

ASF Study Materials for

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

MUSIC BY RICHARD RODGERS
LYRICS BY OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II
BOOK BY HOWARD LINDSAY and RUSSEL CROUSE
Suggested by "The Trapp Family Singers"
by Maria Augusta Trapp

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RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

BOOK BY LINDSAY & CROUSE

Characters

Maria Rainer, *a postulant at Nonnberg Abbey*

The Mother Abbess

Sister Berthe

Sister Margaretta

Sister Sophia

Captain Georg von Trapp

His children:

Liesl, age 16

Friedrich, age 14

Louisa, age 13

Kurt, age 10

Brigitta, age 9

Marta, age 7

Gretl, *the youngest*

Franz, *the butler*

Frau Schmidt, *housekeeper*

Rolf Gruber, *delivery boy*

Elsa Schraeder, *a baroness*

Max Detweiler, *a talent agent*

Herr Zeller

Baron Elberfeld } *neighbors*

Admiral von Schrieber

Neighbors; nuns, novices,

postulants at the abbey;

contestants at the Concert

Setting: Salzburg, Austria

Time: 1938

About the Study Materials

The materials look at basic artistic elements, including family history and the musical's timeline; European historical context; and a worksheet. Other discussion and writing prompts are in light blue boxes throughout.

Adapt these materials to the level and needs of your students.

Welcome to *The Sound of Music*

Heading for the hills is particularly melodic when the reference is to *The Sound of Music*. Anywhere that musicals on stage or film have reached, one need only hit and hold that first note on the word "The—" and everyone can finish the phrase, "hills are alive...." That's some powerful songwriting.

It was a winning story even before the music was added—a widower left with 7 children feeling he must re-marry for their sakes and a devout young postulant with a lively spirit seeking her true calling sent to care for those children in need of love. High stakes provided by the Nazi invasion of Austria, and high notes provided by Maria and the power of song.

In the musical, young love hits powerfully on two fronts, and Liesl runs toward it while Maria, not much her senior, runs away. The wise older woman, a classic Hammerstein character, this time a Mother Superior and truly wise, from her cloister counsels the postulant to embrace the life and love offered her.

Many lives and many loves comprise this musical, Oscar Hammerstein's last, and the pathway through it leads from a convent to a villa, to a song contest, and finally to another country and another life. Maria's is not the play's only "farewell" to initial hopes and dreams and plans, only the first. At the end, the entire von Trapp family is leaving their home and homeland, setting out for a new life—and hoping America will accept some immigrants fleeing violence at home.

With this production ASF is embracing the newer theatrical approach to staging musicals—it will have all the music but played more simply, with two pianos on stage rather than an unseen pit orchestra. We'll be making "the sound of the music" right before your very eyes along with the "Trapp family" singing.

A von Trapp Family Album



The von Trapp children not long before Maria Kutschera met them; from left, Martina, Johanna, Hedwig, Werner, Maria, Agatha, and Rupert. They really did wear sailor suits.



The Trapp family (they dropped the 'von' when they became American citizens) in the U.S. in the 1940s; Georg and Maria rear center. They continued to wear native Austrian garb in the U.S. not as costumes but because it was familiar, practical, and comfortable.

The other vital member of the Trapp Singers was Father Franz Wasner, a priest who began as a renter at their Salzburg villa, became their musical advisor, then their musical director when they began to sing and tour, and a life-long family friend who emigrated with them. His contribution is omitted from the musical to build up Maria's role.

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Daughter Maria Trapp's Memories of Family Music before Fraulein Maria Came

"Growing up we were surrounded by music. Father played the violin, accordion and mandolin. Mother played piano and violin. I have fond memories of our grandmother playing the piano for us after meals...."

"Meanwhile, we were old enough to learn musical instruments. Sometimes our house must have sounded like a musical conservatory. You could hear us practice piano, violin, guitar, cello, clarinet, accordion, and later, recorders. We would gather in the evenings to play Viennese folksongs on our instruments with Father leading on the violin...."

*The von Trapps and
the 10 children c. 1941*

From an Austrian Villa via Vermont to the Broadway Stage

Georg von Trapp raised a musical family; well-bred Europeans were expected to have musical skills, but he never intended that they become professional musicians. In fact, he repeatedly rejected the very idea, but once he lost the family fortune by re-investing it in an Austrian bank to help a friend during the mid-1930s Depression and other financial efforts were not profitable, the family's greatest resource turned out to be themselves and their musical ability.

One of the boarders they took in at the villa to try to make ends meet was both a priest and a musician, Father Franz Wasner. His musical knowledge shaped the Family von Trapp from skilled amateur singers into a formidable musical entity, so that they won Austrian contests, were invited to sing for the Führer's birthday (an honor they declined), and toured across Europe—profitably. He was the musical guru, Maria the driving force, and Georg left to provide moral support and make arrangements.

From Austria to the United States

The Anschluss in 1938 changed the family's future, especially once Georg turned down an appointment to the German Navy. Facing certain arrest and an imminent border closing, they planned a "skiing vacation in Italy," where Georg held dual citizenship, and got out on the last train. Father Wasner accompanied them. From Italy they went to England and the U.S. for a small tour. They settled in the U.S. in 1939, ending up in Vermont, where they built and later opened a lodge [Cor Unum, *one heart*] to the public amid mountains that reminded them of Austria.



The von Trapp Family Choir became the Trapp Family Singers in America, and their repertoire shifted from an emphasis on classical music to include Austrian folk tunes and other music as they traveled nationally and internationally. As the children married and moved, others joined the group until they disbanded in 1957. Some then became missionaries, some teachers, some ran the lodge or taught music schools there.

