



Music & Lyrics by ELTON JOHN & TIM RICE

**Additional Music & Lyrics by LEBO M, MARK MANCINA, JAY RIFKIN,
and HANS ZIMMER**

**Book by
ROGER ALLERS & IRENE MECCHI**

Based on the Broadway production directed by JULIE TAYMOR

STUDY GUIDE

The Cumberland County Playhouse

February 13 – March 22, 2026

INTRODUCTION

This is an educational packet designed for use by you, the teacher, in preparing your students for the upcoming production of *The Lion King Jr.* at the Cumberland County Playhouse. We have endeavored to provide you with suitable information about the show and its roots in literature and pop culture, and to incorporate core curriculum standards in the suggested activities to help you relate this production to particular grade level expectations for each child.

What is the audience's role?

A performance needs an audience. It is as much a part of the theater event as our actors, our designers, our technicians, and our crew. Each playwright asks you to come into the world he or she has created. However, this world is different from television or movies. The actors need your responses, your laughter, your applause. But as you can imagine, cell phones, inappropriate talking, and other distractions will disrupt the world that is being created. If any student becomes disruptive to the point of interference with the performers or other audience members, a chaperon will be asked to remove that student. The theater would cease to exist without an audience, so if you play your part well, the actors can play their parts well – and you both will enjoy the show!

SYNOPSIS

RAFIKI gathers the ANIMALS of the Pridelands to welcome Simba, the newborn cub of King MUFASA and Queen SARABI (*Circle of Life with Nants' Ingonyama*). The king's jealous brother SCAR, no longer heir to the throne, skips the ceremony, upsetting Mufasa. Time passes (*Grasslands Chant*) and YOUNG SIMBA grows into a curious young lion. Mufasa explains the circle of life and that Young Simba will one day be king of the Pridelands. Young Simba shares this news with Scar, who encourages his nephew to visit the forbidden Elephant Graveyard. Young Simba finds his best friend YOUNG NALA hunting with SARAFINA and the LIONESSES (*The Lioness Hunt*) and invites her on his adventure. Once they ditch their overbearing babysitter ZAZU (*I Just Can't Wait to Be King*), the cubs encounter the ravenous SHENZI, BANZAI, and ED in the graveyard. Mufasa arrives and pummels the hyenas before taking the cubs home. Scar emerges from the darkness to recruit the HYENAS in his murderous plan to become king (*Be Prepared*). Back in the Pridelands, Mufasa reprimands Young Simba, then shares the guidance of their ancestors up among the stars (*They Live in You*).

Enacting his plan, Scar leaves Young Simba alone in the gorge and signals the hyenas to scare a herd of wildebeest (*The Stampede*). Scar alerts Mufasa, who leaps into the stampede to save his son. Mufasa rescues Young Simba, but Scar pushes his brother back into the gorge, where he is trampled. Scar blames Young Simba for the king's death and tells him to run away and never return. As Sarabi, Young Nala, Rafiki, and the Lionesses mourn the loss of Mufasa and Young Simba (*The Mourning*), Scar assumes the throne, uniting lions and hyenas under his dark reign. Lost in the desert, Young Simba meets TIMON and PUMBAA, who take him to their "worry-free" jungle home (*Hakuna Matata – Parts 1 & 2*).

Under Scar's reign, the Pridelands are nearly destroyed. Now grown, NALA decides to leave and seek help (*Shadowland*). To her delight, she finds SIMBA alive in the jungle (*Can You Feel the Love Tonight*). Nala urges him to take his rightful place as king, but still ashamed, Simba refuses. Rafiki appears and helps Simba remember his father (*He Lives in You*). With newfound courage, Simba agrees to return to the Pridelands. Timon and Pumbaa distract the hyenas while Nala rallies the lionesses. Simba confronts his uncle, the truth of Mufasa's murder is revealed, and Scar runs away, pursued by angry hyenas. With peace restored in the Pridelands, Simba takes his place as king and the circle of life continues (*Finale*).

