

EXPERIENCE WHERE DREAMS BEGIN.

# HELL'S KITCHEN

BROADWAY'S HIT MUSICAL FROM  
**ALICIA KEYS**

**AFTER THE SHOW**



**STUDY GUIDE**

# HELL'S KITCHEN

## AFTER THE SHOW

### REFLECTION AND ACTIVITIES ON PRODUCTION THEMES

#### CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE OF THEATRE

With its raw energy, diverse characters, and contemporary themes, *HELL'S KITCHEN* resonates with today's theatre audiences. This musical reflects the evolving cultural landscape and how theatre continues to embrace diversity, social issues, and innovative forms of music and storytelling. In the following activities, students will research the rich history of theatre, explore current trends across the industry, and envision what the future of live performance might look like.



#### ACTIVITY: BROADWAY TIMELINE

Explore how Broadway has evolved over time, focusing on the shifts in diversity, storytelling, and music.

In this activity, students will create a timeline of Broadway's history, identifying and analyzing key moments that reflect changes in the musical theatre landscape. Begin by discussing classic Broadway shows, like *Oklahoma!*, *The Sound of Music*, or *The Wizard of Oz*. What makes these shows "classic"? Moving forward in the timeline, the 1960s brought more diverse voices, and the 1970s saw more influence from genres of music like rock and pop. Modern musicals often address contemporary social issues, like *Rent* did in the 1990s, or reimagining traditional casting, like *Hamilton* did in 2015. Theatre often grapples with changing social landscapes as artists try to reflect the world in which they are living.

Students will research specific events or productions (e.g., *West Side Story*, *The Wiz*, *A Chorus Line*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Hair*, *Cabaret*) and place them on the timeline, noting how these productions changed the way stories were told onstage, the music that accompanied them, and the diversity of voices represented. The final timeline will help students understand how Broadway is continually shaped by the broader cultural shifts in society. Encourage students to place *HELL'S KITCHEN* on the timeline too.

#### Classroom Connections – National Arts Standards:

- Grades HS Proficient: Theatre at a Glance: Responding TH:Re8.1.1.b
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists' interpretations of drama/theatre work are influenced by personal experiences and aesthetics.
- Essential Question: How can the same work of art communicate different messages to different people?
  - Identify and compare cultural perspectives and contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

#### DEBATE: IS BROADWAY KEEPING UP WITH SOCIETAL CHANGE?

Use your performance of *HELL'S KITCHEN* to spark critical thinking about whether theatre as a whole is successfully reflecting modern societal shifts in its productions and audiences.

In this debate activity, students will discuss whether today's theatre is adequately keeping up with changes in society—particularly around diversity, representation, and the relevance of its storytelling. The class will be divided into two groups: one advocating that theatre is evolving with the times and reflecting contemporary culture, and the other arguing that it still has progress to make in embracing modern issues.

Students will research and use evidence from recent Broadway shows (e.g., *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Hadestown*) or notable controversies (e.g., casting, lack of diversity, the commercialization of Broadway) to

back their positions. After presenting their arguments, students will engage in a class-wide discussion to explore the complexities of balancing artistic tradition with the need for innovation and inclusivity. This debate will challenge students to consider how art reflects society and the role Broadway plays in shaping cultural conversations.

Use this chart to establish the rules of the debate.

Affirmative Team	Opposition Team	Time Limit
Speaker 1 - Presents their team's case and main points that support the topic.	Speaker 1 - Presents their team's case and main points that support how they oppose the topic.	5
Prep for rebuttals - Rebuttals challenge and present evidence as to why the other team is incorrect and your team is correct.	Prep for rebuttals - Rebuttals challenge and present evidence as to why the other team is incorrect and your team is correct.	3
Speaker 2 - Present first rebuttal against the other team.	Speaker 2 - Present first rebuttal against the other team.	3
Speaker 3 - Present the second rebuttal against the other team.	Speaker 3 - Present second rebuttal against the other team.	3
Prepare final rebuttal and closing statement. The closing statement should restate and summarize your team's points and views.	Prepare final rebuttal and closing statement. The closing statement should restate and summarize your team's points and views.	5
Speaker 4 - Final rebuttal and closing statement	Speaker 4 - Final rebuttal and closing statement	5

**Classroom Connections – National Arts Standards:**

- Grades HS Advanced: Theatre at a Glance: Responding TH:Re9.1.III.c
- Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work
- Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists apply criteria to investigate, explore, and assess drama and theatre work.
- Essential Question: How are the theatre artist's processes and the audience's perspectives impacted by analysis and synthesis?
  - Compare and debate the connection between a drama/theatre work and contemporary issues that may impact audiences.



