

LLC SYLLABUS

**GUYS AND DOLLS: A MULTIMEDIA CELEBRATION OF  
DAMON RUNYON AND FRANK LOESSER**

**When:** Tuesday Mornings, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., Tuesday, January 6, 2026 – Tuesday, February 24, 2026

**Where:** Zoom; a link will be furnished to class participants the morning of each class session.

**Coordinators:** Bob and Lois Kemp [wrkemp@gmail.com](mailto:wrkemp@gmail.com) [lakemp@gmail.com](mailto:lakemp@gmail.com)

**Course Description:** Step into the world of Broadway’s most colorful characters and the prose that inspired them. This course invites participants to explore the vibrant intersection of Damon Runyon’s short stories and Frank Loesser’s musical genius, culminating in the iconic musical, *Guys and Dolls*. Through presentations and lively discussions, we’ll examine the themes, language, music, and cultural legacy of these two American originals. We will explore Runyon’s stylized storytelling about gamblers, luck, romance, showmanship, and urban folklore and study Loesser’s dazzling lyrical wit. Multimedia materials, including film clips, recordings, and readings, will enrich our journey. No prior experience is required—just a love of storytelling, song, and spirited conversation. Sit down, we’re rockin’ the boat!

**Format:** We will read the Damon Runyon short stories that inspired *Guys and Dolls* and created the characters that inhabit it, learn the iconic “Runyonese,” study the ingenious lyrics and musical inventiveness of Loesser’s songs, and more. Participants will make a presentation or lead a discussion of any syllabus topic that resonates with them.

**Resources/Expenses:** The *optional* text for our course is *Damon Runyon, Guys and Dolls and Other Writing* (Penguin Classics, 2008), available in paperback from Amazon for \$19.52 or in Kindle for \$11.99.

All the stories listed in this syllabus are available in the Dropbox Bob has created for this course. This is the link to the Dropbox:

[https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/2o4u7xn007xjdd5jsc5jo/ACpmPvKHc87m\\_9M6AOfSeT8?rlkey=z8jxm5pnldbw4gjp12ke130xm&st=fdc2w5xt&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/2o4u7xn007xjdd5jsc5jo/ACpmPvKHc87m_9M6AOfSeT8?rlkey=z8jxm5pnldbw4gjp12ke130xm&st=fdc2w5xt&dl=0)

These stories, as well as many others, can also be found in the following anthologies:

*Damon Runyon Omnibus*, <https://www.gutenberg.net.au/ebooks11/1100651h.html>,  
*Runyon from First to Last*, <https://www.gutenberg.net.au/ebooks18/1800711h.html>.

The stories are not in the public domain in the United States, but because we are making limited use of these resources for educational purposes, we should be entitled to the fair use exemption of 17 U.S. Code §107 – Limitations on Exclusive Rights – Fair Use.

Another *optional* reference is Keith Garebian’s *The Making of Guys and Dolls*, Mosaic Press, 2002, which traces the genesis of the musical and has a good bibliography. This short (186 pp.), but very amusing, book is available from several sellers at varying prices; if you are interested, you’ll need to shop around. Also possibly available used is the excellent *Broadway Boogie Woogie: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture*, by Daniel R. Schwarz, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, which profiles the historical context of Runyon’s stories and the art and artistry, themes, and characters of Runyon’s fiction. If you are interested in these topics and are unable to

locate the book, Bob can provide relevant excerpts.

