

*“Alone together on a nearly bare stage, with two lights on each, mother and daughter; you can feel how they are separated by a vast emotional distance.”*

-- student essay on Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*

*“[Watching the last scene], it was easy to see potential similarities between my future and [Marlene's] life.”*

-- student essay on *Top Girls*

*[The final scene] shows that people will do anything to prevent being alone...Without companionship and love, we cannot truly live.”*

-- student essay on William Inge's *Come Back, Little Sheba*

*“One thing I have learned about playwriting is that if I change one thing, I will have to change many others.”*

-- student evaluation , *Write on the Edge* playwriting residency

*“I learned that playwriting is a very powerful form for emotional expression. But there's a lot of revision...it's important to take criticisms...Once you think you've done the best you can, you go back and do it again.”*

-- student evaluation , *Write on the Edge*

MTC's education programs teach learners of all ages to see plays and to write plays. Learning to see a play entails understanding how its constituent elements – characters, setting, conflicts – combine first on the page and then in production to form patterns of meaning. It means coming to see how each moment in the action relates to the dramatic whole; how the choices of the playwright, the director, the designers, and the actors unite into a coherent, expressive form. Learning to write a play entails developing the ability to employ those same elements actively in order to create a clear, coherent, meaningful work. Writing an original play thus complements coming to understand a professional play. Through our programs, students acquire and deepen skills of expression and perception.

As the first three quotes above suggest, in mastering these skills, students deepen their understanding of themselves and the world. Plays, after all, are inquiries into human actions and their consequences. Works like Theresa Rebeck's *Mauritius* explore what happens when we confuse value with price; William Inge's *Come Back, Little Sheba* examines how we find the strength to cope with disenchantment and failure; Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* asks what it means to be a woman today and explores the spiritual cost of material success. In delving into works like these and writing plays inspired by them, students grapple with these deeply vexing but elemental questions in personal terms.

As the last two quotes suggest, through intense, laborious effort that enlists both their intellects and their emotions, student playwrights give dramatic form to personal feeling and come to recognize how the works they see on our stages do the same. Through these processes, the students we serve gain a range of valuable skills and knowledge, but finally what we do is help them explore and answer, at least provisionally, the paramount questions of adolescence: “Who am I?” and “What is the world?”