**ACTIVITY: CREATE YOUR OWN MUSICAL CONCEPT**

**After seeing a performance of *HELL'S KITCHEN*, encourage students to create a musical that reflects current societal issues or trends, showcasing their understanding of how theatre responds to and shapes culture.**

In this creative activity, students will be tasked with developing an original musical concept that addresses themes, stories, or issues relevant to today's world. They should consider how contemporary culture, politics, or technology influence the way people live and interact, and how their musical can reflect or challenge these conventions.

Students will outline the genre of music (e.g., pop, hip-hop, classical), the central narrative or theme, key characters, important plot points, and how their work will use diversity, storytelling, and music to engage audiences. Students can present their ideas in small groups or to the whole class, explaining why their concept is needed in today's theatre landscape. This exercise encourages them to think critically about blending entertainment with meaningful cultural commentary, just as theatre has done throughout history.

**Classroom Connections – National Arts Standards:**

- Grades HS Advanced: Theatre at a Glance: Creating TH:Cr1.1.III.a
- Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists rely on intuition, curiosity, and critical inquiry.
- Essential Question: What happens when theatre artists use their imaginations and/or learned theatre skills while engaging in creative exploration and inquiry?
  - Synthesize knowledge from a variety of dramatic forms, theatrical conventions, and technologies to create the visual composition of a drama/ theatre work.

## MANHATTAN PLAZA

As you'll recall, much of *HELL'S KITCHEN* takes place in or around Manhattan Plaza. In the following activity, students will have the chance to learn more about this historic building and its notable residents.



### ACTIVITY: EXPLORE MANHATTAN PLAZA'S LEGACY

**Encourage students to research, analyze, and creatively present Manhattan Plaza's influence and relevance.**

Begin by asking students to research Manhattan Plaza, where they will discover a long list of interesting residents. Task students with selecting a resident they are interested in learning more about. Students will research to gather information about this person's life, achievements, and challenges. Encourage students to look for interesting details and personal anecdotes that help bring their subject's story to life.

To present their findings, students will create a visual display showcasing key elements of their chosen resident's life and work. Each display should include the following:

- A timeline of important events in the person's life
- A map showing significant locations related to their story
- A summary of the person's accomplishments and how they impacted the world
- Examples of adversities the person overcame
- Fun facts that reflect the person's unique personality and legacy

Once the displays are complete, have students share them with the class, allowing everyone to appreciate the legacy and influence of Manhattan Plaza residents. Could any of these people have played a role in *HELL'S KITCHEN*?

#### Classroom Connections – National Arts Standards:

- Grades HS Proficient: Theatre at a Glance: Connecting TH:Cn11.2.1.b
- Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.
- Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists critically inquire into the ways others have thought about and created drama processes and productions to inform their own work.
- Essential Question: In what ways can research into theatre histories, theories, literature, and performances alter the way a drama process or production is understood?
  - Use basic theatre research methods to better understand the social and cultural background of a drama/theatre work.



### ACTIVITY: THE ELLINGTON ROOM – FINDING YOUR SPARK

Just like the Ellington Room in *HELL'S KITCHEN*, create a celebratory and supportive environment where students can present their final projects or performances to channel the energy and creativity they have cultivated. By hosting a showcase in the style of the Ellington Room, students will find their “spark” through creative expression, whether it's through performing, visual arts, or another form of self-expression. This event will allow students to share what they've discovered about themselves and their artistic talents while honoring the importance of community and support in the creative process.