Biography and Broadway

In 1949 Maria Trapp wrote *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, which inspired a West German film *Die Trapp-Familie* [The Trapp Family] and its sequel, *The Trapp Family in America* (1958), which were among the most popular West German films of the 1950s. In these films Georg was portrayed as a sterner figure so Maria could be the inspirational force for the music, along with Father Wasner. The first film also shortened the timeline to the 1930s for Maria's entry.

American director Vincent Donehue saw the West German film and instantly thought the role of Maria von Trapp ideal for Broadway star Mary Martin, who had just wowed the Great White Way in *South Pacific* and *Peter Pan*. She was interested, but just getting the rights from the far-flung von Trapp family took until the end of 1957, when Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse were hired to write the play to be called *The Singing Heart*.

Their plans for a play with Austrian folk tunes soon morphed into a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, the first time Hammerstein would be writing only the lyrics, so the score emerged in a matter of months. The plot continued to change—excluding the emigration, changing her last name and the children's first names and some of their genders, shifting all the events to 1938 near the Anschluss for dramatic effect, cutting Wasner entirely but keeping the Captain's altered stern character so all the focus and story drive could fall on Maria, that is, on their leading lady and star power, Mary Martin.

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Compare children in the musical:

Liesl, 16
Friedrich, 14
Louisa, 13
Kurt, 10
Brigitta, 9
Marta, 7
Gretl, youngest (~5)

(identical ages of von Trapp children in 1927 at marriage)



Young Maria Kutschera



The actual wedding

A Musical Based on Real Events: How Art Reshapes Life

The Actual von Trapp Family History

Events treated in musical occur 1926-38.

- 1880: Georg von Trapp born in a part of the Austrian Empire that later was part of Italy; he held dual Austrian-Italian citizenship
- 1894-1918: Georg's career in Austro-Hungarian Navy, rising to rank equivalent to our Lt. Commander and with medals for sinking several ships
- 1905: Maria Kutschera born
- 1911: Georg's marriage to Agathe Whitehead; their children were:
 - Rupert, b. 1911
 - Agathe, b. 1913
 - Maria, b. 1914
 - Werner, b. 1915
 - Hedwig, b. 1917
 - Johanna, b. 1919
 - Martina, b. 1921
- 1922: Agathe von Trapp dies of scarlet fever caught from children
- 1923: Maria Kutschera graduates from State Teachers College for Progressive Education
- 1924: Maria becomes a postulant at Nonnberg Abbey
- 1926: **Maria sent** to tutor von Trapp daughter Maria, who was weakened by scarlet fever
- late 1927: **Georg marries Maria** (he is 47, she 22); they later have three children of their own
- 1935: **Georg loses family fortune** in an Austrian bank during Great Depression; family begins singing in public under musical direction of Father Franz Wasner.
- 1936-37: Family wins song competition and tours Europe singing
- 1938: **Anschluss** [March 12]: Austria annexed by Nazi Germany; Georg refuses a commission in German Navy; **family travels by train to Italy just as borders close**, then on to the U.S. for singing tour
- 1939: Family tours in Scandinavia, returns to U.S., lives in Pennsylvania
- 1941: family moves to Stowe, Vermont
- 1947: Georg von Trapp dies
- 1957: Trapp Family Singers disband
- 1987: Maria Trapp dies

Timeline of the Musical

All events occur on 8 separate days over a 15-week period in 1938.

Act One

- Day 1: Maria late at abbey
- Day 2: the next day: Maria sent to von Trapp family; her arrival, Rolf and Liesl's talk, thunderstorm. Captain has left for Vienna
- Day 3: 6 weeks later: Captain returns from Vienna with Elsa and Max
- Day 4: one week later: The party; Laendler dance; Maria leaves
- Day 5: three days later: Maria at abbey; Abbess urges her to return to find God's purpose for her

Act Two

- Same day: Maria returns. Political disagreement between Captain, Elsa, and Max. Engagement off; Maria and Captain admit mutual love
- Day 6: 2 weeks later: Wedding at abbey
- Day 7: one month later: Return from honeymoon after Anschluss
- Day 8: three days later: Concert performance and escape via abbey

Major changes from actual events:

- Maria's arrival and wedding moved from 1926-27 to 1938.
- Names of von Trapp children changed and gender of first two swapped; their ages are those at time of actual wedding, not 1938.
- Georg von Trapp's character changed from warm and loving (family's testimony) to cold and severe so Maria's effect can be more dramatic.
- Maria's last name changed to 'Rainer,' her mother's maiden name.
- Maria's role as music teacher excludes the family's own previous musical experience and the musical influence of Father Franz Wasner in developing their abilities.
- The Captain never loses his fortune.
- Note that every scene at the villa includes a political point or allusion, so the world beyond the abbey is both a family in crisis and a socio-political world in crisis.

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Richard Rodgers and
Oscar Hammerstein

Terms Used in Musicals

book musical—a theatrical event with dramatic (as opposed to only comic) goals and integrating story, characters, dialogue, song, and dance into a unified whole. Example: *The Sound of Music*

music—the music for songs, incidental music, and any musical scenes

lyrics—the words for the songs

the book—the spoken script (structure of action, characterization, stage directions)

libretto—book/dialogue and lyrics

score—music and lyrics

sung-through musicals—shows with sung dialogue or recitative, as in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Les Misérables*, *Evita*, or *Hamilton*

The Book Musical—and Rodgers and Hammerstein

The Workings of the Book Musical

Book musicals—those wonders of storytelling in drama, song, and dance—are the classic pieces of 20th-century musical theatre. Traditionally, they have two acts. The longer first act introduces the characters, plot conflicts, and most of the major songs; it ends with a plot complication. The second act resolves the plot complications; it has fewer new songs and more reprises of the earlier major songs. Musicals usually contain more music than dialogue, and through time the music has changed along with popular musical styles. For instance, in the 1920s, the American musical began to incorporate ragtime and jazz; today musicals use hip-hop and rap. In the mid-20th century, musicals provided most of the popular standards in American music.

