THURGOOD

P.L.A.Y. (PERFORMANCE = LITERATURE + ART + YOU)
STUDENT MATINEE SERIES
2018-19 SEASON
DISCOVERY GUIDE

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DIRECTED BY LOU BELLAMY
DEAR EDUCATORS:

“A lawyer is either a social engineer or a parasite on society. A social engineer is a highly skilled, perceptive, sensitive lawyer who understands the Constitution of the United States and knows how to explore its uses in the solving of problems of local communities and in bettering conditions of the underprivileged citizens.”

– Howard University Dean Charles Hamilton Houston

At the Meet & Greet for Thurgood (where a show’s cast, director, and creative team meet the staff of the theatre) back in September, Director Lou Bellamy commented, “It’s kismet that this play becomes more timely and of a particular focus as it gets closer.” When Geva was planning our 2018-2019 season, we felt compelled to share the life and legacy of Thurgood Marshall for a number of reasons (some of them are shared by our season planning committee on page 4), but we weren’t yet aware of Justice Anthony Kennedy’s upcoming retirement announcement or the impending nomination and tumultuous appointment of a new Supreme Court Justice to fill the vacancy.

“Marshall demonstrated those qualities which we admire in members of our highest judicial tribunal: thoughtfulness, care, moderation, reasonableness, a judicial temperament, and a balanced approach to controversial and complicated national problems. Thurgood Marshall’s rise to the Supreme Court reaffirms the American ideal that what counts is what you are and not who you are or whom your antecedents may have been.”

– Majority report for Justice Marshall’s Supreme Court confirmation

Thurgood is a crucial reminder for us to reflect upon and value the significant impact Justice Marshall made as a lawyer, judge, and a Justice, to celebrate an individual who embodied an unwavering passion for voiceless Americans and a dedication to doing the right thing, to recognize how imperative it is for our nation to select our justice officials wisely, and to appreciate how far we have come, but understand the work ahead of us and how far we still have to go. Thurgood has a particularly strong resonance right now for many reasons, and we hope that your students will take advantage of this opportunity to engage in powerful classroom discussions (a few ideas to get them started can be found on page 10) about why this story is still so incredibly relevant and what their own role moving forward might be. As Bellamy reminded the Thurgood team at the start of rehearsals, “When we think about those with power to make decisions about our lives, we like to think they’re important. But we all bring something to the table.”

“He doesn’t fit the mold. He’s not a Yale man and that kind of stuff, you know? Just a big, easy-going, very humane-type person. He doesn’t change his behavior to suit other people. I think it’s a combination of those two factors that the public will embrace.”

– Attorney General Ramsey Clark in 1967

We hope your students leave the theatre feeling empowered; understanding the impact that they, as an individual, can make. It is their uniqueness and individuality that qualifies each person, right now, to take the reins of social change and justice. We are looking forward to continuing this conversation in your classroom with a Discovery Workshop, at Geva during the performance and talkback, and back in the classroom after the show.

“Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on.”

– Thurgood Marshall

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College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for middle school and up, as well as a list of resources used in the compilation of this guide are available at www.GevaTheatre.org/engage-learn/programs-for-students/

“I STARED AT THOSE WORDS CARVED IN STONE, ‘EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW.’ I SURE HOPE SO.”
**Synopsis:** *Thurgood* spans the impressive 58-year career of Justice Thurgood Marshall, the first African American to sit on the Supreme Court. From his early days as the Civil Rights lawyer who argued the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (leading to the end of institutionalized segregation), to his appointment to the highest court in the land, *Thurgood* is a fitting tribute to Marshall’s enduring legacy.

**Setting:** The auditorium of Howard University Law School

The U.S. Congress chartered Howard University, a co-educational private institution in Washington, D.C., in 1867. Howard is a historically black institution that offers an educational experience of exceptional quality to students with high academic potential, according to the University’s website. Particular emphasis is placed on providing educational opportunities for promising African Americans and other minority students.

