WHY READ PLAYS?
During your Division II you will be watching, producing, experiencing, and studying theatre. In addition to the work you will do in courses and the practical learning experiences in which you will engage, we would like you to consider a broad range of playscripts in conjunction with your concentration. Whether you're a playwright, designer, performance artist, actor, director, theatre educator or dramaturg, developing a familiarity with plays and playwrights is important for numerous reasons. One of the primary reasons for expanding your awareness of plays and playwrights is the common language or vocabulary used amongst theatre artists – professionals often make references to plays and playwrights in conversation.

There are a multitude of other more personal reasons for reading and becoming familiar with plays. For example, some theatre artists strive to push against the constraints of traditional theatre – but in order to do this, you must first know what traditional theatre's constraints are. Some artists find inspiration in the creative visions of particular playwrights, eras, or theatrical modes therefore exploration in search of this inspiration is necessary. We invite you to use this opportunity to begin or continue the discovery process of figuring out why you read plays. Hopefully you'll be reading plays for the rest of your life – here's your chance to move forward in a meaningful reflexive manner.

WE BELIEVE theatre is rooted in ritual – purposeful communal storytelling. No written script, no designated director, no proscenium stage – just people intentionally sharing a story with others. Theatre as we are most familiar with it (in a Western context) is a sociocultural entity which has emerged from these roots and has transformed many times over throughout the centuries for a multitude of reasons. Because theatre is a social construct, it must be placed in context historically, politically, culturally, etc. Considering these factors helps readers of plays to understand the relevance and potential of dramatic literature whether the plays be contemporary, time-honored or somewhere in between.
THE JUMPING OFF POINT
On pages 2 and 3, you'll find categories containing a number of playwrights. Your job is to peruse this list, choose familiar and unfamiliar names (If you don’t see a name, category or area (i.e. performance art) you wish to explore, negotiate substitutions with your committee*) and consider these works via a critical lens. Pages 3 and 4 include questions and ideas to help guide you through your reading and analysis of the plays you've selected. For each play, write a response answering one of the questions posed or posing questions raised during your reading. In the end, you should have responses for 10 different plays representing at least 7 different categories to include in your Division II portfolio.

*We highly recommend your play reading be a part of an ongoing conversation with your committee. They may offer suggestions for particular plays or playwrights to read or they may direct you to related resources.

FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY
Bertolt Brecht  Anton Chekhov
Bernard Shaw  Luigi Pirandello
Susan Glaspell  John Millington Synge

AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS OF COLOR
Naomi Iizuka  David Henry Hwang
Jose Rivera  August Wilson
Maria Irene Fornes  Ntozake Shange
Luis Valdez  Suzan-Lori Parks
Kia Corthron  Adrienne Kennedy
Talvin Wilks  Rhodessa Jones
Pomo Afro Homos  Aishah Rahman
Lorraine Hansberry  Alexis DeVeaux
Marita Bonner  George C. Wolfe
Breena Clarke  Glenda Dickerson
Diana Son  Anna Deavere Smith
Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)

SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY
THROUGH THE EARLY 21ST
Federico Garcia Lorca  Caryl Churchill
Naomi Wallace  Split Britches
Tennessee Williams  Marsha Norman
Samuel Beckett  Harold Pinter
Edward Albee  Sean O’Casey
Sam Shepard  David Mamet
Tom Stoppard  Brian Friel
Eugene O’Neill  Tony Kushner
Athol Fugard  Arthur Miller
Edward Bond  John Osborne
Slawomir Mrozek  Neil LaBute
Lisa Kron  Tracy Letts
Constance Congdon  Stephen Guirgis

18TH CENTURY
Voltaire  Elizabeth Inchbald
Oliver Goldsmith  David Garrick
Hannah Cowley  Richard Brinsley Sheridan
George Colman the Elder

ELIZABETHAN/
JACOBEAN:
William Shakespeare
Christopher Marlowe
Ben Jonson
John Webster
Thomas Dekker

INTERNATIONAL
NON-WESTERN
PLAYWRIGHTS
Wole Soyinka
Ama Ata Aidoo
Chikamatsu Monzaemon
Kan’ami Kiyotsugu
Gisbon Kente
Zakes Mda
Derek Walcott
Femi Osofisan
Biyi Bandele
Percy Mtwa
Mbongeni Ngema

MEDIEVAL
Most of these playwrights were anonymous. You might look under “Cycle Plays” or “Morality Plays” or “the Wakefield Master,” for example. Also Hrosvit or Hrosvitha.
SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

THEMATIC INVESTIGATION
Look thematically at the plays you select in a way that compliments your area of study (for example, you could look at plays about “real” characters from all of the suggested groups listed, or how children are portrayed on stage, or look at comedies across time/place through the reading list).

