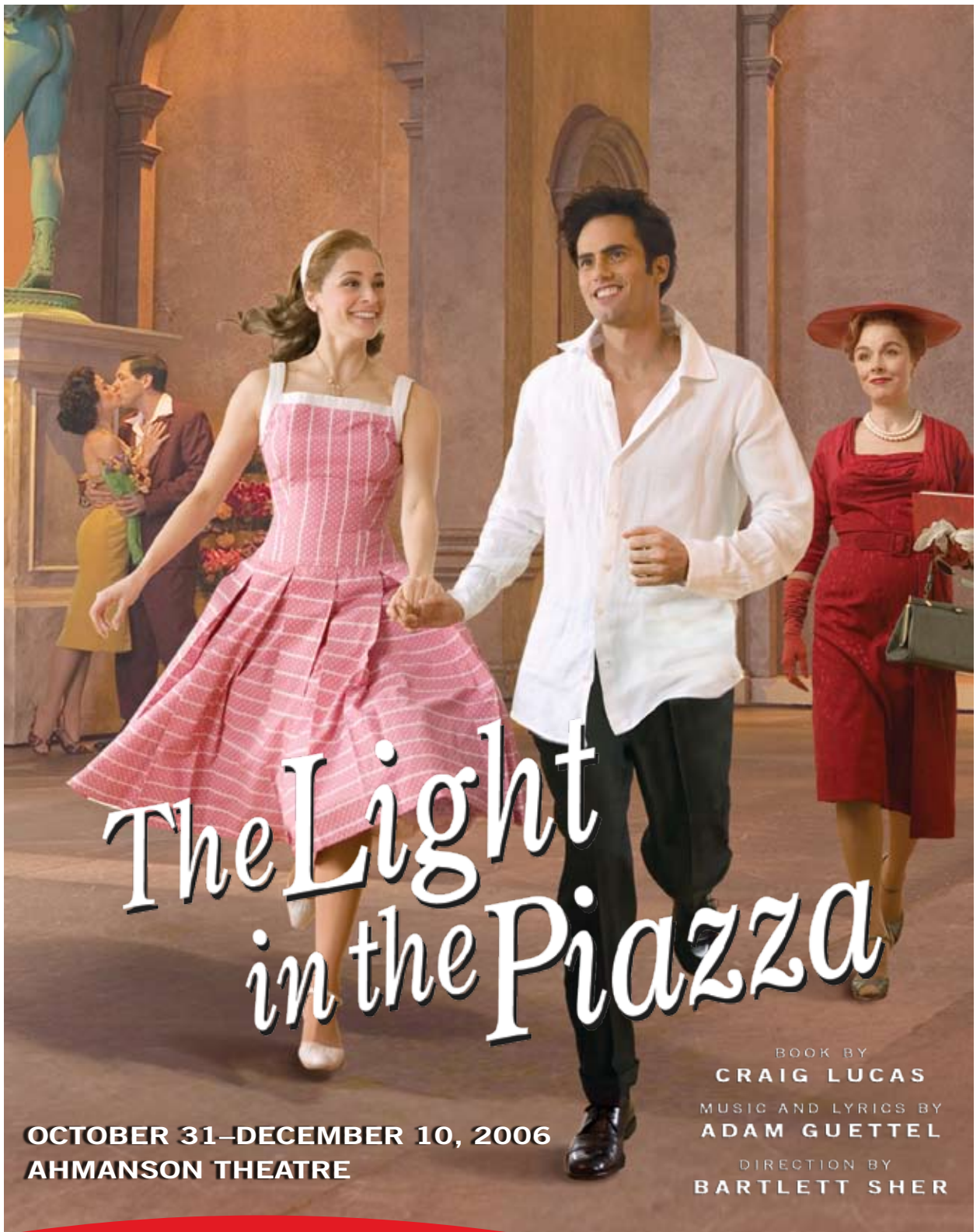


DISCOVERY GUIDE



The Light in the Piazza

OCTOBER 31–DECEMBER 10, 2006
AHMANSON THEATRE

BOOK BY
CRAIG LUCAS
MUSIC AND LYRICS BY
ADAM GUETTEL
DIRECTION BY
BARTLETT SHER

 Center
Theatre
Group
L.A.'s Theatre Company

P.L.A.Y.

PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH

How to Use this Discovery Guide

The Light in the Piazza

*Tiny sweet
And then it grows
And then it fills the air
Who knows what you call it
I don't care
Out of somewhere I have something I never had
And sad is happy
That's all I see*

The light in the piazza

—Clara from *The Light in the Piazza*



THIS FALTERING, desperately heartfelt attempt to explain love at first sight is the essence of *The Light in the Piazza*, a new musical directed by Bartlett Sher at the Ahmanson Theatre, with book by Craig Lucas and music and lyrics by Adam Guettel. Clara Johnson has never married because of a secret in her past; her mother, Margaret, does not believe her daughter can ever find love and live a normal life. When a wind takes Clara's hat in Florence, Italy, everything changes for her. In the city where a new light was shed on the world during the **Renaissance**, new light also shines on Clara and her mother.

This Discovery Guide has been created to add to your experience of the play. It contains historical material and a summary of the play. At the end of each section there are opportunities for you to respond to the play's themes, events and characters.

Vocabulary words are in **bold type**. You will find definitions of these words within each section.

DISCOVERY GUIDE CREDITS

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Peter Royston is the writer of over 40 study guides for Broadway, Off-Broadway and theatres around the United States. He is currently working on the guides for *A Chorus Line*, *Tarzan*, *Mary Poppins*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King* on Broadway.

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OBJECTIVES OF THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE

Provide an overview of the play's dramatic events

Familiarize you with Florence, Italy, the setting for *The Light in the Piazza* and the city that sparked the Renaissance and the rebirth of western civilization

Introduce Michael Yeargan, the set designer for *The Light in the Piazza*, and explore how he recreated the streets, museums and cathedrals of Florence for the stage

Direct you to resources that will help you continue to explore *The Light in the Piazza*

SYNOPSIS

The Light in the Piazza



CHARACTER LIST



Christine Andreas
Margaret Johnson:
an elegant, practical
and attractive woman



Elena Shaddow
Clara Johnson:
Margaret's daughter



David Burnham
Fabrizio Naccarelli:
a young
Florentine man



David Ledingham
Signor Naccarelli:
Fabrizio's father,
owner of a tie shop



Diane Sutherland
Signora Naccarelli:
Fabrizio's mother



Jonathan Hammond
Giuseppe
Naccarelli:
Fabrizio's brother



Laura Griffith
Franca Naccarelli:
Giuseppe's wife



Brian Sutherland
Roy Johnson:
Margaret's husband



Craig Bennett
A priest



Evangelia Kingsley
Tour Guide



IT IS THE SUMMER OF 1953. Margaret Johnson and her naïve daughter, Clara, natives of North Carolina, are visiting Florence, Italy. Margaret and her husband honeymooned in Florence before World War II, and she now wants to share this city, her favorite place in the world, with her daughter. As the musical begins, Margaret and Clara are exploring the Piazza della Signoria, one of the largest and most beautiful piazzas, or open squares, in Florence. When a sudden breeze **whisks** Clara's hat from her head, the hat rises up and away and lands at the feet of Fabrizio Naccarelli. Fabrizio and Clara stare at each other, and, in that moment, fall in love.

Clara and Margaret keep running into Fabrizio, and despite Margaret's best efforts to discourage him, she and Clara are invited to meet his family. She attempts to explain to Signor Naccarelli why her daughter cannot possibly get involved with his son, but each time Margaret is interrupted.

As the relationship between Clara and Fabrizio grows, we learn more about both the Naccarelli and the Johnson families. Fabrizio's brother Giuseppe and his wife Franca have grown apart. When Margaret calls her husband, Roy, at home in America, it becomes clear that they, too, are **estranged**.

When Fabrizio asks Clara to marry him, Margaret, in a panic, takes her daughter to Rome, hoping that she will forget her newfound love. But it is too late. In that single moment in the Piazza, their lives were changed forever. Despite her fears, Margaret must put her faith in this new perspective, this "light" that lets her see the world in a new way.