We have also located free online sources for

*The Damon Runyon Theater*, [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLneoVXdPCzrenc\\_rMzNAXIB-EUJ4QH3za](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLneoVXdPCzrenc_rMzNAXIB-EUJ4QH3za);

The 1950 *Guys and Dolls* Original Broadway cast audio recording,

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcvFO4lyuy\\_tXMWXXIX63T4H62cqlRfiZ](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcvFO4lyuy_tXMWXXIX63T4H62cqlRfiZ);

The 1955 *Guys and Dolls* movie, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhNWjiXREkk>

The 1976 *Guys and Dolls* Broadway Revival (All Black) Cast audio recording,

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmqiE9rxhjJPuXpyPLvmuZKK5djiMTDGT>;

The 1992 *Guys and Dolls* Broadway Cast Revival audio recording (with Nathan Lane),

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy\\_mgC\\_C4Kz\\_Rma53HN33qEbUgzMCPwW8QPA](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_mgC_C4Kz_Rma53HN33qEbUgzMCPwW8QPA);

and *Guys and Dolls Off the Record: 1992 Broadway Revival Cast Recording Session*,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsA7hi3XNRI>,

The 2001 *Guys and Dolls* All Star Studio Cast Complete Score Recording, with Emily Loesser

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy\\_m8WvZKHPBVFmpkCWmZpHUNnpy22lu6sn8](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_m8WvZKHPBVFmpkCWmZpHUNnpy22lu6sn8)

The 2023 *Guys and Dolls* London Cast Recording (with Cedric Neal)

<https://music.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLlqcwJaWH1wb3IebeGAGQD9GyLZTxB1Tr>

**Guidelines for Presentations/Discussion Leadership:** Think about your schedule, as well as your interests, when selecting a topic. You can either make a presentation or lead a discussion. If you are doing a presentation, it should be about 30 minutes in length to allow time for discussion. There are many different formats you may use for your presentation.

- If you would prefer to lead a discussion of your topic, please prepare discussion questions for distribution to the class by Friday of the week before you are scheduled to lead the discussion. Please send your questions to Bob, who will distribute them to the class.
- If you have chosen a topic for which some other form of advance preparation by the class would be helpful, by Friday of the week before your presentation, please either provide the class with a copy of the material you would like them to review or a link to where they can find it online (or in the Dropbox).
- Dramatic readings and debates are good alternatives to discussions and presentations.

**Technology:** If you want to do a PowerPoint or other visual presentation and feel comfortable with the technology, we can allow you to screen share. If you have a presentation but do not feel comfortable with screen sharing, we can arrange before the day of your presentation for someone to help. **In either case, however, please send your presentation to Bob Kemp by the Sunday before your presentation so that we will have a fallback if you run into technical difficulties.**

**Topics for Presentations/Discussions:** In the weekly schedule we have listed the topics we think will do justice to the subject matter. We would prefer to follow the suggested sequence of topics, *but we strongly encourage you to suggest any additional or alternate topic about which you are passionate.*

## COURSE CALENDAR

**1. WEEK ONE – Tuesday, January 6, 2026**

Before Week One, please watch the full-length 1955 movie version of *Guys and Dolls*, which is available on YouTube at the following URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhNWjiXREkk>. This is a good introduction, and we'll discuss our reactions to it during the second hour. You might really enjoy reading the 1950 libretto, at the following URL (and in the Dropbox): <https://www.classactor.org/resources/Guys-&-Dolls-Script.pdf>, which can be read along with the songs from the various recordings listed above and linked in the Dropbox.

First hour: Class Introductions: please think about (1) whether you have ever read stories or newspaper columns about Damon Runyon, (2) whether you're acquainted with *Guys and Dolls* or any of Frank Loesser's other work, and (3) what you would like to learn more about. You can also request to be known by a Runyonese nickname.

Second hour: (1) Review Dropbox resources and (2) any other reactions you would like to share with the class, including favorite songs and favorite characters.