As a musical play, the various elements of drama, song, and dance present levels of character intensity—the adage is “when words are not enough to express your feeling, you sing, and when song is not enough, you dance.” Thus song and dance are the high points of the show.

Musicals are commercial theatre; they are intended to be popular and to make money for their producers (and for the creative team if they’re lucky enough to have a percentage). Aiming to be popular involves a different set of values than pure art, which can be more challenging and individual. A musical wants people leaving the theatre humming the tunes, and today they want people downloading the score, becoming groupies, and buying swag. They’re meant to be musical catnip.

Rodgers and Hammerstein

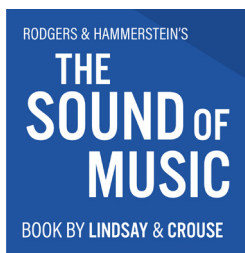
The first groundbreaking, genre-defining book musicals were Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein’s *Show Boat* (1927) and Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* (1943), each of which fused the elements of the musical into a more seamless theatrical experience and moved the musical beyond comedy so that song and dance arose out of and defined the characters and action. Hammerstein was the lyricist and librettist, who wrote first; Rodgers the composer, each the best of his kind, renowned. Their shows won 35 Tony awards, 15 Academy awards, two Pulitzer prizes, two Emmy awards, and two Grammy awards.

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s first musical collaboration was *Oklahoma!* (1943), where the music’s character-development and storytelling qualities turned the team into Broadway gold. They went on to produce a series of blockbusters, including *Carousel* (1945), *South Pacific* (1949), and *The King and I* (1951), as well as *The Sound of Music* (1959), their last collaboration before Hammerstein’s death. All were adapted from fiction or nonfiction prose, thus involving a double adaptation—prose to theatre to musical.

Hammerstein believed in “tolerance and reconciliation,” as in *Oklahoma!*’s “the cowboy and the farmer should be friends.” Together the team showed that “musicals could be ‘idea-bearing,’ socially conscious, and socially responsible, yet still entertain audiences and make money.”

Basics to Consider in *The Sound of Music*

- where and why people burst into song; what that tells us about the moment and the characters
- where and how we feel the Austrian roots of the story and characters
- how and why the musical incorporates a world about to be at war



The Broadway poster looks more like one for *Music Man* than for the *Sound of Music*; the actors only play a guitar on stage.

The film poster is equally but differently odd. Does Maria seem like a convent postulant here or like Liesl's older sister? When does she wear pink? And the only time all these characters are on the mountain together is fleeing Nazis at the end—in this mood?



Broadway Version or Film Version—Which to Produce?

For anyone who knew the 1959 Broadway sound track, the 1965 film was startling in its changes. Elsa and Max's sharp, political songs were gone; in fact, the two no longer sang at all. Also the order of the songs was different, and there were two new songs, both featuring Maria (Julie Andrews). All the songs now focus on Maria and the abbey or Maria, the children, and/or the Captain.

On Broadway, Elsa and Max's songs were biting, edgy lyrics about a self-centered and self-serving ethic. Love is challenging for the wealthy because ... the wealth gets in the way. It's more of a business deal. And if business takes priority, why rock the market if a new political administration comes into power. Profit from them. The Captain may be wealthy, but he cannot support the Nazis, and during "No Way to Stop It" he refuses to go along with the Nazis. The script notes that in the song "the fury mounts between Elsa and the Captain and we see a definite parting of the ways."

In the film, the song with which the Abbess adjusted Maria to the idea of helping the Trapp family is moved to the thunderstorm scene, and "Lonely Goatherd," which had been there, gets written into a new, extraneous scene of a puppet show. Instead, Maria on her own bolsters her "confidence." "Do-Re-Mi" appears later; it no longer introduces her to the children.

"Edelweiss" appears only once in the Broadway score because it was the last song written for the show, penned for the Boston tryouts. By 1965 with its popularity assured, the film uses it twice.

Richard Rodgers wrote both lyrics and music for "I Have Confidence" and for the Captain and Maria's new love ballad, "Something Good," shot in the gazebo to echo the Liesl/Rolf scene.

The closing sections are comparable.

The ASF production will use the film's songs and song order, the more familiar one to the broad audience for this musical.

Musical Variations Between the Two Versions

Song List for the Broadway Musical

Act One

- Preludium/ sacred chant in abbey
- "The Sound of Music" (on mountain)
- "Maria" (this and next in abbey)
- "My Favorite Things" (Abbess, Maria), reprise**
- "Do-Re-Mi" (as Maria meets children, villa)
- "Sixteen Going On Seventeen"
- "Lonely Goatherd" (during thunderstorm)
- "How Can Love Survive?" (Elsa, Max, Captain)
- reprise of "Sound of Music" (children)
- "So Long, Farewell" (party)
- "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" (in abbey)

Act Two

- reprise of "My Favorite Things" (villa)
- "No Way to Stop It" (Elsa, Max, Captain)
- "An Ordinary Couple" (Captain and Maria)
- sacred music and reprise of "Maria" (abbey for wedding)
- reprise "Sixteen Going on Seventeen"
- reprise "Do-Re-Mi" (concert stage)
- "Edelweiss" (concert)
- reprise "So Long, Farewell" (concert)
- Finale (abbey garden)

Song List for the Film (cut, rearranged, new)