L TO R: Christine Andreas and Elena Shaddow, *The Light in the Piazza*, PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.

Vocabulary

Estranged: Alienated or unloved

Gibberish: Unintelligible or nonsensical talk or writing

Renaissance: A cultural rebirth that began in Florence and spread through Europe in the 14th through 16th centuries

Whisk: To move with light, sweeping motions

ACTIVITY

The Light in the Piazza

Questions & Exercises:

1. The Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe wrote, "Where both deliberate, the love is slight: Who ever lov'd, that lov'd not at first sight?" Do you believe in love at first sight? Scientists and artists have been debating for centuries whether love at first sight is genuine. Hold your own debate on the subject. Split your class or group into two smaller groups. One side will be the PRO and the other the CON on the question, "Is love at first sight real?" Each side will be given time to formulate three arguments based on specific characters from literature or examples from science and life; if necessary, use library or Internet resources to bolster your claims. Choose representatives from each side to argue your case, and, if possible, find a neutral party to judge your debate. It will be their job to decide which side made the best argument and to explain why they think so.
2. Watch the actors in *The Light in the Piazza* when they are speaking Italian. Even if you cannot understand the language, can you tell what they are saying? Much of the dialogue and lyrics in *The Light in the Piazza* is in Italian. This helps to immerse the audience in the life of Florence, but it is the actors' job to convey what the characters are actually saying to a non-Italian speaking audience. How is this possible?

Break up your class or group into pairs. Each duo will select a one-page scene from a play to "translate" into **gibberish** and read to the rest of the group, twice. For the first time through, read the scene without any emotion, gesture or inflection. On the second reading, perform the gibberish scene using inflection, emotion and gesture to convey meaning. After each time, ask if the audience is able to understand what is happening in the scene. Why or why not? Check out the Resources section for some suggested plays to use with this exercise.



3. Is there a life-changing experience that shed light on your life and changed you forever? Write a short essay describing the experience and its effect on you.



L TO R: David Burnham and Elena Shaddow, *The Light in the Piazza*, PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.



L TO R: David Ledingham, Elena Shaddow, Diane Sutherland and Christine Andreas, *The Light in the Piazza*, PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.

“I could live there!” Michael Yeargan recreates Florence on stage



The Light in the Piazza, set design by Michael Yeargan. COURTESY OF MICHAEL YEARGAN.



IN THE CENTER OF ITALIAN CITIES, THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST VIBRATES IN THE AIR.

—Linda Butler, *Italy: In the Shadow of Time*



MICHAEL YEARGAN designed the sets for *The Light in the*

Piazza. For Lincoln Center Theater, he created the sets for *Awake and Sing!* and Edward Albee’s *Seascape*. On Broadway, he was the set designer for *The Ritz*, *Bad Habits*, *Hay Fever* with Rosemary Harris; *Ah, Wilderness!* with Jason Robards and Colleen Dewhurst; and Athol Fugard’s *A Lesson From Aloes*. Along with extensive work in regional theatres throughout the country, he has designed sets for many operas, including *Otello*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Così fan Tutti*, *Don Giovanni*, *Susanna* and *The Great Gatsby*. He is Professor of Stage Design at Yale School of Drama.

P.L.A.Y.: How did you get involved with *The Light in the Piazza*?

Michael Yeargan: The director, Bartlett Sher, had actually asked me to do *The Light in the Piazza* in Seattle, where it started, but I had another engagement. So when he took the show to Chicago, he asked me to come on board. That’s how I, delightedly, came into the project. The first thing Bart said to me was “Well, we really didn’t have a Piazza in the original production, and we need a Piazza!”

P.L.A.Y.: For *The Light in the Piazza*, you were given a daunting task: recreate the city of Florence, Italy, on the stage. How did you start this process? Had you ever been to Florence?

Yeargan: I had been to Florence many years ago as a student. I happened to have been there in 1966, which was the year when they had these horrendous floods. When we got to the city, they were

commandeering everyone they could find to help clean out the library. So we put on blue jump suits and gas masks and spent our time digging out 12th century **manuscripts!** It was an unbelievable experience, but I never really faced Florence the way that Clara does in the musical.