#### PROJECT/PERFORMANCE CREATION

Encourage students to prepare a project or performance that reflects their talents, interests, and growth throughout their exploration of *HELL'S KITCHEN*. This creation could include:

- A dance, song, or musical performance
- A visual art project that represents their “spark” or journey of self-discovery
- A short film, video, or multimedia project
- A spoken word or poetry piece

#### VENUE SETUP

If possible, arrange the classroom or another space to resemble a performance venue, such as the Ellington Room from *HELL'S KITCHEN*. This could include:

- Dimmed lighting with a spotlight on the performance area
- A “stage” for presentations (a cleared space in the classroom works well)
- A seating arrangement for the audience that encourages support and connection (e.g., a circle or semicircle)
- Inspirational posters or quotes from the show that emphasize the power of self-expression and community



## THE SHOWCASE

Remind students about the concept of the Ellington Room and its cultural significance in nurturing talent. Emphasize that the showcase is about self-expression, taking positive risks, and celebrating the diverse talents within the class. Encourage students to watch each other's presentations respectfully and with open minds, fostering an environment of collaboration rather than competition.

## SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

After each presentation, give the audience (classmates and teacher) the chance to offer positive, constructive feedback. This feedback could include a compliment about something they admired (e.g., "I loved how you expressed emotion in that monologue" or "Your dance was so powerful and full of energy") or a thoughtful comment about how the project reflected the student's personal journey or spark.

## CLASS REFLECTION

After the performances, host a class-wide discussion where students can share their thoughts on the experience. Use these questions to jumpstart the discussion:

- How did it feel to express themselves creatively?
- What did they learn about their talents and personal growth throughout the activity?
- How did seeing each other's work inspire them?

## TEACHER'S REFLECTION

As the teacher, offer a closing reflection on how each student found and expressed their unique spark. Emphasize that creativity is not just about the final product but about having the courage to be vulnerable and share personal stories, emotions, and passions with others, like the characters in *HELL'S KITCHEN*.

## CELEBRATING EACH STUDENT

End the event with a round of applause for everyone. Reinforce the importance of individuality, growth, and community support in the creative process.

## OPTIONAL EXTENSION – SHOWCASE VIDEO OR DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

If resources allow, consider recording the performances or creating a digital portfolio of students' projects. This portfolio could be shared with the school community or parents as a celebration of the students' hard work and creativity.

This Ellington Room showcase will be a meaningful way for students to channel their individual creativity in a supportive classroom community.

### Classroom Connections – National Arts Standards:

- Grades HS Proficient: Theatre at a Glance: Creating TH:Cr3.1.1.a
- Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.
- Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists refine their work and practice their craft through rehearsal.
- Essential Question: How do theatre artists transform and edit their initial ideas?
  - Practice and revise a devised or scripted drama/theatre work using theatrical staging conventions.

## EXPLORING MOTHER/DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

When you watched *HELL'S KITCHEN*, you probably noticed the relationship between Jersey and Ali is central to the storytelling. Over the course of the show, their relationship is tested as Ali longs for independence. Though Jersey wants what's best for her daughter, the two don't see eye to eye. As Ali's friendships and social life begin to overshadow her relationship with Jersey, the two must navigate their new reality. These two activities encourage students to explore Jersey and Ali's mother-daughter journey they observed in the musical.



### ACTIVITY: SCENE ANALYSIS

Recall the mother-daughter relationship in *HELL'S KITCHEN* and how it evolves throughout the show by examining two pivotal dinner scenes:

- SCENE 3 (Jersey calls the cops)
- SCENE 10 (before "No One")

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## ACT ONE: SCENE THREE

Ali, in the apartment with Jersey,  
who is serving dinner.

ALI

You called the cops?

JERSEY

I don't know what you're talking about. I didn't call anybody.

ALI

Well, the cops showed up.

JERSEY

I'm sure they had a reason. Sit. Eat.

ALI

The reason was a boy was talking to me.

JERSEY

That's part of why they showed up, yeah.

ALI

Oh, now you know why they showed up?

JERSEY

They showed up because they are my friends and Ray is my friend, and at my request, all my friends are looking out for you. And he's not a boy. He's a man.

ALI

You don't know anything about him. You don't know anything about me. You have no idea what I'm going through...

JERSEY

I know exactly what you're going through, and if you just sit and eat --

ALI

Nah, fuck that.

Ali smacks the food away.

JERSEY

...

ALI

...

JERSEY

Clean that up.

ALI

Tell your friends to clean it.

JERSEY

Ali! Ali!

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## ACT TWO: SCENE TEN

ALI

(to audience)

I don't really remember the rest of the night. We stay for a while. I think we have fun actually. Kind of turns into a party. A celebration. I don't remember when we finally leave.