Howard University School of Law opened its doors in 1869, during a time of dramatic change in the United States. It was created to provide legal education for Americans traditionally excluded from the profession, especially African Americans. There was a great need to train lawyers who would have a strong commitment to helping black Americans secure and protect their newly established rights. The students (there were six in the first class) met at night in the homes and offices of the faculty, all of whom were part-time. In time, the law school grew, as did the student body and faculty. In the 20th century, it became not only a school, but also the embodiment of legal activism. Howard School of Law was dedicated to producing social engineers. It emerged as a clinic on justice and injustice in America, as well as a clearinghouse for information on the Civil Rights struggle.

**About the Playwright:** George Cooper Stevens, Jr. is an award-winning film and television writer, director, and producer whose career has spanned more than fifty years. Stevens won 17 Emmys, two Peabody Awards for Meritorious Service to Broadcasting, the Humanitas Prize, and eight Writers Guild of America Awards for his television productions, including the annual Kennedy Center Honors, and two made-for-television mini-series, *Separate But Equal* and *The Murder of Mary Phagan*. In 1962 he became the head of the Motion Picture Service of the United States Information Agency under Edward R. Murrow, and in 1967 he founded the American Film Institute. During his tenure, more than 10,000 irreplaceable American films were preserved and catalogued for enjoyment by future generations. In 2009, President Obama named Stevens to be co-chairman of the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities. Stevens was awarded an honorary Oscar for lifetime achievement at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ Governors Awards.

**Why he wrote Thurgood:** “When I decided to make the Separate but Equal mini-series, I did all this research. And years ago I saw Henry Fonda do a play called Darrow, about Clarence Darrow. I think that play was somewhere in the corner of my brain - how effective it was. And the idea of doing a play about Thurgood Marshall occurred to me. Barack Obama has one portrait in his office, and it’s of Thurgood Marshall. Well, I saw Barack Obama speak at Howard to maybe 1,500 students. He talked about Thurgood Marshall. And the students were inspired and Thurgood’s memory was exalted.”

**Production History:** *Thurgood* was first performed at the Westport Country Playhouse in May of 2006, starring James Earl Jones. It premiered on Broadway at the Booth Theater in April of 2008, starring Laurence Fishburne. On February 24, 2011, HBO screened a filmed version of the play, which Fishburne had performed at the Eisenhower Theater at the Kennedy Center. Of *Thurgood*, Fishburne said, “It’s all there. I mean, we deal with his flaws and we deal with his strengths. We deal with his history; we deal with his disappointments, as well as his victories. So, it’s all there in the show. Warts and all.”

*“THE LAW IS A WEAPON, IF YOU KNOW HOW TO USE IT.”*
“[Marshall’s stories] are brought to life by all the tricks of the storyteller’s art: the fluid voice, the mobile eyebrows, the sidelong glance, the pregnant pause, and the wry smile. They are his way of preserving the past while purging it of its bleakest moments. They are also a form of education for the rest of us. Surely, Justice Marshall recognized that the stories made us – his colleagues – confront walks of life we had never known.”

– Supreme Court colleague William Brennan

INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTISTS

Lou Bellamy, Director of Geva’s production of Thurgood, is an icon of the American theatre industry. He founded the Penumbra Theatre Company in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1976, and it was under Bellamy’s direction that renowned playwright August Wilson received the first professional production of his career. In 2006, when Bellamy was chosen as a McKnight Distinguished Artist, he wrote, “I believe that theater in the community must function as a sounding board, where comments concerning community values, aspirations, and clarifications are made lovingly – yet critically.” Bellamy has directed at theatres across the county, as well as performing, and serving as an Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota for 38 years.

Lester Purry, playing Thurgood Marshall in Geva’s production, began acting in high school, then performing in summer stock theatre productions. With $13 in his pocket, he moved to Minneapolis to further pursue his acting career. Purry is a longtime company member at Penumbra Theatre, and has spent the past 30 years acting in films and performing at theatres across the country.