**2. WEEK TWO – Tuesday, January 13, 2026**

First hour: Damon Runyon Life

Second hour: "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown"

**3. WEEK THREE – Tuesday, January 20, 2026**

First hour: The times: Damon Runyon's New York

Second hour: "Blood Pressure," "Pick the Winner"

**4. WEEK FOUR – Tuesday, January 27, 2026**

First hour: Damon Runyon's Style and Runyonese

Second hour: "Romance in the Roaring Forties" and "Butch Minds the Baby"

**5. WEEK FIVE – Tuesday, February 3, 2026**

First hour: Frank Loesser Biography and Personal Reminiscences (Donna Kerner, who knew Frank Loesser)

Second hour: The Making of *Guys and Dolls*

**6. WEEK SIX – Tuesday, February 10, 2026**

First hour: Songs that set the scene

- a. Songs: Overture/Runyonland, "Fugue for Tinhorns" "The Oldest Established" "Guys and Dolls"
- b. Inspired by: "Blood Pressure," "Pick the Winner," and other stories featuring recurring characters like Harry the Horse, Big Jule, and Nicely-Nicely
- c. Possible points to consider: (1) How does the song function in the plot? (2) What elements of the story are reflected in the song? (3) Does the musical structure of the song convey meaning?
- d. Compare renditions

Second hour: Songs about Sky and Sarah

- a. Songs: "I'll know," "Havana," "If I were a Bell," "My Time of Day," "I've Never Been in Love Before," "More I Cannot Wish You"
- b. Inspired by: "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown"
- c. Possible points to consider: (1) How does the song function in the plot? (2) What elements of the story are reflected in the song? (3) Does the musical structure of the song convey meaning?
- d. Compare renditions

**7. WEEK SEVEN – Tuesday, February 17, 2026**

First hour: Songs about Nathan and Adelaide

- a. Songs: “Adelaide’s Lament,” “Sue Me,” “Take Back Your Mink”
- b. Inspired by: Composite of Runyon’s female characters, especially those in “The Lily of St. Pierre” and “Madame La Gimp”
- c. Possible points to consider: (1) How does the song function in the plot? (2) What elements of the story are reflected in the song? (3) Does the musical structure of the song convey meaning?
- d. Compare renditions

Second hour: Songs about the Mission and moral redemption

- a. Songs: “Follow the Fold” and “Sit Down, You’re Rocking the Boat,” “Marry the Man Today”
- b. Inspired by: “The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown” and “The Snatching of Bookie Bob”
- c. Possible points to consider: (1) How does the song function in the plot? (2) What elements of the story are reflected in the song? (3) Does the musical structure of the song convey meaning?
- d. Compare renditions

**8. WEEK EIGHT – Tuesday, February 24, 2026**

First hour: Wrap up: “Marry the Man Today,” Identifying well-known literary passages rewritten in Runyonese

Second hour: Damon Runyon Essays: “Passing the Word Along” and “Death Makes a Social Call”; songs that were not included in the 1955 Movie: “My Time of Day,” “I’ve Never Been in Love Before,” and “More I Cannot Wish You”; final comments and good-byes

**List of Other Possible Topics for Discussion**

**Supplementary Materials:** In preparing for this course, we have found some interesting source materials that are listed in the table below, including a very substantial amount of reference material for use by our class exclusively for this course.

TOPIC	SOURCE(S)
Damon Runyon biography in depth	<i>Broadway Boogie Woogie: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture</i> , Introduction: Who Was Damon Runyon?
The Social Context of Runyon’s Writing	<i>Broadway Boogie Woogie: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture</i> , Chapter 1: Runyon’s New York; Historical Contexts and Fictional Universe
Damon Runyon’s Style and Runyonese	<i>Broadway Boogie Woogie: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture</i> , Chapter 4: The Art and Artistry of Runyon’s Fiction
The Making of Guys and Dolls:	Garbedian, <i>The Making of Guys and Dolls</i> , Mosaic Press, 2002  <i>Garbedian discusses, among other things, the inspiration and the collaborative process behind creating the musical, the role of producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin, and the contrasting styles of book writers Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows.</i>
Damon Runyon: A Life	An interview with the author is at this URL. <a href="https://booknotes.c-span.org/Watch/23574-1/Jimmy">https://booknotes.c-span.org/Watch/23574-1/Jimmy</a> , which is also in the Dropbox reference materials, together with many other treasures.