

## Popular culture – A Broadway musical

- 1 Look at the photo and read the title of the article. Do you know what the connection is between *West Side Story* and a Shakespeare play?
- 2 Read the article and check your answers.



## From musical to movie

In the film's opening scene, the camera moves down towards a group of teenagers, as a street fight changes into a dance. In the ballet that follows, the film's drama is emphasised by the musical and visual excitement. The dancers move in straight lines, and their movements are mirrored in the lines of the tall straight apartment buildings and the sharp rhythms of Leonard Bernstein's music. The songs explain the relationship between Tony, an ex-Jet, and Maria, a Puerto Rican girl whose brother Bernardo is the leader of the Sharks. It is this tragic love story that is at the heart of the film. Tony and Maria's love, like Romeo and Juliet's, is young and hopeful. They want to change their lives, but they find it impossible to escape from the violence of gang warfare.

**W**est Side Story was originally a Broadway musical about New York street gangs, based on *Romeo and Juliet*. In Shakespeare's famous tragedy, the Montague family and the Capulet family are bitter enemies. In *West Side Story*, Montagues and Capulets become rival gangs: the Jets, who are white teenagers, and the Sharks, who are

Puerto Rican immigrants. *Romeo and Juliet* is a story about a historical family argument, but *West Side Story* is based on a real social conflict that existed in the streets of New York. The Broadway show was a stylised view of rough city life on a stage. To make a successful movie from the play, it had to be more true to life.

### WORD BOOSTER

#### Match the words and definitions.

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 1 musical     | a groups fighting against each other          |
| 2 tragedy     | b angry disagreement between people or groups |
| 3 rival gangs | c not realistic but with style                |
| 4 conflict    | d sad play in which people suffer or die      |
| 5 stylised    | e regular pattern of sounds in music          |
| 6 rhythm      | f play or film with music and dancing         |

### 3 Match 1–6 with the descriptions (a–f).

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1 Montagues and Capulets | a the lovers in Shakespeare's play                        |
| 2 Jets and Sharks        | b the lovers in <i>West Side Story</i>                    |
| 3 Romeo and Juliet       | c Maria's brother, the leader of the Sharks               |
| 4 Tony and Maria         | d the composer of the music for <i>West Side Story</i> 's |
| 5 Bernardo               | e the rival families in Shakespeare's play                |
| 6 Bernstein              | f the rival gangs in <i>West Side Story</i>               |

### 4 Are the statements true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 The Sharks are a gang of local white boys. ....
- 2 Shakespeare's play is about city street rivals. ....
- 3 The film of *West Side Story* is more realistic than the musical. ....
- 4 The movie starts with an innocent love scene. ....
- 5 Maria is related to a member of one of the gangs. ....

### 5 Finish two of the sentences so that they are true for you.

- 1 I have never seen *Romeo and Juliet* and/but .....
- 2 I have seen *Romeo and Juliet* and/but .....
- 3 I have seen the film *West Side Story* and/but .....
- 4 I have never seen the musical *West Side Story* and/but .....