What resources did you investigate in preparation for this production?

Lester: I watched documentaries, news clips, and interviews of Thurgood Marshall. I also listened quite intently to what others said about him, and I was taken with John Lithgow’s performance of Winston Churchill in The Crown [as an inspiration for character development].

Lou: My own memories of getting the news of Mr. Marshall going across the country championing the cause of African American citizenship was my greatest resource. My parents were members of the NAACP, so we received Crisis and Opportunity in our home. As a child, I read of Mr. Marshall and thought of him and his associates as superheroes! Jean Gordon Ryon’s dramaturgical research packet [which the director, actor, and creative team receive at the start of the rehearsal period] has also proved invaluable.

What is the most compelling thing you learned about Thurgood’s life and legacy?

Lester: His belief in a country, and his faith in a governmental system that had no history, nor intention, of honoring itself or him was powerful to ruminate upon.

Lou: The extent of Marshall’s commitment, which moved far past just a job, was striking. It was a personal understanding of the indignities and danger inherent in a segregated America. This personal identification with it, and a steadfast belief in the law and the possibility of America, is inspiring.

“Professor Houston says a lawyer who is not a social engineer is a social parasite.”
How much of Thurgood’s voice, physicality, and personality did you internalize as you crafted your own portrayal of Thurgood, and how much of this character comes from you, as an actor and a person?

Lester: I decided to filter Thurgood and not do an imitation, but rather obtain the essence of his conviction of mission and unwavering belief in America. I was more invested in his courage and the sacrifice to give his entire life to the cause of Justice. This, I believe, allows for a more passionate and relatable character.

What do you hope audiences will take away from Thurgood? How do you hope they will be impacted, and share that impact with others?

Lester: What this man, and those who were with him, did is in arms reach of today. This is not ancient history. This is still being worked out today; it’s not over. We still have work to do.

What are the excitements and the challenges a one-person show, and what role does the audience play in a solo performance?

Lester: Energy will be garnered on my own and will come from the audience being active listeners. The theatre is a very symbiotic experience.

Lou: It’s my fifth one-person show. I’ve even acted in one written for me expressly by August Wilson. The demands of a one-person show are tremendous. Everyone involved must understand the working style of the actor and provide systems that encourage and support his/her process. It’s also wonderful because you get to breathe with them, understand them, become them, and really relish in your time with the artist.

Why are we doing this show?

“For me, choosing Thurgood for the season was a way for all of us to remember, or rather not forget, who paved the way for progress in our country. It was a dangerous time, and Marshall’s fearlessness still inspires me today.”
– Mark Cuddy (Artistic Director)

“Before reading Thurgood, I knew who Marshall was and when he served on the Court, but I was unaware of his history as a Civil Rights activist and lawyer. In the current hyper-partisan climate in the Legislative and Executive branches of government, it’s refreshing to reflect on a time when integrity and character mattered, and a man like Thurgood Marshall could make a difference.”
– Matt Reinert (Director of Production)

“As we look at the world around us, at the things that make us angry or ashamed today and in our history books, it’s so important to remember what Thurgood Marshall understood – that one person can make a difference. The stories of this icon of the Civil Rights movement are inspirational, and I hope that they embolden our audiences to stand up and strive for equality for us all. I’m personally moved by Thurgood; I’m inspired by these stories to consider the actions that I can take to have a positive impact.”
– Jenni Werner (Literary Director)

“We begin our season planning each year by talking about what challenges and issues are going on in the world, in the country, and in our region – then we try to choose a season that relates to those topics. It’s natural to think that, with the political divide growing so wide in this country, the next Supreme Court nomination would be under intense, contentious scrutiny. That seemed the perfect time for us to explore the life of Thurgood Marshall, and to present an example of how one life, well lived, can make an enormous difference for us all.”
– Skip Greer (Director of Education)
Thurgood Marshall was one of the defining American characters of the 20th Century. His story is heroic because he changed history, deploying the law like an army, challenging his country to live up to the principles upon which it was founded. He was the architect of successful court challenges to existing law that became the foundation for the Civil Rights movement. Marshall offers the playwright the gift of his own humanity and humor.”