- "The Sound of Music"
- Preludium (sacred chant in abbey)
- "Maria"
- "I Have Confidence" [new song]
- "Sixteen Going on Seventeen"
- **"My Favorite Things" (during thunderstorm)**
- "Do-Re-Mi" (Maria and children exploring)
- reprise of "Sound of Music" (children and Captain)
- **"The Lonely Goatherd" (puppet show)**
- **"Edelweiss" (Captain, Maria, children)**
- "So Long, Farewell" (party)
- "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" (in abbey)
- **"Something Good" (Captain and Maria) [new song]**
- reprise "Maria" (abbey, wedding march)
- reprise "Sixteen Going on Seventeen"
- concert: reprise "Do-Re-Mi"
- reprise "Edelweiss"
- reprise "So Long, Farewell"
- reprise "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" (climb)

RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S

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Benedictine postulants

postulant—the first step toward becoming a nun, a candidate who moves into the religious community to discern if this life is right for her and for the community to discern her fitness. If successful, she becomes a novice for further training before taking first vows. Final, irrevocable vows come some years later.



Nonnberg Abbey and nearby Alps in Salzburg, Austria

"Let's Start at the Very Beginning..."

An essay opens with a title, an introduction, and a thesis statement. So does the Broadway musical, *The Sound of Music*.

The title promises sound and music, and that is indeed the start.

As introduction, we hear music in a Christian context—the sounds of Nonnberg Abbey, bells and nuns chanting in Latin the "Dixit Dominus" [*The Lord said*], which states the power given to the One placed at the right hand of God, and ends with praise: "Glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever." The language, the setting, and the singers speak to an ages-old tradition of devotion and to purpose and order in life.

Then the Angelus bells ring (a distinctive rhythm). They are rung at 6 am, noon, and 6 pm daily to prompt a devotion commemorating the Incarnation—the Spirit made flesh, the moment when Gabriel spoke to Mary about her calling as a mother. This Angelus is clearly 6 pm, because the day is ending and someone is missing (the many are in the fold, but there is a missing lamb, as it were), Maria [whose name is a form of *Mary*], a postulant in the abbey—who is not yet aware of the coming call to motherhood in the story.

But Maria is not lost; she's just late. With permission, she has spent the day on the nearby mountainside. She, too, is singing—not the same chant but the music of the hills, of nature. So there is music inside the walls of the abbey, and music outside as well; on the mountainside Maria claims, "My heart wants to sing / Every song it hears."

The idea of an inside world and an outside world is clearly established from the top, the idea of various responses to the "call," and that there are many kinds of music, a variety of ways to give glory to God.

The Title Song—the Thesis Statement

Though she knows she must return to the abbey, Maria waits for "one more lovely thing / That the hills might say," because "The hills are alive / With the sound of music." This, too, is a response to creation, to what has been given, one her heart responds to strongly—and as we will see, the response of her heart (and others' hearts) to music is one of the driving forces and concerns of the musical.

In the song, her heart wants to respond like a bird's wings rising and like a falling brook—like following one's nature—but also like a chime from a church and "a lark who is learning to pray," an apt description of Maria at this moment. Hearing the "call" of the divine and learning to pray, to heed and respond to God, will be crucial elements of Act One for Maria, actions that will echo in and affect many others.

The end of the song adds vital information: "I go to the hills / When my heart is lonely...." Loneliness and the need to reach out, to move beyond it, also drives the action of the play—going to the hills is the first such move. Another is coming in the next scene. Such an idea ends Act One with the challenge of "Climb Every Mountain," and at the end of the show, of course, the family climbs an actual mountain to seek a new life.

On the hillside, Maria seeks the "blessing" of the sound of music; with that, "I'll sing once more." Music as blessing is a potent part of the musical's thesis and plot.

Singing is a literal action, what she is doing at the moment and wants to continue to do, but also a spiritual state of responding to God's creation, nature, the world. So one question that arises is which song she should continue to sing—the nuns' or the hills', because apparently she cannot sing both at once. Whichever song she chooses, she will "sing once more."

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Edelweiss

The flower has several names—its Greek/Latin scientific name means "lion's paw," but in Italian and French it is "star of the Alps"; it has also been called "cat's paws" and "wool flower." The German name means "noble white," and this member of the daisy/sunflower family grows at Alpine heights and is the national flower of Romania, Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Switzerland. When given, it promises dedication—so Captain von Trapp's song is a pledge, not just a melody.

In 1959, no one in Austria knew the song "Edelweiss" because it was a folk-song-style melody written especially for this musical, although everyone else thought it authentic.

Edelweiss

The Arc of the Story and the Music

Act One: Problems and Challenges

• How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?

Or more precisely, how do you solve the problem of Maria? Despite her earnest devotion, this postulant at the abbey does not seem to be solid nun material.

The Abbess allows Maria to take a day on the mountain before having a serious discussion of her spiritual vocation. On Broadway she introduced the idea of Maria's life outside the abbey by asking her, in song-form, about her "Favorite Things." Maria does not want to leave the abbey, but her most vital responses at the top of the show are about life outside it. Maria obeys the Abbess and accepts as God's will the call to help the von Trapp family temporarily as a tutor. Interestingly, Maria the problem now has potential to be a problem solver—or someone else's problem for a time.

• How Do You Solve a Problem Like Having Seven Motherless Children?

The von Trapp villa has its own problems due to the early death of Mrs. von Trapp. The one remaining parent has lost his vocation—a sea captain and naval hero now in a post-World War I country without a coastline or a navy, though his home is still run like a ship. Captain Georg von Trapp needs a "first mate" or governess for the children.

A postulant not much older than his oldest daughter would seem a losing bet, until the children meet Maria and vice versa. It is almost love at first song as they bond with music.

• How Do You Solve a Problem Like Choosing the Right Second Wife?

