creating a scene or monologue based on that interview (as laid out in the Discovery Guide). In this assignment, students can experience the challenges faced by the playwrights in portraying real people authentically and with respect. Used in conjunction, these activities will enrich students’ understanding of how different types of language can be used, and make them comfortable switching between different spoken and written voices. (Students can also try writing up their interview in the format of a biography or newspaper report for practice with additional writing styles.) This is essential for success on standardized writing assessments, in which students



*Scenic designer Klara Zieglerova created a set that captured the industrial grittiness and appeal of the New Jersey The Four Seasons called home.*

will be asked to adopt a tone that is likely to be more professional or academic than their everyday speech.

## Drama/Theatre

From an English standpoint, *Jersey Boys* provides a great example of dramatic structure, characterization and dialogue. The show draws on established dramatic tropes, such as the use of multiple narrators (see: “The *Rashomon* Effect” in the Discovery Guide) and building a musical around the pre-existing songs of one group or artist, but it does so in innovative ways that set it apart from other musicals in the genre. In a unit on drama, *Jersey Boys* can be used as an example of contemporary American theatre, musical theatre and historical/biographical theatre.

Seeing *Jersey Boys* in the theatre adds a whole new dimension to the study of the show. With a Tony Award® for Best Lighting Design and Tony® nominations for Best Direction and Best Scenic Design, *Jersey Boys* is an exemplary theatrical experience. *Jersey Boys* also makes use of projections as an integral part of its design, a technique that is becoming more popular in the theatre every year. A student who sees this show will be exposed to new, creative theatrical techniques with all the resources and spectacle that Broadway allows.

## Music

*Jersey Boys* is overflowing with opportunities for students to learn about music. The music of The Four Seasons is, of course, iconic American pop music. The evolution of music in America is apparent in the show and in listening to the songs that are included. The Four Seasons are part of a musical tradition that includes doo-wop, R&B and rock and roll. Music’s connections to the rest of the culture are also a part of this show, as when the character of Bob Gaudio explains:

*We weren’t a social movement like the Beatles. Our fans didn’t put flowers in their hair and try to*

*levitate the Pentagon. Maybe they should have. Our people were the guys who shipped overseas...and their sweethearts. They were the factory workers, the truck drivers. The kids pumping gas, flipping burgers. The pretty girl with circles under her eyes behind the counter at the diner. They’re the ones who really got us, who pushed us over the top.*

*Jersey Boys* can bring to life a study of popular music in America and help students connect with a genre that may be unfamiliar or otherwise unappealing to them. The story of The Four Seasons is one that any student can relate to, and this will help them to appreciate the music made by the group.

## History

*Jersey Boys* is set in a dynamic, exciting period in America’s history. It may function as a way to reinforce whole-class lessons about the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s, or it may be a focus for more individual projects. For example, students could research a topic from a list of important events or movements of the era (feminism, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement) and present their research from the point of view of any of the show’s characters, offering what they imagine to be their own character’s view of that subject.

## Health/Physical Education/Dance

*Jersey Boys* depicts multiple characters dealing with addiction or substance abuse, which can be turned into a teachable moment for students. Since the show is not designed specifically to warn against these dangers, and therefore avoids moralizing, students may be more receptive to

discussing the ramifications the characters face than they would be with a film or television special that was written for that express purpose. Consequences are definitely present in the show for both substance abuse and gambling addiction, but the script handles



*Frankie Valli (Tony Award® winner John Lloyd Young) and his first wife, Mary Delgado (Jennifer Naimo) struggle with his success, his absence from his daughter’s life and her addiction to drugs.*

both with a light enough hand to make real discussion of all sides of the problems possible after the show.

In addition, an exploration of other music from the 50's, 60's and 70's can lead to a possible physical education or dance unit on popular dances of those eras. The Twist is probably the best known, but students can also learn dances such as the Freddie and the Pony. This can connect to dances the students already know, from the Electric Slide to the Chicken Dance to the Macarena.

## Math/Economics

Throughout much of the play, the characters struggle to come up with the funds to keep moving ahead in their musical careers. Occasionally, this problem is temporarily solved with loans. A practical lesson on how interest works can be tied into this plotline. Additionally, students can learn about inflation and do some research to find out what the amounts mentioned in the show (like Tommy DeVito's eventual \$162,000 loan debt and \$500,000 tax lien) would be equivalent to today.



*Nick (J. Robert Spencer), Frankie (John Lloyd Young) and Bob (Daniel Reichard) confront Tommy (Christian Hoff) about his debt with the mob.*

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