



Monty Python's Spamalot

Lovingly ripped off from the classic film comedy *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, *Spamalot* is the 2005 Tony Award-winning Best Musical directed by Mike Nichols, with a book by Eric Idle and an entirely new score created by Grammy winners Eric Idle and John Du Prez.

Telling the legendary tale of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, and featuring a bevy of beautiful show girls, not to mention cows, killer rabbits and French people, *Monty Python's Spamalot* has been hailed as "a no-holds-barred smash" (*The New Yorker*). This surefire comedy hit will leave your groups laughing well after the final curtain has come down!

TALKING POINTS:

*What are some of the historical events of medieval times that find their way into the world of *Spamalot*? How are these true occurrences skewed to fit the world of the musical?

*The classic song "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" appears in *Spamalot*, as a 'cheer-up' song sung by Patsy to King Arthur at the start of Act 2 – and reappears in the finale of the show. Why do you think the creators used this standard in the show? What comedic effect does its appearance create?

*"Breaking the fourth wall" is a term used when characters in a play or musical come out of the world of the show for a moment and address the audience directly. What are some of the ways this device is used in *Spamalot*? Recall the specific scenes or musical numbers where this is employed. How is it effective in enhancing the surreal, anything-can-happen world of the musical? What do you think some of the challenges are when using this device?

ACTIVITIES:

The Arthurian Legend

King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table get a royally hilarious treatment in *Spamalot*. Yet the 'Arthurian Legend' of the King and his gallant knights has historical roots which have been interpreted in many different ways over the course of time. Break into groups and do some basic research on the roots of the Arthurian Legend. Divide up each of the main players in the legend, and explain their histories. Come together as a class and share your findings, then compare and contrast the initial outline of the each character and the story of King Arthur with how they're represented in *Spamalot*. Where does the musical find comedy in this classic tale of heroics and chivalry? What are some other ways the Arthurian legend has been adapted onto film and stage?



The Comedy of Parody

'Parody' is defined as "a literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule". *Spamalot* delights in offering parodies of many aspects of theatre and culture, especially in the hilarious "The Song That Goes Like This", a parody of grand sounding romantic musical songs. Make notes of different ways that the scenes and songs of *Spamalot* use parody effectively – and then create your own parody song of an aspect of contemporary culture. It could be related to television, movies, or other 'styles' of song – be creative with how you parody your target, and share your works with the class!

The World of Monty Python

The Monty Python comedy troupe has been one of the most successful and acclaimed in contemporary history, drawing an international following through their film, television and live performances. What are the aspects of comedy that make them so distinct and creative? Do some research on the history of Monty Python – its creators, their films, memorable appearances, etc. Share your findings with the class and discuss the different ways that the unmatched world of Python comedy comes to life on stage in *Spamalot*. If you can, find audio and video film clips to support your points!

GOALS:

Students will –

- *Determine how the nondramatic art forms are modified to enhance the expression of ideas and emotions in theatre. (Fine Arts/Theatre)
- *Describe and compare the basic nature, materials, elements and means of communicating in theatre, dramatic media, musical theatre, dance, music and the visual arts. (Fine Arts/Theatre)
- *Use precise and descriptive language that clarifies and enhances ideas and supports different purposes (Language Arts)
- *Organize ideas to achieve cohesion in writing (Language Arts)