Captain von Trapp feels it his duty and perhaps his inclination to re-marry. His social circle has afforded him a suitable candidate, Elsa, a glamorous, very wealthy widow. Good for him, not as good for the children. The children respond to Maria and slowly so does the Captain. What's a man to do? He has two very different options. What's Maria to do? She also has two very different options.

• I'm Sixteen, He's Seventeen—and a Nazi Sympathizer

The older generation's love issues are contrasted by Liesl and Rolf's youthful attraction. Liesl responds to Rolf; Elsa sets her sights on Georg; Maria runs away from her response to the Captain—and the Captain tries to avoid the Nazis.

Act One to Act Two

The large action of Act One is from the abbey to the villa and the discovery of new love—Maria's for the children and theirs for her, Rolf and Liesl's, Georg and Elsa's proposed merger, and finally the spark between Georg and Maria. At the end of Act One the action circles back to the abbey, only to be reoriented to the villa by the Abbess.

The show's first song is Maria's on the mountain, and its last song is about figuratively climbing mountains. Three songs in sequence in the middle of Broadway's first act (two in the film) offer views of love—"Sixteen...", "Lonely Goatherd," and "How Can Love Survive," natural attractions and the unnatural obstacles that possessions and high finance can pose.

Act Two on Broadway offers only three new songs while reprising six from Act One; the film has only one new song in the second half. At the end of the musical, as the love relationships have clarified into a wedding and the political tensions increased in yet another, less holy 'union,' the *Anschluss* of Austria with Nazi Germany, Georg sings "Edelweiss," his own love ballad and farewell song to his country. Climbing mountains becomes the final escape from Nazi hegemony and a new beginning elsewhere for the new "dream" the family has found as the nuns reprise the act-ending song.

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Thinking about Settings

The Abbey

A Benedictine convent, a holy place of spiritual dedication, a retreat from the world to focus on prayer and doing God's will. Led by the Abbess, the Mother

Superior, whose word was to be seen as if it spoke the will of God. So the abbey is led by God the Father and a Mother Superior, the only intact parental unit at the start of the play. The nuns are wedded to Christ and their vocation. The Abbey works to a strict schedule of activity and devotion or prayer; it is a very ordered life (in fact, it's called an "order"). Its schedule is signaled by bells; Maria's nature

does not quite fit this setting, this order—yet? ever?

Maria's parents have died, and there is no reference to siblings or other family; her only connection is to the mountain. (In that regard, this Maria is luckier than the

actual Maria, who was fostered out by her father once her mother died when she was three; after he died when she was nine, she ended up with an abusive uncle.) We are told Maria keeps more worldliness in her abbey life than do the others—she still uses curlers, sings popular songs as well as devotional chants, gets sidetracked and does not strictly heed the ordered timetable of devotions. Maria cannot change this world, this order; she must change ("form" herself) to fit it in order to stay.

Biographical note: The actual Maria von Trapp only found religion late in her teens; the uncle who raised her after her parents died had been an atheist. After taking her education degree at 18 and hearing a powerful sermon when she attended a concert in a church, she decided to give her life to God, went to Salzburg, asked a policeman directions to the strictest convent, and was sent to Nonnberg Abbey.



Nonnberg Abbey in Salzburg, the oldest convent north of the Alps



The Abbey's gate, well known from the film—on which side does Maria belong?

The von Trapp villa

A three-story villa, sizable and well-apportioned, comfortable and worldly. A family home, but this family has only one parent; the mother has died.

As a former naval officer, Captain von Trapp now runs his home like a ship—with "decorum and orderliness ... discipline."

In this regard, it is very like the abbey; it has regimen and hierarchy. We are told Franz the butler is "my orderly," and Frau Schmidt the housekeeper is "the executive officer." He instructs Maria in the whistle signals, which she rejects; she will not even try to "governess" by whistle, by signal. Not the military but the musical will define her approach—the note, the yodel, the melody. As the Captain leaves, he tells Maria, "you are in command."

Maria sees the children's need and responds to it; she "ministers" with music. She is there to teach, and she does—how to sing and how to learn while enjoying being a child, with play (a lesson the actual Maria never got to enjoy).

Singing becomes harmony, a potent concept for music and for family. When the Captain returns from Vienna, he responds to "The Sound of Music" the moment he hears his children singing, and he too sings once more—though he still has enough aristocratic pride to be upset by his children's playwear.

The third setting is, of course, Austria and its Alps.



The von Trapp villa in the Salzburg suburbs (Himmler used it as a headquarters during World War II)

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

BOOK BY LINDSAY & CROUSE



A Benedictine Abbess. This is Laurentia McLachlan (1866-1953), an authority on music and medieval manuscripts who pioneered restoring Gregorian chant. She entered a Scottish abbey at 17 and died there at 87.

Topics to Consider

- The Abbess has to give Maria news she does not want to hear about leaving the abbey for a time (perhaps forever?). Identify the strategy the Abbess uses to help Maria hear and accept this decision. What values and steps does the Abbess employ in helping Maria accept and move forward with this transition?
- Compare the two worlds Maria finds herself in—abbey and villa—and what each asks of her. Then assess Maria's strengths and weaknesses as a postulant and as a governess.

Character, Crisis, and Choice/ 1

The Abbess

If ever there were a role model for the wise old woman archetype, it's the Abbess. In her position, she has the responsibility to perceive and express the will of God regarding those in her charge, a responsibility she wields with clarity, firmness, and insight.

In considering Maria's future with the order—since as a postulant, Maria is at an "up or out" moment—the Abbess seeks others' views. Yet she has already begun to act by granting Maria the day on the mountain, "outside" time, letting Maria access all her responses.

