

## How to Read a Play

“To read drama well requires a theatrical imagination attuned to the possible realizations of the dramatic script onstage.”

1. Imagine the physical environment (setting)
  - a. When is the play set?
  - b. Where is the play set?
  - c. What are the main markers in that location (eg, a door, a throne, a dining room)
2. Imagine the scenic environment
  - a. What are the specific physical layouts of the particular scenes?
  - b. Which characters are present in the particular scenes?
3. Imagine each character’s appearance
  - a. What do they look like?
  - b. What do they wear?
  - c. How do they move?
4. Imagine the language of the play
  - a. The spoken text (ie, dialogue; literally what the characters say to each other)
  - b. The action text (ie, the physical language of the play; the gestures and movements and movements and shape our understanding of the play)
  - c. The subtext (ie, the unspoken thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the characters)
5. Imagine the production elements of the play
  - a. How would you light the play?
  - b. How would you costume the play?
  - c. How would you design the set?
  - d. How would you stage the play?

Finally, “you should approach the dramatic text as if you were a theater professional. Instead of reading a play to discern preexisting meanings, look for the places where a role, a scene, or a verbal exchange may be performed in different ways and make choices as to how such components might be interested in the theater of your mind.”

## How to Read a Play Worksheet

Assignment: Read "Reading Drama, Imaging Theater" in *The Norton Anthology of Drama* (pages 81-85). Then read *Soul Gone Home* by Langston Hughes (page 997) and answer the following questions based on your reading. If you can't find concrete answers in the text, use your imagination to create responses.

1. When is the play set?
2. Where is the play set?
3. What are the main markers in the location?
4. What is the physical layout of the scene?
5. What characters are present?
6. What do the characters look like?
7. What do the characters wear?
8. How do the characters move?

9. What did the dialogue (the spoken text) reveal about the son and mother characters?
  
10. What does the physical language of the play (the action text) reveal about the son and mother characters?
  
11. List any subtext (ie, the unspoken thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the characters) you imagine the characters having.
  
12. Write a brief description of how you envision the play, listing any lighting, costume, design elements, or staging choices you would make.