

# RAGTIME

## CONTENT GUIDE

### THEATRE UNDER THE STARS

2018-2019 SEASON TEXAS ESSENTIAL  
KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DOCUMENT

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## RAGTIME

**Show Dates:** April 16 - 28, 2019

Book by Terrence McNally

Music by Stephen Flaherty

Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens

Based on "Ragtime" by E.L. Doctorow

**Curricular tie-ins provided for grades: 8 - 12**

### **TEKS:**

#### **Fine Arts**

[Fine Arts - Middle School](#)

[Fine Arts - High School](#)

#### **English Language Arts**

[ELA - Middle School](#)

[ELA - High School](#)

#### **Social Studies**

[Social Studies - Middle School](#)

[Social Studies - High School](#)

*The highlighted TEKS can be met by seeing the show, completing discussions, creating artwork and participating in the activities.*

# ABOUT THE SHOW

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Based on E.L. Doctorow's powerful book about immigrants and the fight for the American soul in the early twentieth century, *Ragtime* is a magnificent and deeply moving musical. Featuring a Tony Award® winning score and book, *Ragtime* is set at a time when worlds and cultures are colliding on issues of race, class, gender equality, and politics.

The plot of *Ragtime* shows the intersection of three groups of people in the United States between 1902 and 1917 - African-Americans, represented by Harlem musician, Coalhouse, upper-class suburbanites, represented by Mother, and Eastern European immigrants, represented by Tateh - and the struggles each face as their worlds collide during this time.

*Ragtime*, with book by Terrence McNally, music by Stephen Flaherty, and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, opened on Broadway 20 years ago in January of 1998 and ran for two years at the Ford Center for the Performing Arts. It was nominated for 13 Tony Awards®, of which it won four including Best Original Score.

This ensemble musical takes a look at the past and, in it, we see our present, and the opportunities for our future.

**Disclaimers:** *Ragtime* contains sexual references, strong language, acts of violence, and racial tension. It also includes heart-bursting moments of self-discovery, a yearning towards the hopes and dreams of a people, and an in-depth look at where our nation was over a hundred years ago, inviting us to examine the path we want to take for the next one hundred years.

*Language:*

*Sons of Bitches: 2*

*Damnedest: 1*

*Nigger: 9*

*Coon: 2*

*Hell: 4*

*Goddamn(ed): 4*

*Whore: 2*

*Shit: 1*

*Ass: 2*

*Damn: 2*

# GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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**Below are some general discussion questions that will get students thinking about the production they've just seen!**

## ONE NATION

### **Pre-Show Questions:**

- What does it mean to be American? How does history affect how we look at ourselves as a society?
- There are certain moments in American history that are looked at as turning points. Brainstorm a few of these moments, and reflect on how they affect your view of American History and yourself as a citizen.

### **Post Show Questions:**

- What did it mean to be an American at the turn of the 20th century or the 1900s? Has it changed?
- Many characters in *Ragtime* have a turning point: a moment where they have to make a choice. Discuss some of these choices with your class:
  - What choice did each character have? Was this the only option?
  - What would have happened if they had chosen a different option? How would it have affected the story?
  - Do you agree with the choice the character made? Why or why not?
  - What turning points have you had in your life? How do you think your choices impacted you? Your family? Your community? Your city? Our society?

## DIFFERENT

### Pre-Show Questions:

- Much of the plot in *Ragtime* follows the intersection of people from different backgrounds, cultures, etc.
  - How do we come to decisions about others? What factors influence our perspectives?
  - What is like to be different?
  - Have you had a time in your life that you needed to interact with people who had different backgrounds, goals, language, viewpoints, etc. from you?
    - How did that make you feel?
    - Was it easy or hard to navigate the situation?
    - What did you learn from your experience? What did you learn from each other?

### Post Show Questions:

- “And there were no negroes and there were no immigrants”
  - This line is from the Prologue of *Ragtime*. Discuss the validity of this line in your class. Is it true? Why is it said?
- What intersections of people did you witness onstage?
  - How did these disparate personalities and groups of people interact? Did they interact?
  - How did the characters in *Ragtime* come together to effect change? In our time, how can individuals from different backgrounds with different experiences come together to make a difference? To effect change?
  - Were these characters as different as they first appeared?

- Discuss some of the terms for people used in the show: foreigner, immigrant, negro, communist, mother, whore. What do all of these terms have in common?
  - How does the language we use about other people separate them from us? Why would someone use a label to separate themselves from someone else?
  - What do you think it means to be “the other”?