In their relationship, the Reverend Mother is the teacher and Maria the pupil. When asked the most important lesson she's learned in the abbey, Maria says, "To find out what is the will of God and to do it," even when it is hard to accept. The Abbess reminds Maria of that core value before telling her she is being sent to help the von Trapp family for a time.

The Abbess also equips Maria with more spiritual ballast, for on Broadway she offers her the memory of "My Favorite Things." The song is a shared memory, but wisely recalled at this moment to strengthen Maria—note that the song mentions an array of detail from life outside the abbey, not devotion in the abbey. In the film, of course, Maria is the dispenser of the song, not its recipient, during the thunderstorm.

Given the words of her song on the mountain and in the Abbess' office, consider how many meanings Maria's last line in the scene may have: "I have been given permission to sing." When Maria later returns in emotional distress, the Abbess is equally clear-sighted and firm: find your true vocation; know what your calling is.

Maria and Vocation

At the abbey Maria thought she had chosen her life's path, but it seems that path may not be choosing her. How can she help feeling rejected by God? Does the Abbess ease this response?

The Abbess asks her, "you weren't prepared for the way we live, were you?" Is she any more prepared for life at the von Trapp villa? Perhaps. If teaching the Captain's children is a distant second in Maria's interests and goals, she nonetheless approaches the task with commitment and verve. If this is God's calling for the moment, there is a need here she can answer.

Like the actual Maria von Trapp, this Maria immediately falls in love with the children and they with her. Her every instinct proves golden with them. Her nurturant impulses expand, but mothering poses other challenges.

The Captain's presence complicates her response. He rejects, then accepts her contribution. He is a strong personality, and one who is coming back to life before her eyes thanks to the music. But while Liesl at 16 eagerly explores male/female dynamics, Maria is 22 going on 16. Any response from her would



Maria and Georg von Trapp

involve a very different life and set of vows than she anticipated.

The Abbess always knew Maria was a young woman full of life and love. Later she asks Maria to consider how God wants her to spend her love—which holy commitment she might make; God will not lose by either choice.

And the commitment once made, compare Maria's backing of her husband's political views with Elsa's response to those views earlier.

Character, Crisis, and Choice/ 2

The Captain and a Second Wife

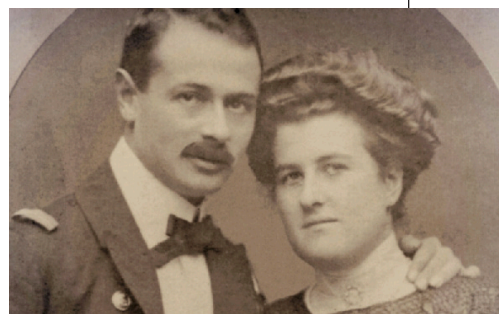
Captain von Trapp has had a career in which he excelled and a wife he adored both snatched from him by fate—as a result of losing World War I, Austria lost its seacoast territory and thus its navy, which had been his career, and then his wife died, leaving him to raise their seven children alone (with the help of staff). So in the musical the Captain has now overlaid his professional world on his domestic one, running his home like a ship, seeking military precision in all things. Orders, not emotions. The results are convenient if not healing, but not good for the children.

His home life is in absentia, for he only dashes in from Vienna for a day to hire another governess. Vienna's social scene has introduced him to an attractive widow, refined and wealthy. On Broadway, who this "new" Captain could turn into is defined in Act Two's "No Way to Stop It" with its mantra of "Nothing else

as wonderful as I." A merger with Elsa would be quite different from his first marriage, which was apparently a love match, but it would feed his ego. Who is he and what are his values now? His trajectory appears to be a second marriage of convenience and a life of aristocratic social whirl. Two elements affect that trajectory—Maria and the Nazis.

With the children's singing, Maria unintentionally defibrillates him into emotional life again. Her presence keeps ambushing him, as when he dances the Laendler with her, each responding to the other with a spark. She rejected the whistle; instead she offers music and a person with passion rather than sophistication. She's not an aristocrat; she's an employee, the governess and moreover a postulant in a holy order.

So he follows through on or lets Elsa ensnare him into an engagement. Do the proper thing, not the emotional. Yet fate in the form of history once more intervenes to affect his life.



Georg and Agathe Whitehead von Trapp, his first wife, who died of scarlet fever in 1922 after five of the children contracted the disease during an epidemic at their school.



The von Trapp children the year before their mother died.

The Austrians and the Nazis

The Austrians are Germanic; they speak German and share a culture with their neighbor. History divided them into the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Prussian-led unified Germany in the 19th century, but they were kindred spirits. Various wars affected their relationship, especially the treaties ending World War I, which forbade their unification. Yet Hitler wanted a Greater Germany, one that included Austria, and the question in 1938 Austria is: does being Germanic mean being Nazi?

The Nazis are coming; their takeover, in history and the musical, is inevitable. What is to be done? The story keeps the Nazi threat alive in every scene at the villa, but it heightens in the scenes with Elsa, Max, and the Captain. Adult topics—the do-re-"me" of survival. Max is often on the telephone with Berlin, while Elsa treats the Nazi threat as a temporary irritation; it will go away. The Broadway song "No Way to Stop It" actually includes a serious political discussion. Elsa proves as ready to "engage"

herself to the Nazis as to Georg. Only he sees the underlying motives and the threat to his principles, his country, and his life. If he cannot stop Austria's "alliance" with Germany, he *can* stop his alliance with Elsa and that mindset, and he does. This is his version of his finding true vocation. He says Austria, which by that point is a loaded term for him, the cue for "Edelweiss."