(Ali moves upstairs.)

At some point I'm upstairs and my mom puts me to bed. Not on the couch. In the bed in the bedroom. Which, that's honestly what I needed. And I *sleep*. I sleep like pretty much I have never slept before. And my mom kinda just takes care of me the whole time. And before I know it, it's Friday night. And it's six o'clock.

(Jersey has set the table for dinner. She sits and waits.)

And it's 6:30. And it's 7:30. And he's not coming.

JERSEY

He's not coming.

ALI

He's definitely not coming.

JERSEY

I did it again. I believed he'd stick around and he didn't cause he doesn't. I asked him to bring dinner. And now he's not here and there's no dinner.

Ali goes to the fridge.

ALI

There is dinner. I made sandwiches. Just in case.

Ali sets out the food.

JERSEY

I'm sorry he's not here. I'm sorry Knuck's not here. I'm sorry -- I am so sorry that Miss Liza Jane isn't here --

ALI

Ma. You're here. You've always been here. Thank you.

SONG: NO ONE.

## INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

Have students watch or read each scene and jot down their immediate thoughts about the emotions and conflicts present in the scene. If students want to watch the scene, ask who would like to play the roles and let them perform the scene. Encourage students to look for any symbolism, dialogue, or actions, and then have them interpret what these elements could mean.

## COMPARISON

Ask students to create a two-column chart or Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two scenes. They should focus on the following elements:

- Emotional tone (conflict vs. comfort)
- Communication (evasive and defensive vs. sympathetic and understanding)
- Actions (avoiding vs. supporting)
- Setting symbolism (dinner as a battleground vs. dinner as a safe space)

## GROUP REFLECTION

Bring the class together to discuss the following:

- What are the key changes in the mother-daughter relationship between the two scenes?
- How do Ali's and Jersey's external relationships or experiences shape this transformation throughout the show?
- What does the progression from conflict to comfort tell us about the broader themes of the musical?
- Has their understanding of the scenes evolved since seeing the performance of *HELL'S KITCHEN*?

### Classroom Connections – National Arts Standards:

- Grades HS Proficient: Theatre at a Glance: Responding TH: Re7.1.1.a
- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists reflect to understand the impact of drama processes and theatre experiences.
- Essential Question: How do theatre artists comprehend the essence of drama processes and theatre experiences?
  - Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.



## ACTIVITY: CHARACTER MAP

Recall the characters Jersey and Ali from *HELL'S KITCHEN*. Create a visual representation of Jersey and Ali as individuals, exploring how their internal and external relationships shape their mother-daughter bond.

Students can work individually or in pairs to create separate character maps for Jersey and Ali. These maps should represent Ali and Jersey. They can be circles labeled with their names, an outline of a person representing each character, or any other shape that works for your students. Inside the shape should include the characters' core traits (key personality traits, their sense of humor, concerns, fears, dreams and what they want). Create a web outside the shape that includes their relationships (friends, family, neighbors), careers, schools, interests, and any other external factors that shape these characters.

Once students have the visual map, discuss as a class how the internal traits and external relationships of these two characters affect their mother-daughter connection. Are there specific relationships or situations that negatively affect their bond? Are there outside forces that affect their relationship? How do each character's core traits affect how they react in different situations? What similarities do Ali and Jersey have?

### Classroom Connections – National Arts Standards:

- Grades HS Proficient: Theatre at a Glance: Responding TH: Re7.1.1.a
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- Essential Question: How do theatre artists comprehend the essence of drama processes and theatre experiences?
  - Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.

## YOUR RAGE IS REAL!

In the performance you saw of *HELL'S KITCHEN*, Ali tells Miss Liza Jane that she is too angry to play piano in the aftermath of Knuck's arrest and Ali's fight with Jersey. Miss Liza Jane recognizes Ali's feelings and encourages her to play through the pain. As Miss Liza Jane says, "Your rage is real. Your rage is earned. But I will not let you let it defeat you." While everyone feels negative emotions sometimes, like anger, explore ways to channel these emotions into something positive.