– Preface of Thurgood, by George Stevens, Jr.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland on July 2, 1908, Thoroughgood Marshall (later shortened to Thurgood) was the grandson of a slave. His father William Marshall (a Pullman railcar waiter), and mother Norma (a teacher) instilled in him from youth an appreciation for the United States Constitution and the rule of law. Marshall learned how to debate from his father, who took Marshall and his brother William Aubrey Marshall to watch court cases; they would later debate what they had seen. Marshall said that although his father never told him to become a lawyer, he “turned me into one. He did it by teaching me to argue, by challenging my logic on every point, by making me prove every statement I made.”

Thurgood attended Frederick Douglass High School (originally called Colored High), Baltimore’s public high school for black students. There was no library, cafeteria, or gym, and it was badly overcrowded, but Thurgood could look out of his classroom window, at the Northwest Baltimore Police Station, where he was fascinated by the daily operations. “Instead of making us copy out stuff on the blackboard after school when we misbehaved,” Marshall later recalled, “our teacher sent us down into the basement to learn parts of the Constitution. I made my way through every paragraph.”

After completing high school in 1925, Thurgood followed his brother to the historically black Lincoln University in rural southern Pennsylvania, the nation’s first degree-granting Historically Black College and University (HBCU), where he was taught by all white professors. He was suspended twice for hazing and pranks, and seemed to spend much of his time playing pinochle and telling stories between taking pre-med classes to prepare for a career in dentistry, at his mother’s request. Marshall’s friendship with fellow student Langston Hughes and his relationship with future wife, Vivian “Buster” Burey, encouraged him to take his studies more seriously, and he graduated from Lincoln cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in humanities, with a focus on American literature and philosophy. Thurgood and Buster wed in 1929.

In 1930, Thurgood wanted to apply to the University of Maryland Law School, but it was clear that a black student’s application would have been denied, so Thurgood sought admission at one of the nation’s most distinguished black schools instead. He was accepted at Howard University Law School that same year and came under the immediate influence of the dynamic new dean, Charles Hamilton Houston, who instilled in all of his students the desire to apply the tenets of the Constitution to all Americans. Paramount in Houston’s outlook was the need to overturn the 1898 Supreme Court ruling Plessy v. Ferguson, which established the legal doctrine “separate but equal.”

After earning his law degree, Marshall opened a private practice law office in Baltimore during the depths of the Great Depression, but quickly found himself in debt by handling Civil Rights cases for poor clients. Marshall’s first major court case, Murray v. Pearson, came in 1933 when he successfully sued the University of Maryland (the school he’d hoped to attend as a young law student) to admit an African American Amherst University graduate named Donald Gaines Murray.

“AS A BOY, I CAME TO UNDERSTAND THAT TWO THINGS MARKED MY FAMILY — DISTINCTIVE NAMES AND EXTREME STUBBORNNESS.”
Thurgood followed Charles Hamilton Houston to New York and later became Chief Counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As the founder and Executive Director of NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund, Marshall won 29 of the 32 Civil Rights cases he argued before the Supreme Court, and was the first African American lawyer ever to win a case before the Supreme Court. For two decades, Marshall traveled constantly, up to 50,000 miles a year, supervising more than 400 cases at a time and often facing the threat of harassment and even physical attack. “I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown for a long time,” he commented. “Under Marshall, the NAACP’s legal staff became the model for public interest law firms,” wrote biographer Mark Tushnet. “Marshall was one of the first public interest lawyers. His commitment to racial justice led him and his staff to develop ways of thinking about constitutional litigation that have been enormously influential far beyond the areas of segregation and discrimination.” During this period, Marshall was also asked by the United Nations and the United Kingdom to help draft the constitutions of the emerging African nations of Ghana and Tanzania.