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

RAFIKI – a mysterious and wise mandrill

ENSEMBLE – the animal inhabitants of the Pridelands, including the wildebeest; also create the environment of the jungle and desert

MUFASA – a lion, king of the Pridelands, and Simba's father

SARABI – a lioness, queen of the Pridelands, and Simba's mother

ZAZU – a hornbill, Mufasa's loyal yet fretful attendant

SCAR – a lion, Mufasa's jealous brother

YOUNG SIMBA / SIMBA – a curious, eager lion who will one day be king

LIONESSES – the female lions who provide for the Pridelands by hunting

YOUNG NALA / NALA – a spunky, brave lioness and Simba's best friend

SARAFINA – a lioness, Nala's mother

BANZAI – a scruffy hyena who serves Scar

SHENZI – a tough hyena who serves Scar

ED – an aloof hyena who serves Scar

HYENAS – stinking, mangy animals who live outside the Pridelands

TIMON – a sarcastic, outgoing meerkat who lives in the jungle

PUMBAA – a gentle, kind-hearted warthog and Timon's best friend

Source Material

In 1990, Disney Feature Animation decided to produce *King of Beasts*, an animated film set in Africa and featuring a war between lions and baboons. The movie went through many incarnations before opening on June 15, 1994 as *The Lion King*, Disney's 32nd animated feature film. Although told through the anthropomorphic lens of lions in the African savanna, the story of Simba's adventure to the throne is universal and shares elements in common with other tales of betrayal and destiny, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Following Joseph Campbell's concept of the hero's journey, Simba must overcome severe challenges and his own fear to assume his rightful place as a king of the Pridelands. The animated film featured the voices of many famous actors, including Matthew Broderick (adult Simba), Whoopi Goldberg (Shenzi), Nathan Lane (Timon), and James Earl Jones (Mufasa), and soared with songs by Elton John (music) and Tim Rice (lyrics) and a score by Hans Zimmer. The film won Academy Awards® for Best Original Score and Best Original Song ("Can You Feel the Love Tonight") and the Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy. *The Lion King* is the highest-grossing hand-drawn film in history and continues to be an audience favorite.

After the success of *Beauty and the Beast* on Broadway, Disney Theatrical Productions was eager to bring another hit musical to the stage. The Broadway adaptation of *The Lion King*, directed by Julie Taymor and produced by Peter Schneider and Thomas Schumacher, opened on November 13, 1997 at the New Amsterdam Theatre and won six Tony® Awards, including Best Musical and Best Director (Taymor was the first woman to win the honor). The musical features elaborate puppets, masks, and costumes by Taymor and Michael Curry inspired by theatrical techniques from around the globe.

The book was written by Roger Allers, who co-directed *The Lion King* animated feature, and Irene Mecchi, who co-wrote the film's screenplay. Lebo M, a South African performer and composer, penned new songs celebrating the unique sound of South African music. Together, with John and Rice's songs from the film; additional music and lyrics by Zimmer, Mark Mancina, and Jay Rifkin; and additional lyrics by Taymor, the score is one of the most distinctly eclectic on Broadway.

In the summer of 2006, *The Lion King* moved from the New Amsterdam Theatre to Broadway's 1,600-seat Minskoff Theatre, where it is still running after over 8,500 performances. *The Lion King* is the third longest-running show and the highest-grossing show in Broadway history, has been translated into eight different languages (Japanese, German, Korean, French, Dutch, Mandarin, Spanish, and Portuguese), and has had over 25 global productions that have been seen by more than 110 million people on every continent except Antarctica.

Further Reading:

The Lion King: Pride Rock on Broadway by Julie Taymor with Alexis Greene (Disney Editions, 1997)

South Africa: The Culture by Domini Clark (Crabtree Publishing Company, 2008)

South Africa and Its People by Godfrey Mwakikagile (Intercontinental Books, 2008)



From Stage to Screen

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Adaptation

USE THIS LESSON TO: analyze a story and write creative solutions for a theatrical adaptation.

