

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Due: \_\_\_\_\_



***Singin' in the Rain (1952) directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen***

**Cast**

Gene Kelly as Don Lockwood  
Debbie Reynolds as Kathy Seldon  
Donald O'Connor as Cosmo Brown  
Jean Hagen as Lina Lamont  
Millard Mitchell as R.F. Simpson

**Crew**

Directors: Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen  
Producer: Arthur Freed  
Writers: Betty Comden and Adolph Green  
Editor: Adrienne Fazan  
Director of Photography: Harold Rosson  
Music: Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed

Distribution/Studio Company: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer  
MPAA Rating: Unrated  
Running Time: 103 minutes

**Background and Introduction to *Singin' in the Rain***

*Singin' in the Rain* may not be everyone's cup of tea in this class, but the film is one of the most loved and critically acclaimed musicals of all time; as such, we owe it to ourselves as film history students to watch and analyze the film. The film features one of the most beloved song and dance numbers – the film's title song "Singin' in the Rain" – a number about a man who is so madly in love that it makes him sing and dance in the rain. Cheesy? Yes, but sweet. Whether or not you appreciate the film is in the air, but you should respect it because many critics cite the film as Hollywood's greatest, finest screen musical.

One of the reasons we're watching the film is because it humorously satirizes and parodies what we will study in sound, and the panic surrounding the troubling transitional period in Hollywood in the 1920s when silent films transitioned to "talkies." The film centers on Don Lockwood, a talented but arrogant silent film star, and his on-screen blonde bombshell partner, Lina Lamont, who are pressured by the studio boss R.F. Simpson to adapt to the changing times in film. Their task is to update their silent period drama to their first sound picture, a musical. There's one serious problem, however – the temperamental, narcissistic Lina isn't exactly well suited to musicals. Don and two friends then come up with a plan to save the doomed film if Lina doesn't thwart their plans in order to elongate and relish her career.

Musicals are genres in which songs and dance numbers express lyrical beauty. The film exemplifies the organic, "integrated musical" in which the story's characters naturally express their emotions in the midst of their lives (What do you mean you guys *don't* do that?). Song and dance replace the dialogue, usually during moments of high spirits or passionate romance and over half of the film, a "play within a play" type of film, is composed of musical numbers. Analyze this traditional musical and the complex beauty of the choreography and singing. Be prepared to analyze the characteristics of both films to determine how influential the filmmaking language system of sound is in film and how *Singin' in the Rain*, a classical American musical, compares to contemporary musicals.

### Pre-Viewing, During Viewing, and Post-Viewing Notes

**Directions:** Conscientious film students prepare themselves for a film by writing any notes about the film that may be important during the pre-viewing process and any notes that the group presentation will make for our post-viewing discussion of the film. Jot down any lecture or discussion material here. In addition, this page is used to record your notes while you watch the film. In the left column, describe scenes from the film that seem intriguing, interesting, or relative to your life. In the right column, write a response to the scene you described in the left column. You may write what you think the scene means, what the scene reminds you of, what you don't understand, how you feel about it, or any other comments.

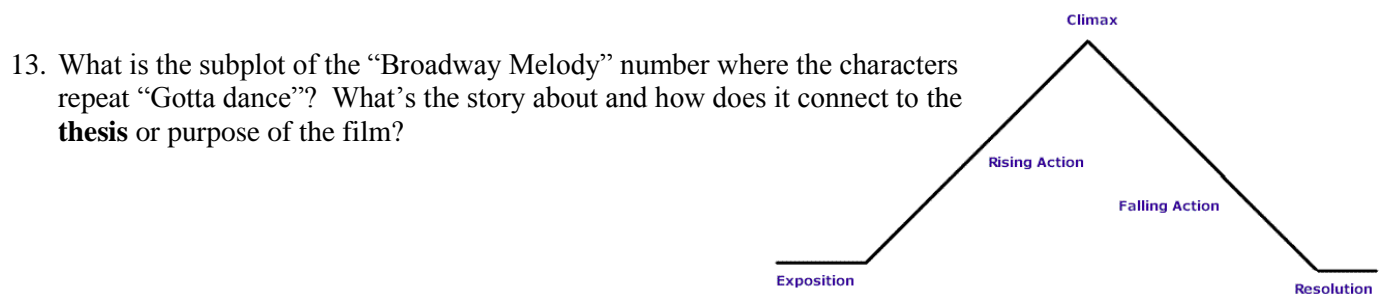
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## Comprehension Questions