In 1955, after 25 years of marriage, Buster died from cancer, withholding her diagnosis from Thurgood until after the announcement of the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954. Later that year, Marshall married Cecilia “Cissy” Suyat. They had two sons, Thurgood Marshall Jr. (a former top aide to President Bill Clinton), and John W. Marshall (former Virginia Secretary of Public Safety).

After amassing an impressive record of Supreme Court challenges to state-sponsored discrimination, President John F. Kennedy appointed Thurgood Marshall to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. In this capacity, he wrote over 100 decisions including support for the rights of immigrants, limiting government intrusion in cases involving illegal search and seizure, double jeopardy, and right to privacy issues. None of Marshall’s 112 majority decisions was ever reversed by the Supreme Court.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Judge Marshall to the office of U.S. Solicitor General – the fourth highest-ranking position in the Department of Justice. As Solicitor General, Marshall won 14 of the 19 cases he argued in representation of the government before the Supreme Court – more than any other American. Two years later, in June of 1967, President Johnson nominated Marshall to the Supreme Court saying that this was “the right thing to do, the right time to do it, the right man, and the right place.” Marshall was the 96th person to hold the position, and the first African American. It was later revealed in a series of tapes and recordings that President Johnson had long-term aspirations for Marshall from the start, and carefully crafted a path for Thurgood to eventually join the Supreme Court as part of Johnson’s strategy to implement his Civil Rights agenda. “I want to build him up where he’s impenetrable,” Johnson said. President Johnson frequently utilized Thurgood’s advice, asking him to suggest names of other black leaders for top administrative posts such as agency heads and ambassadors.

Marshall once bluntly described his legal philosophy as this: “You do what you think is right and let the law catch up.” Thurgood served on the Supreme Court for the next 24 years, compiling a liberal record that included strong support for Constitutional protection of individual rights (especially the rights of criminal suspects) and freedom of speech. His most frequent ally was Justice William Brennan, who consistently joined Justice Marshall in supporting abortion rights and opposing the death penalty. Justice Marshall established a record for supporting the voiceless American.

In his retirement press conference on June 28, 1991, he expressed his view that race should not be a factor in choosing his successor. Justice Marshall died on January 24, 1993, at the age of 84. Marshall is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, and left all his personal papers and notes to the Library of Congress. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan said, “Of no other lawyer can it so truly be said that all Americans owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.”

“MY APPROACH WAS TO THE USE THE LAW, NOT BREAK IT.”
The Road to Civil Rights

“After the Civil War Homer Plessy and other Negroes in the South had been free to vote and sit anywhere they damn well pleased – and then in 1890 Louisiana passed a law that ordered rail companies to provide separate accommodations for white people and colored people. You know what they called it? (He plays the irony) ‘An Act to Promote the Comfort of Passengers.’ Homer Plessy says the segregation law is a violation of his rights under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Judge John H. Ferguson doesn’t see it that way. He fines him twenty-five dollars.” – Thurgood

The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was adopted in 1868, as a Reconstruction Amendment that addresses citizenship rights and equal protection of the law. It was proposed in response to issues related to former slaves following the American Civil War. The amendment was bitterly contested, particularly by the states of the defeated Confederacy, which were forced to ratify it in order to regain representation in Congress. The amendment, particularly the first section, is one of the most litigated parts of the Constitution, forming the basis for landmark decisions such as Brown v. Board of Education (1954 – segregation), Roe v. Wade (1973 – abortion), Bush v. Gore (2000 – elections and recounts), and Obergefell v. Hodges (2015 – same-sex marriage).