Rolf also gets swept up in the Nazi machine; early on, when caught by the Captain while trying to find Liesl, he desperately responds, "Heil!" enraging von Trapp. When last we see Rolf, he is in an S.S. uniform, a Hitler Youth figure. In fact, he is the one named character we see in a Nazi uniform. The responses triggered by that uniform in 1959 are unambiguous, but Rolf remains a person. When we saw him in his earlier role as telegram deliverer, he told Liesl, "I'll take care of you....," and the action gives him the choice, a chance to live up to his earlier pledge. He can choose the way he will "take care" of her.

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

BOOK BY LINDSAY & CROUSE

Historical Context: 1938 Austria and the Anschluss

Anschluss means 'joining,' 'union,' and it is the term, actually the euphemism, used for Hitler's annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938, prior to World War II. It was a bold, strong-arm move, an invasion presented under the p.r. screen of aid requested by fellow Germans.

Treaties at the end of World War I forbade the union of Germany and Austria, but the countries' new constitutions laid out that goal. In 1925 in *Mein Kampf* Hitler said the countries must be unified "by any means possible" because "people of the same blood should be in the same Reich." When he came to power in 1933, he pursued his "dream" to climb, cross, and conquer every mountain in pursuit of a "Greater [Larger] Germany."

In 1932 conditions had seemed favorable for such a union, but after 1932 and Hitler's rise, Austrian sentiment shifted. A small Nazi cadre began mounting terrorist attacks, even assassinating the Austrian chancellor in a coup attempt.

Austrian prime ministers during the 1930s tried to limit Nazi power but believed Hitler's solemn promises to respect Austrian sovereignty. Hitler slowly forced the Austrians to accept Nazis into government positions, most notably the police. By 1938 Hitler needed Austria's natural resources, especially iron, because he was in an armaments race with the Allies and had fallen behind his goals to produce an invincible war machine. An Austrian merger vote scheduled for March 13, 1938 was the tipping point. Lest the *Anschluss* lose the vote, as he feared, Hitler invaded the day before, sending out false press reports of Austrian riots and cries for help. The next day Hitler returned to his homeland and was surprised by the warm welcome. He had his *Anschluss*.

One of the Nazi campaign posters for the "reunification" of Austria with Germany in 1938: "one people, one realm, one leader"



The Austrian Empire prior to World War I; notice its Adriatic seafront. Post-war Austria was landlocked; the empire divided into Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, and parts given to Ukraine and Romania (see other map).

"And once we're over that mountain, we're in Switzerland."

—Maria in the script

"Don't they know geography in Hollywood? Salzburg does not border on Switzerland."

—real Maria von Trapp

"In Hollywood you make your own geography."

—Robert Wise,
director of the film
The Sound of Music

Geography 101: Switzerland Isn't Over That Mountain

If we needed more proof of Broadway and Hollywood's fictionalizing of history and facts in pursuit of a "good," salable story, we need only look at that last sequence in *The Sound of Music* in which the von Trapp family ostensibly walks over the mountain into Swiss safety. Actually, Switzerland is 150 miles to the west of Salzburg. In 1938, on the other side of a Salzburg Alp was Nazi Germany; in fact, Hitler's summer retreat, Eagle's Nest, was only a few miles away.



Austria after World War I



Worksheet for *The Sound of Music*

PRE-SHOW

1. Maria wants to be a nun; the Captain is a retired officer in the Austrian Navy. What, if any, similarities are there between life in a convent and life in the military? Do they have anything in common?



The iconic image from the 1965 film of The Sound of Music—Julie Andrews (Maria) in an Alpine meadow

2. What is the situation in a family without a mother? Are there any tensions? Might tensions arise if the father begins to think about remarriage? How do the children feel and respond? What is the best way to handle such a transition?

3. What are the tensions in the world around the villa in Salzburg? What is going on in Austria and Europe in 1938? How do these events impact the action of the musical?

POST-SHOW

4. Who are the major characters in *The Sound of Music* and what are their conflicts? Are there inner conflicts as well as external or interpersonal conflicts?
5. Musicals are driven by character and conflicts, as are all plays, but they are especially driven and defined by the music. Which songs address conflicts or tensions and which work to clarify or resolve them in *The Sound of Music*? What emotions prompt the characters into song?
6. Which song stands out as catchy or most appealing in this musical? Which song plays the most important role in the story of the musical? Are they the same song? Why or why not?

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

BOOK BY LINDSAY & CROUSE

Speak/ Sing/ Dance

- Music is a major part of a musical's emotional story. The general rule about musical theatre is that when words are no longer enough, you sing, and when singing is no longer enough, you dance.
- Think of the musicals you know from stage or film (Disney musicals? others?). Does this general rule hold true in them? Examples?
- How often do characters sing in this musical? What prompts them to sing? What emotional state are they in? Is it always with the same emotion or do different emotions inspire song? How does that affect the song?
- How often do characters dance in this musical? Why do they dance? Does the dance affect them? If so, how? Is that important to the story?



The parade for Hitler's arrival after the Anschluss; the Germans provided the flags. Do these children know what they're waving and at whom?

The Sound of Music: Activities for Younger Students

Favorite Things

- Listen to or look at the lyrics of the song "My Favorite Things." How many of Maria's favorites are in nature (such as raindrops and whiskers); how many are material things; how many are her own possessions? Is the song about having and owning or about recognizing beauty and a series of special moments perceiving something interesting or special?
What do we learn about Maria from this list?
- What does "favorite" mean? On what basis does something become a "favorite"? How do we judge what is "good" (for us? for everyone?)?
- Make a list of your favorite things or write it like a song lyric in phrases (that rhyme?). Include perceptions as well as stuff.