**Directions:** Answer the following questions during or after the movie.

1. Note how the characters immediately address the camera, which is presumably filming the premiere. What is the effect of having characters address us, the viewers?
2. When Don Lockwood tells us about his upbringing and childhood, this is an example of what editing term that we studied? What transition is used to showcase this change? How is it effective?
3. Why does Don lie about his past when he tells the audience that his motto, “Dignity...always dignity,” is what’s important? How do we know what’s truthful: what Don tells us or what we see? Why?
4. Watch Don and Lina’s silent film. The crowd is enthused. Would you share this reaction, or would you have the same reaction as Kathy who says that words are important and that silent films are all show? Why or why not?
5. Note that we never hear Lina Lamont speak for quite some time. This is an example of an audio vacuum, which builds silence in order to allow an effect to build. What is the effect of Lina’s voice when she finally speaks?
6. How do people respond to “talkies” and **synchronous sound** when it is first presented to them? Why? Do you agree or disagree? How does Cosmo respond to the invention? What does this reveal about Cosmo’s character?
7. After the party when Don walks on the lot of Monumental Pictures, we get a glimpse of what the studio system era of Hollywood was like. How many pictures are being cranked out? What do you assume is the quality of these pictures? Why?

8. What **sound effect** is played when Cosmo moves in “Make ’Em Laugh”? What does this effect illustrate about his movement?
9. Note how the director directs the actors in silent films. How much artistic freedom does the director allot the actors to hone and present their craft?
10. What specific technical problems does the Monumental Pictures crew encounter when they initially film in sound? What errors do you note when the film is screened for a preview? How does the audience respond to the errors?
11. What is the lyrical beauty of “Singin’ in the Rain”? What is Don Lockwood communicating through this extravagant song and dance number, even if it is silly?
12. What is Cosmo’s suggestion to fix *The Dancing Cavaliers*? How are the filmmakers going to make it a musical? Does this story seem plausible and entertaining to you? Why or why not?



14. Why are so many long shots and extreme long shots used in the fantasy dance number, “Broadway Melody”?

15. How does Lina get her revenge when she learns what Don, Cosmo, and R.F. have planned? How do Don, Cosmo, and R.F. enact their revenge?
16. Note that Lina says that Kathy will have to continue being Lina's voice because Kathy signed a five-year contract to the studio. Again, this is another example of real practices that were employed in the studio system era, which pressured some filmmakers to ink long-term deals to only one studio. What are the benefits and disadvantages of this practice to both actors *and* studios separately?
17. In a fight for feminism, Don wants to ensure that Kathy receives the credit she deserves and that she is given a career to pursue. How is this empowering to Kathy specifically as well as all women who want to work in film?

### **Discussion Questions**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions after you watch the film.

1. Did the film conform to or defy your expectations of traditional Hollywood musicals? Why or why not?
2. How does the general public respond to and treat Don Lockwood and Lina Lamont as Hollywood stars? Is it at all similar to or different from how the public treats stars today? Why or why not?
3. One of the film's major **motifs** is the difference between appearance and reality. In what ways do we still create this façade of ease and glamour in film? What is underneath that façade?

4. Lina's **dialect** provides a humorous example of how important dialect is in establishing a character's personality. What information is conveyed in **dialect**, especially for Lina's character? How much does **dialect** dominate how we judge people based on simply hearing today?
5. This will be one of the most **formalistic** works that we watch this year. What about the songs and dance numbers are lyrical (i.e. beautiful)? Why? Which songs and dance numbers are your favorites? Why?
6. Lina Lamont is one of the most loathsome characters in a film. What makes Lina Lamont such a villainous character? Is it her lack of talent, her ear-gouging dialect, her naivety, or her selfishness? What actor or actress do you think is similar or different to Lina based on your preconceived ideas of that actor or actress? Why?
7. A **conflict** in the film is high verses low art. What is considered "low" art and "high" art today? Why? What is beneficial or problematic with this type of classifying or labeling art?
8. The tone of the film certainly doesn't match the tone of many works in popular culture, which are frequently cynical, jaded, or ironic. Because of this opinion, critics argue that musicals are not nearly as common today as they once were. Are there any contemporary works that are similar in tone to *Singin' in the Rain*? Does a work like this film hold up today, or is it dated? Why?