Plessy v. Ferguson was a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, issued in 1896. It upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation laws for public facilities as long as the segregated facilities were equal in quality, a doctrine that came to be known as “separate but equal.” This legitimized many state laws re-establishing racial segregation that had been passed in the American South after the end of the 1865-1877 Reconstruction Era. The decision was handed down by a vote of 7 to 1. Plessy v. Ferguson is widely regarded as one of the worst decisions in U.S. Supreme Court history. Despite its infamy, the decision itself has never been explicitly overruled. However, a series of subsequent decisions (beginning with Brown v. Board of Education) have severely weakened it to the point that it is usually considered to have been de facto overruled.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka was a landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black students and white students to be unconstitutional. The decision effectively negated Plessy v. Ferguson. Justice Earl Warren’s court unanimous (9–0) decision stated, “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” As a result, racial segregation was ruled a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. This ruling paved the way for integration and was a major victory of the Civil Rights movement, and a model for many future impact litigation cases.

Jim Crow Laws were state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the southern United States. The laws were enforced until 1965. As a body of law, Jim Crow institutionalized economic, educational, and social disadvantages for African Americans. Legalized racial segregation principally existed in the southern states, while northern racial segregation generally was enforced in housing with private covenants in leases, bank lending practices, and employment preference discrimination, including labor union practices.

“I HAVE TO TELL YOU, SOMETIMES I GET A LITTLE WEARY OF TRYING TO SAVE THE WHITE MAN’S SOUL.”

“Jim Crow Dress Code Here” was scrawled on a window of a nightclub in downtown Rochester in September 2018. Do you feel Jim Crow Laws are still unofficially intact?
According to the Supreme Court’s website, The Supreme Court is “distinctly American in concept and function,” as Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes observed. Few other courts in the world have the same authority of constitutional interpretation, and none have exercised it for as long or with as much influence. The Constitution of the United States is a carefully balanced document. It is designed to provide for a national government sufficiently strong and flexible to meet the needs of the republic, yet sufficiently limited and just to protect the guaranteed rights of citizens; it permits a balance between society’s need for order and the individual’s right to freedom. The complex role of the Supreme Court in this system derives from its authority to invalidate legislation or executive actions which, in the Court’s considered judgment, conflict with the Constitution. This power of judicial review has given the Court a crucial responsibility in assuring individual rights, as well as in maintaining a living Constitution whose broad provisions are continually applied to complicated new situations.

Each term, approximately 7,000-8,000 new cases are filed in the Supreme Court. Plenary review, with oral arguments by attorneys, is currently granted in about 80 of those cases. The publication of each term’s written opinions, including concurring opinions, dissenting opinions, and orders, can take up thousands of pages. With rare exceptions, each side is allowed 30 minutes of argument and up to 24 cases may be argued at one sitting. Since the majority of cases involve the review of a decision of some other court, there is no jury and no witnesses are heard. For each case, the Court has before it a record of prior proceedings and printed briefs containing the arguments of each side. Each week, the Justices must also evaluate more than 130 petitions seeking review of judgments of state and federal courts to determine which cases are to be granted full review with oral arguments by attorneys.

When the Justices assemble to go on the Bench each day and at the beginning of the private conferences at which they discuss decisions, each Justice shakes hands with each of the other eight Justices as a reminder that differences of opinion on the Court do not preclude overall harmony of purpose.

Unlike the office of the Presidency, there are no official age, citizenship, or residency qualifications for becoming a Supreme Court Justice. Justices receive a nomination from the President that must be confirmed by the Senate, for a lifetime appointment (but they can be impeached, should it be necessary), and any new appointment to the Court can support or upset the political balance of the Justices decisions, which is — in part — why nominations to the Supreme Court are not taken lightly. The Supreme Court, as a whole, also possesses no official enforcement power, but rarely are their orders ignored.