TIME: 45 minutes

MATERIALS:

- Copies of the “Morning Report” scene description (included in Downloadable Resources)
- Paper
- Pencils

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

- Learn literary and theatrical vocabulary, including terms like: adaptation, setting, character, and objective.
- Work as a class and in small groups.
- Adapt a scene from the animated feature film *The Lion King* for the stage.

READ-ALOUD: (1 minute)

The Lion King began as an animated film before it was adapted into a Broadway musical. The Broadway show was in turn adapted into a musical for young performers called *The Lion King JR*. In the adaptation process, authors must reinvent the ways in which the story is told to embrace the new genre, medium, and audience. Let’s explore the process of adaptation.

WARM-UP: (12 minutes)

1. Ask students to brainstorm plays, books, TV shows, or movies that started as something else. Can they think of any movies that were adapted from books? TV shows that were adapted from movies? Plays that were adapted from movies or books? Video games that started as movies or TV shows?

2. Next, recap The Three Little Pigs:

- Three little pigs build their houses next to one another. The first house is made of straw, the second of sticks, and the third of bricks. The house of bricks took a long time to build, and the pigs who built their homes of straw and sticks tease their brother for wasting so much time and energy building his house.
- The big, bad wolf visits the house of straw. He huffs and puffs and blows the house down. The first little pig runs to the safety of his brother's house of sticks.
- The big, bad wolf visits the house of sticks. He huffs and puffs and blows the house down. The two pigs run to the safety of their brother's house of bricks.
- The big, bad wolf attempts to blow down the house of bricks, but it is too strong.
- The wolf finally attempts to enter using the chimney. The third pig is clever and begins boiling a pot of hot water in the fireplace. The wolf falls into the pot and runs screaming from the house. The three little pigs are safe, thanks to the hardworking, clever brother.

3. Divide the class into small groups.

4. Assign each group one of the following genres: musical, sitcom, music video, western, silent film.

5. Give the groups five minutes to act out The Three Little Pigs in the style of their assigned genre.

6. Allow the groups to share their work if time allows.

7. Facilitate a discussion about the adaptation process using prompts such as:

- What did you need to change in order to tell the story in your assigned style?
- What was challenging about the process?

- What was rewarding about the process?

HOOK: (7 minutes)

1. Explain to students that in the adaptation process, a playwright may elect to remove a scene, write a new one, or rearrange the scenes' order in the show.
2. In the feature animated film *The Lion King*, there is a scene that does not appear in *The Lion King Jr.* or current Broadway adaptations.
3. Distribute a "Morning Report" scene description to each group, and select a volunteer to read the passage aloud.
4. Ask each group to determine the setting of this scene.
5. Ask the groups to list the characters in this scene. Challenge students to consider if there might be any animals present who aren't referenced in the passage.
6. Ask each group to brainstorm two to five things that can happen in animation that cannot happen easily on a stage.

MAIN ACTIVITY: (20 minutes)

1. Tell the students that they will now become playwrights and adapt this scene for the stage.
2. Have each group write a short adaptation of the scene. The scenes should:
 - Have an established setting that is clear to the audience.
 - Include stage directions. Stage directions are unspoken words telling actors where to go or what to do onstage. Students can write their stage directions in parentheses.
 - Include dialogue that characters speak to each other.
 - Contain a clear beginning, middle, and end.

3. After students have begun brainstorming and writing, encourage them to think of theatrical solutions to the challenges in the scene. How could they adapt the pounce or Zazu's flight? These solutions should be clear in their stage directions.
4. If time allows, have students shape their scenes.

REFLECTION: (5 minutes)

Use these prompts to facilitate a discussion with your class:

- What did you like about the process of adaptation?
- How did you reinvent the story to be told onstage?
- Did you find the process of adaptation for the stage limiting or inspiring?