When the musical came up, I thought I would go back and do a research trip, but I was never able to. I did find a wonderful book of black-and-white photographs from the late 1950s, which really became our bible. Bart felt very strongly that there is a monumental quality to Florence, that when we went to the Piazza Signoria, he felt it should be gigantic, it should dwarf the people.

I did finally get back to Florence, this past summer. And, oh my God, I could live there! It's an amazing place. You do feel as if the city kind of takes you and guides you through its streets, one street naturally flows into another; you feel as if it pulls you from a street into a big square.

P.L.A.Y.: That idea of one street flowing into another - the fluidity of your sets, moving from one scene to another, seems to match that natural flow.

Yeargan: That's exactly right. We knew we had to do something really outrageous and **surreal** for the hysteria section when Clara gets lost in the city. This led to the idea that, by moving the towers of the set around in different combinations, different patterns would show the different streets and squares of the city. I don't think any of us realized how infinite those combinations could be. We've been putting the show together for the tour and we've

found some new combinations we couldn't have done at Lincoln Center.

P.L.A.Y.: The set was designed for a thrust stage at Lincoln Center. How did you go about changing it for the proscenium stage at the Ahmanson?

Yeargan: In the thrust part of the stage at Lincoln Center we were able to use trap doors in the floor to bring props and furniture up and down from beneath the stage, but because of the wide variety of stages at theatres throughout the country, we can't do that on tour. So now the actors push the props and furniture on and off, and, in a way, this adds to the fluidity of the show. The characters become part of the set movement. In each scene, Florence assembles itself right in front of the audience; the city propels the story forward.

Questions & Exercises:

Michael Yeargan's sets for *The Light in the Piazza* are suggestive rather than realistic; sometimes a single column, gate or storefront can powerfully suggest an entire scene rather than recreating that section of a city in detail. Look through newspapers and magazines to find a photo of an emotionally charged scene. Choose one detail from that image that suggests the feeling of the entire scene. Cut it out of the photo. In one paragraph, describe why you chose this detail and how it evokes the larger scene.



Vocabulary

Commandeer: To take by force
Manuscript: Book or document written by hand

Proscenium stage: A stage where the playing area is separated from the audience by a frame known as the proscenium; the Ahmanson Theatre has a proscenium stage

Surreal: Having a strange, dreamlike quality
Thrust stage: A stage that extends into the audience's portion of a theatre; the Mark Taper Forum is a thrust stage

Florence: A Beacon in the Dark

MAGNIFICENTLY STERN AND SOMBER ARE THE STREETS OF BEAUTIFUL FLORENCE; AND THE STRONG OLD PILES OF BUILDING MAKE SUCH A HEAP OF SHADOW, ON THE GROUND AND IN THE RIVER, THAT THERE IS ANOTHER AND A DIFFERENT CITY OF RICH FORMS AND FANCIES, ALWAYS LYING AT OUR FEET.

—Charles Dickens from *Pictures of Italy*



In a city made of statues and stories it ignited there like a beacon coming out of the dark

—Margaret from *The Light in the Piazza*

Christine Andreas, *The Light in the Piazza*. PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.



WALK THROUGH the streets of Florence (called Firenze in Italian)

and you walk through an open-air museum, a living celebration of the past. You are walking in the footsteps of artists such as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the poets Dante and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. On nearly every street corner, in every open square, or piazza, you see architecture, painting or sculpture that can spark the imagination, just as Florence

sparked the world's imagination long ago. It was here, on these streets, that a light dawned after centuries of darkness; it was here that the Renaissance began. And it is here, in *The Light in the Piazza*, that a light dawns for Margaret and Clara.

Starting in the 14th century, Florence saw a flourishing of art, science and the **humanities** that eventually spread throughout Europe. This era, which continued through the 16th century, was

later called the Renaissance, literally “rebirth” in French. After millions died from the Black Death (1347–1351), many Florentine artists and thinkers re-evaluated how they looked at life. They traded the fear-of-God values of the Middle Ages for a more human-centered, individualistic philosophy, labeled **Humanism**. This changing viewpoint, combined with the generous **patronage** of business people, like the powerful Medici banking family, created the conditions that brought about the Renaissance.



