

The Sound of Music(als) in Academic English

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Musical Theater's presence in Japan has exploded in the past decade and, as a result, student interest in this form of entertainment has dramatically increased. This paper presents an overview of an introductory course taught in English to sophomore level students on American Musical Theater. The course has been offered to Japanese students for ten years in the English Language Program at a private Japanese liberal arts university. The practical goals of the course are to expose students to the multi-faceted on-stage and back-stage world of musical theater, as well as its specific "language." The academic goals are to provide an opportunity for students to read about and write about musical theater, as well as orally communicate their ideas. Students achieve these goals through the study of four musicals viewed on video ranging from the traditional Oklahoma to the modern musical Cats. They also attend a live musical performance. At the beginning of the term students choose one or more area(s) of musical theater to focus on throughout the course. In addition, they use the ideas gained from reading a book related to their area of interest to assist them in preparing for a Final Project, the "Grande Finale" of the course. Final Projects range from Music Critic to choreographer to costume designer. It is hoped that when students complete the course they have a well-grounded foundation about the basic elements of musical theater, as well as a life-long confidence in their ability to assess and enjoy its merits.