Cultural Context

SOCIAL STUDIES: Source Material and South African Cultures

USE THIS LESSON TO: explore the South African influences in *The Lion King JR.* and investigate the cultures surrounding the show's musical roots.

TIME: 45 minutes

MATERIALS:

- Copies of Song: "Shadowland" (included in Downloadable Resources)
- The Lion King JR. Guide Vocal Tracks
- Dramaturgy in South Africa worksheet (included in Downloadable Resources)
- African Languages Guide (included in Downloadable Resources and on pages G16-G18 of this guide)
- Paper and pencils
- Access to the Internet and other research sources
- Poster boards (four)
- Craft supplies

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

- Explore cultural and theatrical concepts, including South African peoples and dramaturgy.
- Work in small groups.
- Apply research skills to an artistic endeavor.
- Create dramaturgical research boards.
- Understand the role of a dramaturg in a theatrical production.

READ-ALOUD: (1 minute)

The music and spirit of *The Lion King Jr.* is rooted in the rich cultural landscape of South Africa. In the theater, it is important that everyone who works on a show – from the director to the designers to the actors – understands the world of the play. A dramaturg is like a detective for the theater who investigates the cultural and historical context of a show so that the company better understands the material.

WARM-UP: (5 minutes)

1. Divide the class into small groups.
2. Distribute one copy of the "Shadowland" sheet music to each group.
3. Ask the students to act as dramaturgs and investigate the music and circle anything that could provide more context for the world of *The Lion King Jr.* Are there any words or lyrics that tell us something about the characters, setting, or atmosphere of the play?
4. After the groups have reviewed the music, facilitate a conversation with your students. What did they notice? What are they curious about?

HOOK: (10 minutes)

1. Play the Guide Vocal Track of "Shadowland."
2. Ask the students to actively listen to the song and write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Side-coach with questions like:

- How would you describe this song?
- What instruments do you hear?
- What kind of languages might these be?
- How does the song make you feel?
- What does the rhythm of the music feel like?
- How would you describe the characters singing this song?
- What inferences can you make about the non-English lyrics?

When the music concludes, ask the students to share their observations within their groups.

3. After the groups have discussed, ask each group to share its thoughts with the broader class.

4. Share with the class that The Lion King JR. is musically rooted in South Africa. Within this African nation, there are many different cultures, several of which are represented through the show's music, lyrics, and story.

MAIN ACTIVITY: (25 minutes)

1. Distribute the Dramaturgy in South Africa worksheet to each group.
2. Assign each group one of the following South African cultures:
 - Zulu
 - Xhosa
 - Sotho
3. Using research tools like the Internet, encyclopedias, and textbooks, ask the groups to investigate their assigned South African culture.
4. After the groups have completed their worksheets, distribute a poster board and craft supplies to each group.
5. Inform the class that during the rehearsal process, a dramaturg will share their research with the cast, directors, and designers. Often, the dramaturg will create a research board displaying photos, artwork, quotes, and facts about the source material or background of the play.
6. Ask the groups to create research boards about their assigned cultures. Challenge the groups to include information from each section of their worksheets, as well as photos, colors, patterns, and words that describe their researched cultures.
7. Ask the groups to present their research boards to the class.

REFLECTION: (5 minutes)

Use these prompts to facilitate a discussion with your class:

- Now that you have researched some South African cultures, how do you feel about “Shadowland,” the song that we listened to earlier?
- Why would an actor in The Lion King Jr. want to understand the various cultures in South Africa?
- How might a costume designer for The Lion King Jr. use such research?
- What skills does a successful dramaturg have?

A Delicate Balance

SCIENCE: Playwriting and Ecosystems

USE THIS LESSON TO: understand the ways in which a change to an ecosystem can affect the planet and its inhabitants.