Piazza della Signoria

Start your walk through history in Florence's centro storico, or historic center, in the Piazza della Signoria, as Clara and Margaret do in *The Light in the Piazza*. During the 1500s, the architectural aspect of Florence began to change from large palaces and enclosed gardens to spacious public squares like this one. For the Florentines, piazze (the plural of piazza) were like stage sets: open spaces for the dramas of their lives. They were often the site of outdoor theatrical presentations, horse races or football games.

The Light in the Piazza

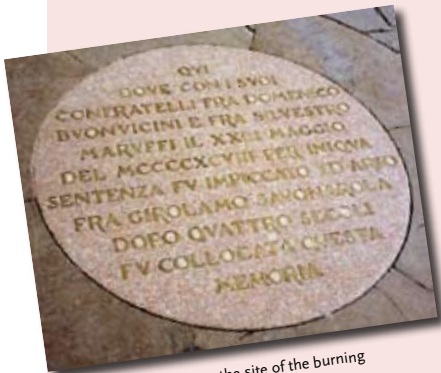
Right off the Piazza is the Galleria degli Uffizi or Uffizi Gallery. Designed in 1560 to hold the uffizi, or administrative offices, of the Medici family, it later became the storehouse and museum for the Medici's vast collection of artwork. Masterpieces by Botticelli, Michelangelo, da Vinci and Raphael fill its 45 rooms. Here in the Uffizi Gallery, Margaret and the innocent Clara see two paintings featuring Mary and her child. You too can see these examples of that new, humanist viewpoint: the "Madonna and Child with Two Angels" (1465) by Fra Filippo Lippi, which humanized the figures of Mary and Jesus and features an angel making direct, and mischievous, eye-contact with the viewer; or Da Vinci's "Annunciation" (1472-1475), in which Mary is shown reading a book. Depicting sacred figures like Jesus and Mary as human was unheard of before the Renaissance.



Uffizi Gallery



"Madonna and Child with Two Angels" by Filippo Lippi.



Bronze plaque marking the site of the burning of Savonarola

Not everyone appreciated the new ideas of the Renaissance. Walking back to the Piazza della Signoria you may see, as Margaret and Clara do, a bronze plaque marking the spot where, on May 23, 1498, Girolamo Savonarola was burned at the stake. A Dominican **friar**, Savonarola came into power after the death of Lorenzo de Medici in 1492, and **decided** all that his predecessor had stood for: art, worldly pleasure, humanism, rationalism. Savonarola preached a return to medieval values and urged his followers to throw their worldly possessions into a huge fire on the Piazza, which became known as the "Bonfire of the Vanities." Ironically, he proved so unpopular that he was burned alive here one year later. As Margaret observes, "People were apt to be very cruel in those days. But they must feel sorry for it, because they're still talking about it all these years later."



"David" by Michaelangelo

Walk northeast to the Galleria dell'Accademia, a popular museum established in 1784 as a quiet place of study for art students. Today, many come here to see Michelangelo's "David," a work of art that has become so well known that it is often forgotten what the statue actually depicts: the beautiful nude figure of the young Biblical David before he slew the monstrous Goliath. Calmly defiant and dignified, the David symbolizes the fight against ignorance and darkness that the Renaissance, and Florence, came to stand for.

Questions & Exercises:

1. *The Light in the Piazza* is based on a novella by Elizabeth Spencer, originally published in 1959. From what you have read about Florence and seen in the musical *The Light in the Piazza*, why do you think Elizabeth Spencer set her story here? In discussion, compare the "rebirth" that Florence, and all of Europe, saw with the Renaissance, to the "rebirth" that Clara and Margaret find in *The Light in the Piazza*. As the musical begins, Margaret sings, "In a city made of statues and stories,/It ignited there,/Like a beacon coming out of the dark," referring to the Renaissance. Discuss what else has ignited, or been illuminated, for Margaret and Clara during the course of *The Light in the Piazza*.