The Map, Austria, and History

- Look at a map of Europe or the world and find Austria. Locate the city of Salzburg on the northwest Austrian border. What country borders on Austria there? Then locate Switzerland. Figure out how far it is to walk to Switzerland from Salzburg.
- During the 1930s, Adolf Hitler gained leadership of Germany, but he had been born in Austria. He wanted Germany to conquer and rule all of Europe. His first step was to join Austria with Germany because both countries spoke German and had a common heritage, but he really wanted their iron and steel industries for his military. Based on location, would it be easy for Germany to take over Austria?
- Hitler tried to get Austria to join him by working from inside Austria's government. The word he kept using was *Anschluss*, the German word for "unite," suggesting their language already made them "one." He did not mention what made them different—such as treatment of minorities. Is someone like us in one thing always like us in all things?

Children and Adult Politics

- How often do you watch or listen to the news? If you do, how often do you see children in the news? How and why? Do the von Trapp children see and hear about the changes in the larger world around them? Do you hear about larger issues in the world?
- Their father was an Austrian war hero in World War I, a brave and loyal naval officer who swore allegiance to Austria and its emperor.
After the war, there was no longer an Austrian emperor or navy, but he still felt the power of his oath. When Germany "unites" with or overruns Austria, the German navy wants him to serve in it and swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler. What reasons are there for joining the German navy? What reasons are there for not joining the German navy? What decision should Captain von Trapp make? What does he decide? Why? What is he loyal to?

Music

- The real von Trapp children learned to play musical instruments before they started singing; their parents both played. Can you play a musical instrument? Which one? What kinds of music do you play?
Once Maria joined the family, they began to sing church music (masses), Austrian folk songs, and classical music. What kind of music do you sing? What kinds of music do you like? Where do you sing? How often? Do you sing alone or as a group? How does group singing work? What do you have to pay attention to?
- What is your favorite song in the musical? Why? What do you think is the most important song for the action of the musical? Why?
- When do people sing in the musical? Do they use songs to state ideas, make decisions, help themselves, or discover? Do you sing different songs when you're in different moods or situations?

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

BOOK BY LINDSAY & CROUSE



The musical includes an adaptation of the *Laendler*, an Austrian folk dance. How is it used? (Photo from the film, Christopher Plummer and Julie Andrews. Rodgers used the "Lonely Goatherd" melody here; how appropriate is that?)

Dance in This Musical

Speak, sing, dance is the usual progression of emotion in a musical. Rodgers and Hammerstein's earlier musicals often have big dance numbers—the dream ballet in *Oklahoma!*, the "Shall We Dance" number in *The King and I*, the talent show and other moments in *South Pacific*.

- Are there big dance numbers in *The Sound of Music*? Why? What dance is there? When? Why there? What strong emotion gets expressed in each instance? What is the effect of each dance?
- What is the role of dance in our culture? In your life? Do you watch the dance competitions on tv? What kinds of dance do you like? What role does the music play? How athletic is dance (especially if you watch the tv competitions)?

Activities for *The Sound of Music*

Elements of the Musical

- In musicals, the musical elements dominate. How are songs and dance used in this musical? What kinds of situation arise that prompt songs? What emotions get expressed? Does any song prompt a change or shift? Which one(s) and how, why? Does a song resolve or clarify any situation? Which one(s), how, why?
- Since this production is using the film's song sequence, have a group research the Broadway songs that have been cut—the Elsa and Max songs, "How Can Love Survive" and "No Way to Stop It" and the ballad "An Ordinary Couple." What is their role in the Broadway version of the show? What part of the plot do they enlighten? Do they involve useful character insight or decisions? Why might they be cut or, in the case of "An Ordinary Couple," replaced?
- Which songs are most important to the plot of the musical? How and why? Which songs are most important to the emotional journey(s) of the musical? Why?
- What is the central relationship in this musical? What are its challenges? Are there other relationships that parallel or reflect on that one?
- What conflicts and choices does each major character face? How are they resolved?
- If the major characters are in the midst of personal decisions and crises, who is available to be the cool head or advisor? How many advisors are there in this musical? Who would you listen to? Why?

Art and Theatre

- Design a poster for *The Sound of Music*. What visual elements does the story suggest? Which visual elements are the best hook? Why? What is this musical really about? If you could only use one visual element, which one would it be and why?

History in the Musical

- For their musicals, Rodgers and Hammerstein are often drawn to stories with tensions that need reconciliation and understanding. *Oklahoma!*, their first collaboration, was built on the land-use tensions between the cowmen and the farmers in the Oklahoma territory. A cowhand and a farm girl are the central love interest. In *South Pacific*, intercultural relationships arise between islanders and the U.S. Army personnel stationed in the Pacific islands during World War II. A lieutenant from a wealthy American family falls in love with a native girl, and an Army nurse falls in love with a French emigrant who has children by a native woman. *The King and I* is set in 19th-century Siam (Thailand), and the challenge is for the English schoolteacher hired by the King to understand his values and he hers. What historical intersection of values does *The Sound of Music* involve? Who does the musical throw together and what is each set of values and loyalties? What are the tensions?
- What larger historical forces are at work behind the interpersonal relationships in the musical? How important are those larger forces? How and when do they impinge? How are they resolved?
- How important was the *Anschluss* ["union," "joining" of Austria and Germany] in the buildup to World War II? What was Hitler's strategy before war was actually declared? What was the tipping point that brought on the declaration of war? Who were the warring forces on each side of World War II?

- Research the Austrian Aid effort made by the Trapp family after the war. They were in the U.S. trying to become citizens, but they did not forget their homeland. What were the conditions there? Do we also see these family values in the play's action?

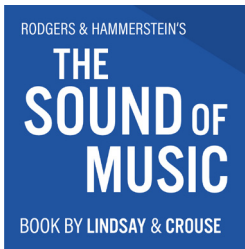


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