TIME: 45 minutes

MATERIALS:

- Copies of Scene 3: The Pridelands (included in Downloadable Resources)
- Copies of Scene 10: Scar's Cave (included in Downloadable Resources)
- Blackboard or smartboard access
- Pencils

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

- Learn scientific and theatrical vocabulary, including terms like: ecosystem, resources, monologue, dialogue, and playwright.
- Investigate ecosystems and animal inhabitants.
- Work individually and in pairs.
- Write a monologue.
- Write a scene in pairs.

READ-ALOUD: (1 minute)

The world's ecosystems exist in a delicate balance. External changes to an ecosystem, like pollution and overhunting, can have a negative impact on the planet. In *The Lion King Jr.*, Mufasa and Scar have different opinions when it comes to using their kingdom's resources. Let's explore the effects of their different approaches.

WARM-UP: (9 minutes)

1. Create three columns on your blackboard or smartboard. In each column, write the alphabet vertically, allowing enough space for students to write a word next to each letter.

2. Divide the students into three teams. Have the teams stand in single-file lines, facing their columns on the board.
3. Invite students to think of the African savanna. Each team's job is to think of a word for each letter of the alphabet related to this ecosystem. The word may be a plant, animal, color, climate, or anything else related to the savanna. (Examples: antelope, buffalo, creatures, dry, elephant, etc.)
4. Explain that this is an alphabet relay. Students will have five minutes to complete as many letters as possible. Teams may only send one student to the board at a time and must move through the single file line in order. If a student cannot think of a word, he or she may pass and send the next student on the team up to the board.
5. The team with the most letters complete after five minutes wins.
6. After the race, reflect on the words the students generated. How are some of the words related? What would happen to some of the items listed if one of the items was no longer present in the ecosystem?

HOOK: (10 minutes)

1. Select four students to read excerpts from *The Lion King Jr.* Distribute one of the two included scenes to each selected student and assign them parts.
2. As the chosen students are reviewing the script, explain the background of the two scenes to the class. In Scene 3: The Pridelands, Mufasa, the king of the Pridelands, and his young son, Simba, sit atop Pride Rock and overlook the whole kingdom. Mufasa explains the importance of respecting the circle of life. In the second scene, Scene 10: Scar's Cave, Scar, Mufasa's jealous brother, who has stolen the crown and become king, feels that no one in the kingdom respects him. The hyenas have come in complaining that there is not enough food, and Scar is angry that they think it is his fault.
3. Have the actors read the scenes aloud.
4. Facilitate a conversation about the different leadership styles of Mufasa and Scar.

MAIN ACTIVITY: (20 minutes)

1. Tell students that they will become playwrights. A playwright is an author of a play.
2. Define the term “monologue” for the class. A monologue is a moment in a play when a character speaks alone onstage. Monologues are often used to share what a character is thinking.
3. Assign half the class to Mufasa, and the other half to Scar. Remind students that these two are brothers. Invite students to imagine a moment when Mufasa and Scar were teenage lions. Although they are hungry, their father has just explained that they cannot go hunting. Many gazelles have become sick and the population is dwindling. Their father explained that although they are hungry now, if the lionesses hunt too many gazelles, the herd will die out.
4. Ask students to brainstorm some initial reactions that their character may have had when being taught about the delicate balance of the ecosystem.
5. Next, ask students to imagine how their character may have felt knowing that someday he may be responsible for maintaining the balance of the kingdom’s ecosystem.
6. Ask students to write a monologue that shares their character’s reaction to the delicate balance of the circle of life. Remind the class that monologues should be written in their character’s voice, as if he is thinking aloud.
7. After the students have completed their monologues, divide the class into pairs, ensuring that each Mufasa is paired with a Scar.
8. Now introduce the concept of dialogue. In a play, dialogue is a conversation that takes place between two or more characters.
9. Have the partners write an original scene. Use the following prompts to facilitate this activity:

- The scene begins after Mufasa and Scar's father has explained the dangers of overhunting. They are alone together for the first time since they heard this important lesson.
- Remember that Scar and Mufasa have different outlooks on the world.
- Using one line from each of your monologues, write a scene in which Mufasa and Scar express their opinions on the circle of life.
- Make sure the scene has a beginning, middle, and end.

