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Reading > Lesson 8: Completing Summaries/Charts > Exercise 8.2

FOCUS: Completing charts ("schematic tables") about passages.

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DIRECTIONS: Read the passage. Match the answer choices on the right side of the screen to the correct category on the left side of the screen by dragging the choices to the blanks next to the bullet points. For charts with seven choices, two will not be used. For the chart with ten choices, three will not be used

Postwar American and European Theater

During the 1940s, the values and practices of the theater were reassessed in many countries around the world due to the effects of World War II. Postwar America and Europe each developed a new interpretation of theater, represented in quite different genres.

Although modified realism dominated the approach to plays of postwar American theater, the *musical* emerged as the country's most popular theatrical form and, according to some critics, the country's most important contribution to world theater. With roots in early Greek drama and Roman comedy, musical drama was of course not new. In the eighteenth century, the popular ballad and comic opera were introduced, and in the nineteenth century, music was first used to underscore drama. The musical comedy first appeared in America at the close of the nineteenth century. However, it was not until after World War II that it became an influential theatrical genre. A large majority of the musicals at that time were lighthearted comedies whose songs provided an uplifting and entertaining way of relating a story. Audiences enjoyed the fact that songs could convey a character's emotions quickly and efficiently. Another popular aspect of the musical was its implementation of dance and traditional theatrical elements, such as costume and lighting effects, to enhance the story. Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!,* produced in 1943, is often credited as one of the first musicals to combine music, story, dance, and visual elements in a meaningful way. One of the best-known examples of the postwar musical is Frederick Loewe's *My Fair Lady*, which used a number of songs to assist in telling the story of a young woman's transformation from one social class to another.

Trends in European theater after World War II contrasted sharply with the optimism of the American musical. Social problems, individual moral responsibility, and accountability were common topics. In France the human condition, issues of truth, and the possibility of a true morality became the subject of *absurdist drama*. This unique form, which originated in the 1950's, was greatly influenced by existentialist philosophy. However, unlike existentialist philosophers Sartre and Camus, absurdist playwrights viewed uncertainty, disorder, and inability to make meaningful choices as final truth. Thus, drama that featured these views came to be called absurdist, a label based upon Camus' description of the human condition as absurd. While absurdist drama was born in France, the most influential absurdist playwright was Samuel Beckett of Ireland. Absurdist drama often combined basic traditional elements of plot and/or storyline with irrational, seemingly impossible, and chaotic elements. One of the most well-known absurdist plays is Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* which is without plot and uses the simple storyline of two derelicts waiting in a barren setting for someone, Godot, who never comes. The play combines humor, absurdity, and despair.

In postwar European theater, absurdist dramas provided a glimpse into the human **psyche** wrestling with questions about existence and meaning in life, while, overseas, American musicals celebrated a great energy and optimism. Absurdist drama could make an audience consider the human condition through humor and despair, while musicals inspired laughter or amusement and celebrated a positive often idealistic view of life. In this way, two entirely different facets of the theatrical medium were discovered and explored.

1 Postwar American and European Theater

Postwar American Musical

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Postwar European Absurdist Drama

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Casts doubt on the ability to control one's fate
Focuses on a world of chaos without logic
Characterizes absurdity as the highest goal in life
Portrays generally upbeat stories in romantic ways
Characterizes a positive, optimistic attitude toward the world
Integrates successful characters to illustrate idealism
Uses song, dance, and costuming to tell a story