ALL ABOUT CONTEXT
The time during which a playwright works greatly impacts the plays written. Consider the context of the play – historical, political, social, religious, etc. How are these factors reflected in the play? Can you ascertain the playwright’s affiliations by reading the play?

-ISMS AND ERAS
The American Heritage Dictionary defines an –ism as a ‘distinctive system of beliefs, myth, doctrine or theory that guides a social movement, institution, class or group.’ The -isms that have shaped and influenced theatre are many. What –ism(s) does the play you read reflect – romanticism, absurdism, realism, postmodernism, etc.? How is the philosophy of this idea manifested in the play? Is this philosophy or style the primary mode of this playwright or did they shift their beliefs and work according to societal changes occurring during their writing? What social factors influenced this playwright? How does the play mirror other art (music, dance, visual art) of the time?

IS IT RELEVANT?
Did you find the play to be dated or could it speak to an audience today? How has the meaning of the play changed over time? Were there any moments/characters in the play that you think would offend a contemporary audience?

A LITERARY PERSPECTIVE
Discuss the language utilized in the play. How are the allusions, metaphors, ---- in the play utilized and to what aim?
A VISUAL PERSPECTIVE
Look at the play through the lens of your particular theatrical discipline. How would you direct/design/etc. this play? Think about the various elements of the play – i.e. exposition, mood, dramatic action, character relationships, etc. and consider how you would imagine staging this play in order to enhance these elements.

DEVICES AND STAGING CLUES
It is essential for the following questions that you locate a description of the kind of staging that was available at the time the play was written. Was theatre typically produced indoors or outdoors? Did it depend on natural lighting or some other source? Was the background a wall, or a painted drop, or a vista of mountains and sky? After you figure some of this out, consider the theatrical devices used in the play.

Give a couple of SPECIFIC examples of theatrical devices that this play make use of (lighting, props, costumes, makeup or masks, scenery, sound/music, or special effects). What do these devices reveal or suggest? [For example, in Shakespeare there are instantaneous changes of setting, because for all intents and purposes, there was no set and no lighting per se, but a lot of language to indicate where we are now and what’s around us. There may have been a handful of props to indicate a setting, but little else. So how does this kind of "deficit" in one sense create possibilities in another?]

Transitions: How does the play handle the change from one scene to another (or if there are no transitions, how does that contribute to the impact of the show?) Is it by having a change of scenery? A musical interlude? New characters walk on stage? Characters enter stage through a different door? Change of lighting? Do you notice anything of interest about scene beginnings and endings?

ART AND SOCIAL ACTION
Look at the plays you read through a social justice lens (i.e. gender, cultural diversity, or socioeconomic/class concerns). What do you think these plays might have been trying to accomplish in terms of social consciousness and what are the tools or devices that the play makes use of in order to make that happen? How does the play handle the idea of the "stranger"? Does the playwright challenge cultural norms and/or moral beliefs? How does the playwright suggest casting the play? Is the play intended to be multicultural, postcolonial, or intercultural (extracultural or transcultural) and how did you determine this?

JUXTAPOSE
Locate two plays by two different playwrights with similar styles, themes, structures, characters, etc. and discuss the similarities and differences between the two plays. To make this more interesting, consider two plays from different cultures or eras.

A CONVERSATION
If two characters (from different plays), two plays, or two playwrights could talk to one another about themselves, or another relevant topic what would they say? Write a fictional conversation illuminating points of interest to you.

TEACH IT
How would you introduce this play to a class of middle school students? What prompts would you utilize to get young people engaged in the process of playscript analysis?