10. If time allows, invite students to share their scenes with the class.

REFLECTION: (5 minutes)

Have students write a journal entry about their experiences, using the following prompts:

- How does overhunting affect our ecosystems today?
- What else has the potential to disrupt the circle of life on our planet?
- What can we do to ensure the circle of life remains intact?

The Rhythm of the Pridelands

MUSIC: Rhythms and Story

USE THIS LESSON TO: explore underscoring and its use in storytelling.

TIME: 45 minutes

MATERIALS:

- *The Lion King Jr.* Guide Vocal & Performance Accompaniment Tracks.
- Djembe drums or other percussion instruments (optional)

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

1. Explore how tempo, volume, and musical arrangement can change mood.
2. Work in small groups.
3. Create an original rhythmic underscoring.
4. Explore how music can influence theatrical storytelling.

READ-ALOUD: (1 minute)

In *The Lion King Jr.*, the music is an essential part of the storytelling. The composers use a variety of rhythms and sounds to tell the story. Let's explore how music can be used to enhance storytelling through underscoring and transitions.

WARM-UP: (9 minutes)

1. Standing in a circle, explain that you are going to experiment with rhythms that compliment one another.
2. Instruct the students to listen as you start a rhythm that will be repeated. Then, one by one, each student will add a rhythm of their own.
3. As the leader, start by clapping a simple 4/4 rhythm (1-2-3-4).
4. Have the student to your left clap a rhythm of their own at the same time.

5. Continue adding students into the mix until everyone in the circle is playing their repeatable rhythm at the same time.
6. Try the activity again, this time choosing a conductor who will determine the order in which students add their rhythms. The conductor can also manipulate the tempo and volume and experiment with various sections of the rhythms, cutting out and coming back in at different times.
7. At the end of the activity, facilitate a brief reflection with the group. How did changing the tempo, volume, and number of people playing at once change the mood?

HOOK: (10 minutes)

1. Clear an open space in your room.
2. Play “Into Scar’s Cave” from the Lion King JR. Performance Accompaniment Tracks.
3. Ask students to move around the space, allowing the music to inform their movements.
4. Next, play the track again and instruct students to free-write words or draw pictures that come to mind when they hear the music.
5. Finally, listen to the track one last time and encourage students to play along with the rhythms they hear using their bodies as percussion instruments.
6. Explain that in musical theater, songs help to tell the story. Underscoring a scene helps to communicate atmosphere to the audience. Facilitate a reflection with the group. How did each musical theme make them feel? What do they think is happening in the story during each of these moments?
7. How did the rhythms and percussion change with each theme?

MAIN ACTIVITY: (20 minutes)

1. Break students into small groups.
2. Assign each group one of the following moments from *The Lion King Jr.* for which they will compose rhythmic underscoring:
 - Mufasa's death
 - Timon and Pumbaa discover Young Simba
 - Simba returns to the Pridelands
3. Using djembes, other percussion instruments, or their hands and feet, instruct each group of students to create original underscoring for their assigned moment. Each piece of underscoring should:
 - Clearly convey the mood of the moment.
 - Have a clear beginning and end.
 - Involve the use of djembes, percussion instruments, or hands & feet.
 - Include all group members.
4. After the groups have created their rhythms, ask them to share their work with the class.

REFLECTION: (5 minutes)

Use these prompts to facilitate a discussion with your class:

- What artistic decisions did you make and why?
- How did rhythm choices vary between groups?
- How did you decide on the tempo and volume of your underscoring?
- How did underscoring help tell the story?
- What was the mood of your dramatic moment and how did you reflect that in your underscoring?