## ACTIVITY: REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

**Give students a safe space to reflect on how to engage with negative emotions or experiences.**

Begin by acknowledging that, like Ali, many young people feel misunderstood from time to time. Feeling unheard and misunderstood can lead to lots of different emotions, like feeling annoyed, angry, and confused. Ask the students to think about a character in *HELL'S KITCHEN* with whom they identified. Then, ask them to write about the character. Why do they identify with that character? Do they agree or disagree with the choices the character made in *HELL'S KITCHEN*? Would they have handled the situation differently?

Now ask the students to imagine that Miss Liza Jane from *HELL'S KITCHEN* has encouraged them to channel their emotions into a creative outlet, just as she challenges Ali in the show. What form of expression would they choose? Would it be music, art, writing, dance, or another medium? How would that outlet help them process and transform their feelings?

Wrap up by discussing how creative outlets can serve as powerful tools for processing strong emotions. Ask students if they can think of any examples of someone channeling a negative experience into artistic expression.



## ACTIVITY: CLASS DISCUSSION

**Talk about the stigma surrounding anger, particularly for young people, and brainstorm ways to channel difficult emotions into positive action or art.**

Begin by revisiting the idea that anger, especially in young people, is often misunderstood or dismissed. Though Ali's feelings are valid, Jersey doesn't take her seriously, whereas Miss Liza Jane encourages Ali to own her rage and transform it into something positive. Facilitate an open conversation by asking students to share their thoughts on how anger is perceived by society, their families, or their peers. Use examples from *HELL'S KITCHEN* where characters express their rage—whether through confrontation, creativity, or silence—and discuss the outcomes of those moments.

Encourage students to reflect on their own experiences with anger: What are their triggers? How do they express their emotions? Is feeling angry always negative, or can it lead to growth and positive change? Brainstorm as a group ways to channel anger into positive outlets, such as art, activism, sports, or writing. Conclude by inviting students to create a personal "rage-to-action" plan, where they identify one issue they feel strongly about and a constructive way to address the issue.

### Classroom Connections – National Arts Standards:

- Grades HS Accomplished: Theatre at a Glance: Creating TH:Cr1.1.II.c
- Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists rely on intuition, curiosity, and critical inquiry.
- Essential Question: What happens when theatre artists use their imaginations and/or learned theatre skills while engaging in creative exploration and inquiry?
  - Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work.

Founded in 2006 by educator and author Timothy Allen McDonald, and headquartered in New York City, iTheatrics is the world's leading authority on educational musical theatre.

iTheatrics adapts musicals for young performers and creates support materials that make the process of putting on a show achievable and accessible for all. iTheatrics shows are licensed worldwide by Music Theatre International (Broadway Junior titles) and Concord Theatricals (Youth Edition and Young Actors Edition titles). In North America alone, 36 million people see a musical adapted by iTheatrics each year, which is three times the number of people who attend a Broadway show annually. In fact, the majority of people who see a live production in North America are attending a show adapted by iTheatrics.

iTheatrics is committed to ensuring young people everywhere have the same access to the arts as they do athletics. iTheatrics is making impressive progress in achieving this mission through partnerships with the Shubert Foundation/MTI Broadway Junior Middle School Musical Theater Program, the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, Turnaround Arts, and the Educational Theatre Foundation (ETF). Each of these partnerships builds sustainable musical theatre programs in underserved schools. iTheatrics's proprietary approach provides teachers, with or without an arts background, the skills required to present a musical. iTheatrics measures success based on whether the school continues to present a musical after five years, and the efforts boast a sustainability rate of 92%.

Additionally, iTheatrics is proud to have partnered with former First Lady Michelle Obama to produce the first-ever White House Talent Show.

In 2017, iTheatrics published *The iTheatrics Method: The Quintessential Guide to Creating Quality Musical Theatre Programs*, the first textbook dedicated to creating sustainable and quality educational theatre programs in schools and after-school settings.

The book is available for purchase on Amazon.

In addition, iTheatrics creates study guides and student-focused engagement initiatives for Broadway and West End shows, as well as the The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, The White House, The Jim Henson Company, NBC Universal, and more.

iTheatrics also produces Junior Theater Festivals and Celebrations in the USA, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand with an annual attendance of 15,000.

[iTheatrics.com](http://iTheatrics.com)

Hell's Kitchen Study Guide content based on  
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Content Created by iTheatrics.



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