The Supreme Court by the numbers:
Of the 114 Justices since 1789...
...4 were female (the first was appointed in 1981)
...3 were non-white (Marshall was the first, in 1967)
...6 were foreign born
...1 did not graduate high school
...all were lawyers before their appointments, and nearly two thirds were judges
...Harvard has produced more Supreme Court Justices than any other law school
...the youngest Justice was appointed at age 32; the oldest was appointed at age 68
...more than 50 have chosen to resign or retire
...the oldest retiree was 90
...1 was impeached
...the longest tenure on the Court was 36 years and 7 months

There has never been a Justice of Asian, Native American, or Pacific Islander heritage. No Supreme Court Justice has ever identified himself or herself as anything other than heterosexual, or identifying with any gender other than their birth gender. 91 identified as Protestant, 13 as Catholic, 8 as Jewish, 1 had no religious affiliation, and 1 was agnostic. The financial position typical of Supreme Court Justices is upper-middle to high social status. Most were reared in suburban environments, and came from civic-minded, politically-active, and economically-comfortable families.

Public Opinion:
According to a 1991 poll, 20% of respondents felt it was important for there to always be at least one black person on the Court, while 77% felt that race should never be a factor in choosing a Supreme Court Justice. 53% of respondents felt it was important for there to always be at least one woman on the Court.

“I WANT YOU TO LEARN WHAT YOUR RIGHTS ARE UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, REGARDLESS OF HOW THEY’VE BEEN INTERPRETED BY THE COURTS, AND TO USE THE LAW TO OBTAIN JUSTICE.”
A CLOSER LOOK AT THURGOOD

Modeled after a late 1980s/early 1990s suit, Thurgood’s suit is a classic look that transcends the not-so-distant past. “It’s not a super distinct period for suits, which is nice because it’s timeless without being incredibly specific,” said Geva costume shop draper Janice Ferger.

Long before Thurgood actor Lester Purry arrived in Rochester, Geva’s five-person costume shop received his measurements and set to work adapting a suit pattern to Purry’s specifications. Then a mock-up suit was created from medium-weight muslin fabric. This is the suit that was used for Purry’s first fitting in Rochester, when he arrived to begin rehearsals. After adjustments were made to the pattern and the costume team was confident that the fit and look of the suit was accurate, the real suit was then constructed using the wool show fabric. Before the suit’s completion, there was a second fitting, about mid-way through rehearsals, with Purry in the real suit (minus all the finishing details like lining and hems, etc.), so fitting details could be modified before finishing touches were added.

A custom-made suit coat alone can take 8-10 full days to create, and a complete three-piece suit could easily require two weeks of full-time dedication to build from scratch, including making the pattern. A custom suit is extremely labor intensive, requires a good deal of hand-sewing, and is created using dozens of tiny pieces that need to be stitched together to form the detailed pockets, collar, and sleeves. Additionally, quality wool can easily run upwards of $50 per yard. If a suit requires 6 yards of fabric (depending on the person’s height and size), in addition to the hours of labor it takes to build, you begin to get an idea of why a custom suit is such an investment.

In our case, costumes that appear on the Geva stage usually need to last a minimum of 40 performances (often more), and take on a good deal of daily wear and tear and frequent cleaning. For these conditions, it is imperative that clothing is not only well-constructed from high-quality materials and craftsmanship, and is durable, but also that it fits our actors extremely well so they are comfortable and can focus on their job of telling the story without worrying about their costume. We always want costumes to suit the needs of both the actor and the character that they play.

For Thurgood’s suit, Director Lou Bellamy and Costume Designer Casey McNamara chose navy blue because the color is both classic and professional. Many individuals in political positions choose to wear some variation of red, white, and blue. Thurgood’s navy blue suit and red tie will also contrast the sepia tones of the set, allowing him to truly be the focal point of the show.

Director Lou Bellamy wanted to use an instrumental version of the song “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” (often referred to as the Black National Anthem), by James Weldon Johnson and set to music by John Rosamond, at the end of the show. Read the lyrics below and consider why the director made this choice.