2. *The Light in the Piazza* lighting designer, Christopher Akerland, said in *Live Design* magazine that "[t]he progression during the productions was that Florence was a real character." Can a city have a character? From what you have read about Florence, and seen in the musical *The Light in the Piazza*, could you describe the "character" of Florence? If Florence were a person, what would be her (Italians refer to their cities as women) characteristics? Write down ten descriptive words to illustrate this "person." Use these words to write a paragraph description of this character, "Florence."

Now do the same closer to home. Think about your own neighborhood – does it have a "character"? As you did with Florence, imagine that your neighborhood is a person. Make a list of ten descriptive words to illuminate this "person" to your reader. Use these words to write a paragraph describing this "person."

Vocabulary

Decry: To openly condemn

Friar: A male member of a religious order that originally relied solely on charity

Humanism: A system of thought that centers on people and their values, capacities and worth

Humanities: Those branches of knowledge, such as philosophy, literature and art, which are concerned with human thought and culture

Patronage: Support or encouragement of a patron, usually financial

RESOURCES

The Light in the Piazza

Interested in knowing more about the people and events of *The Light in the Piazza*? Here are some websites, books and films to check out.

WEB SITES:

www.polomuseale.firenze.it/english/musei/uffizi/Default.asp

An official Italian museums web site with information on the Uffizi Gallery

www.italyguides.it/us/florence/florence_italy.htm

The ItalyGuides Web site provides virtual tours of Florence, including the Piazza Signoria. QuickTime software, which can be downloaded for free, is required to view the images.

www.fictionalcities.co.uk/florence.htm#list

An extensive list of fiction books set in Florence, and other cities, created by a British librarian

www.nytimes.com/packages/khtml/2005/05/31/multimedia/20050531_PIAZZA_SLIDESHOW.html

The *New York Times* slideshow and audio description by Michael

Yeagan on the creation of the set for *The Light in the Piazza*

BOOKS:

The Light in the Piazza and other Italian Tales by Elizabeth Spencer (Banner Books, 1995)

Florence: Biography of a City by Christopher Hibbert (W.W. Norton & Company, 1993)

The Age of the Renaissance edited by Denys Hays (McGraw-Hill Books, 1967)

Rome, Venice, Florence by Dana Facaros and Michael Pauls (Cadogan Guides, 2001)

Pictures of Italy by Charles Dickens (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1974)

SUGGESTED PLAYS FOR THE "GIBBERISH" EXERCISE:

The Piano Lesson by August Wilson (Plume, 1990)

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett (Grove Press, 1954)

The Crucible by Arthur Miller (Penguin Classics, 2003)

Ah, Wilderness! by Eugene O'Neill (Samuel French, 1979)

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams (New Directions, 1999)

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansbury (Vintage, 1994)

FILM & VIDEO:

These films will give you a flavor of Tuscany and Florence:

A Room with a View directed by James Ivory (Merchant Ivory, 1985)

Under the Tuscan Sun directed by Audrey Wells (Walt Disney Video, 2003)

Enchanted April directed by Mike Newell (Paramount, 1991)

Tea with Mussolini directed by Franco Zeffirelli (MGM, 1999)

A Midsummer Night's Dream directed by Michael Hoffman (20th Century Fox, 1999)

An adaptation of Shakespeare's magical play, set in 19th century Tuscany

The Light in the Piazza. PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.



About P.L.A.Y.

P.L.A.Y.
The Light in the Piazza

NOW IN ITS 36th YEAR, Performing for Los Angeles Youth (P.L.A.Y.) is Center Theatre Group's award-winning youth theatre and theatre education program. P.L.A.Y. serves more than 35,000 young people, teachers and families annually through a variety of performances, residencies, discount ticket programs and innovative educational experiences. P.L.A.Y. offers programs that allow young people, teachers and families to attend productions at the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson and Kirk Douglas Theatres for low or no cost. P.L.A.Y. is dedicated to artistic excellence and innovation in its theatrical productions and to the development of young people's skills and creativity through the exploration of theatre, its literature, art and imagination.

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