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past
has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present
has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears
has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the
blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright
star is cast.
God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might led us
into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God,
where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the
world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our God,
True to our native land.

“IN KOREA I LEARNED WHAT A SPECIAL HELL IT IS FOR BRAVE MEN TO FIGHT AND DIE OVERSEAS FOR FREEDOMS THEY’VE NEVER KNOWN AT HOME.”
“I’ve always believed the whole thrust of our Constitution is people-to-people. Strike them and they will cry; cut them and they will bleed; starve them and they will wither away and die. But treat them with respect and decency, give them equal access to the levers of power; attend to their aspirations and grievances, and they will flourish and grow...and, yes, join together to form a more perfect union.” – Thurgood

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- In what ways has the work of Thurgood Marshall changed America? How did he work within the laws and use them to his advantage to argue for and incite change?
- Draft a list of the qualities you look for in political leaders, both as public figures and as ordinary people. Which of these qualities did Thurgood Marshall possess? Which of these qualities do you possess? Are there any you’d like to work on for yourself?
- What issues are our Supreme Court Justices currently grappling with? Are there any decisions or types of cases you hope will be presented to them for future ruling?
- Do you believe there are alterations that could be made to our Justice system to create a more efficient legal process? Or do you think that the checks and balances of our present system are maintaining balanced progression?
- In what direction would you like to see our future Supreme Court lean? What would you change about the makeup of the Court or their processes? Do you have confidence in the agenda, works, and efforts of our current Supreme Court in terms of ruling in a fair and balanced manner?
- Presidents have nominated more people to the Supreme Court than have actually been appointed. Research past nominees who have had rocky roads to the Court or were failed nominations. Why were their appointments difficult or failed? Do you think the right decision was made? How do you feel about the appointment of our nation’s most recent Supreme Court Justice, Brett Kavanaugh?
- If Thurgood Marshall were alive today, what current issues in our nation might attract his attention?
- What inequalities do you see in your community? What can you, as an individual, do to make a contribution or to help achieve change and justice? What are some specific examples of opportunities where you, like Marshall, can use the law like a weapon or work within established rules or systems to right the wrongs you see?

Check out https://www.GevaTheatre.org/engage-learn/programs-for-students/ for an online activity about Thurgood Marshall’s legacy court cases.

“Equal means getting the same thing at the same time and in the same place. There can be no separate but equal schools. Separate schools cannot be equal.”

“Laws not only provide concrete benefits. Laws can change the hearts of men.”

“What is the quality of your intent? Certain people have a way of saying things that shake us at the core. Even when the words do not seem harsh or offensive, the impact is shattering. What we could be experiencing is the intent behind the words. When we intend to do good, we do. When we intend to do harm, it happens. What each of us must come to realize is that our intent always comes through.”

“I wish I could say that racism and prejudice were only distant memories. We must dissent from the indifference. We must dissent from the apathy. We must dissent from the fear, the hatred, and the mistrust. We must dissent because America can do better, because America has no choice but to do better.”

“You do what you think is right and let the law catch up.”

– Thurgood Marshall

**“SURE, WE KNOW HOW FAR WE’VE COME – BUT WE ALSO KNOW HOW FAR WE STILL HAVE TO GO.”**
Upcoming Student Matinee Performances:

December 4th, 6th, 8th, 12th, 18th, and 19th at 10:30am
For all audiences (ages 5 and up)

April 25th at 10:30am
For middle school audiences and up

May 8th at 10:30am
For high school audiences

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(Donors listed are for the time period 7/1/17 to 9/31/18.)

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Thanks to the following donors for their generous contributions to the 2018 Summer Curtain Call, the theatre’s annual gala in support of Geva’s education programs:

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And thanks to the 500 individuals who attended the event and made donations through the auctions, raffle, wine pull and paddle call.

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