



Tennessee Williams' ***A Streetcar Named Desire***

Comprehensive Guide for AS and
A Level English

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Teacher's Introduction

This study guide is intended to accompany the whole-class study of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams. Page references are taken from the Heinemann edition of the play ISBN 9780435233105.











This guide supports the study of the text in the classroom. It is recommended that students also read the text independently. The information contained in the guide is not tailored to a particular specification; however, it has been written to support the teaching of the following examination units:

Board and Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AQA (A) A Level• AQA (B) AS Level• Edexcel AS• Edexcel A Level• Eduqas AS• Eduqas A Level• OCR AS

The Assessment Objectives (AOs)

The activities and information contained within the guide have been created to ensure students are able to meet the Assessment Objectives and it is useful if students are encouraged to fully assimilate what each of the five means.

Students can be taught to see the AOs as 'windows' through which they view the text. Each of the windows presents a slightly different view, but taken together, they provide a comprehensive picture.

	Indicates an Extended Essay Question		Indicates a Key Term
	Indicates a Debate Prompt		Indicates Wider Reading
	Indicates a Key Quote		Indicates a Key Event
	Indicates an Active Learning Task		Indicates a Quick Quiz
	Understanding historical terms		Indicates Context

The Assessment Objectives (AOs)

A01. Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

A02. Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

A03. Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.

A04. Explore connections across literary texts.

A05. Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.

January 2016

The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* contains potentially upsetting scenes of an implied rape and attempted rape. These scenes are discussed in this resource, notably on p. 36–38.

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Studying the Play

Reading the play straight through at least once before closer study is useful to give a sense of the play and how events are sequenced. Tennessee Williams wrote the play to be read; therefore, it is useful if students read the parts aloud in class to get a feel for the language. Students are often asked to imagine they are seeing the play being performed as they read. Ideally, students should watch a performance of the play during their study of it.

Appropriate Critical Terminology

Students should be able to use appropriate critical terminology when writing about the play. The terminology listed in the glossary at the end of this guide. Students should be encouraged to use this terminology to say and do in their exploration of the text. Examiners expect candidates to support their arguments with textual reference.

Dramatic Devices

Considering *how* and *why* the writer uses dramatic techniques to shape the characters, their world and their interactions with each other, is crucial in preparing to write about the text. In novels, writers are able to convey the characters' thoughts and emotions through narrative. On stage, unless characters are given soliloquies and asides, the playwright needs to use dramatic devices. Students should be aware of this as they are reading and consider how Tennessee Williams uses stage directions as well as costume, props, the set and so on to add to the characters' words. Figurative language and symbolism are also key methods Williams uses to enrich our understanding of the characters and their thoughts and feelings.

Form, Structure and Language

Students should be encouraged to consider how form, structure and language shape meaning. Consideration of methods such as foreshadowing, use of time, framing, pairs and parallels, patterns, idiolect, figurative language, motifs and genre will add to a student's understanding, and enjoyment, of the play.

Contextual Factors

Students can take a historicist approach in their study of the text. Put simply, this means they need to consider each text as part of a range of texts shaped by the time in which it was written. Therefore, they will be expected to explore a range of social and historical contexts; for example, war, gender, class, changing morality and politics. They will need to consider different interpretations of the play, recognising that multiple interpretations are available. The tasks they are given will encourage an examination of the ways Williams' methods shape meaning in the text.

Students should be encouraged to study the contexts in which texts are written and received. Societal values change over time and in *A Streetcar Named Desire* there is some vocabulary that people may find offensive. Aspects of the play also make for uncomfortable reading. Students should be made aware of this before reading and encouraged to see the text as a product of the time it was written, when certain attitudes were more tolerated.

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Different Interpretations

Considering how an audience may respond compared with a contemporary audience, approach this, and discussing the racist, misogynistic and homophobic attitudes in the play to stimulate discussion. Texts can be interpreted from a number of perspectives and over time building a file of critical viewpoints drawn from different sources.

Conflict

Conflict drives drama and *A Streetcar Named Desire* is full of conflict. Students can look beyond obvious conflict, such as arguments between characters about money or power, education, heritage, money, alcohol, loyalty, betrayal, sanity, truth... all these can be sources of conflict.

Tragedy

Students may consider ways in which the play can be considered a tragedy. This could include considering Blanche as a tragic heroine and how her flaws and behaviour impact on those around her and contribute to her demise; on Stanley's role as tragic villain and the part he plays in Blanche's downfall. Also, the ways in which the time and setting create a world in which the tragedy is able to unfold as well as the structure of the text; for example, the harmony of the apartment and order can only be restored by her removal. The play can be examined; for example, the ways in which it can be considered a modern domestic tragedy and the audience may draw from the play: what does Blanche's story teach us about tragedy?

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Context

Tennessee Williams' Life

Thomas Lanier Williams was born in Mississippi in 1911 and his early life had a significant influence on his work throughout his writing career. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is arguably Williams' best-known play and was first performed in 1947, two years after the end of the Second World War.

Family Life

Williams' father, Cornelius Coffin Williams, was a heavy-drinking, domineering man whose bad temper and womanising made him difficult to live with. In contrast, Edwina Dakin, Williams' mother, was the genteel daughter of a church minister who felt she had married beneath her. The family moved many times and as a result, Williams' childhood was quite unstable. Echoes of his parents' conflicting natures can be seen in the coarseness of Stanley Kowalski and the desperate attempts to hold on to Southern gentility we see in Blanche DuBois.

The playwright took the name Tennessee in 1938, comparing life as a writer with Native Americans to wrest control of the state. Williams was making a statement: 'We are in a constant battle against uncivilised forces and later stated the play is about the sensitive, the delicate, by the savage and brutal forces of modern society'.¹ As Williams' interactions with Stanley and Mitch in the play illustrate this.

Williams' Mother

The themes of madness and loss are prevalent in the play, both on a personal level and a metaphorical level as the play explores the changes in American society during the 1930s. Blanche's clothes, her mannerisms and her language hark back to a bygone era and are a reflection of Williams' own mother, who was traumatised by being forced to live in poverty. Williams described his mother as losing 'belief in everything but loss' and Blanche's irrationality and her incarceration in the asylum are also echoes of events in Edwina's life. Blanche continually revisits her past, so does Williams in his writing.

Williams' Father

Elements of Cornelius Coffin Williams are evident in the presentation of Stanley Kowalski: his language and behaviour; his predatory sexuality; his ingrained misogyny; his desire for power; his fuelled rages – these behaviours, so at odds with the stereotype of the Southern gentleman (embodied by the near-mythical Shep Huntleigh), were drawn from Williams' memories of his father.

Furthermore, references to 'Allan Grey', Blanche's former husband, can also be seen in Williams' own life. In the play, Blanche's world irrevocably changes when she confronts Stanley with the words 'You disgust me' after finding him in bed with another man. Williams' homosexuality was a further source of friction with his father, who referred to him as a 'freak'. Some audiences have interpreted Stanley as simultaneously sexually desirable and repulsive, a reflection of Williams' troubled sexuality. Williams lived during an era when homosexuality was illegal and implied the character of Allan Grey married Blanche in an attempt to 'cure' him.

Williams' Sister

The mental fragility of both Williams' sister Rose and his mother Edwina can be seen in the play. Williams was very close to his sister and suffered greatly when she was institutionalised (her brain removed) as a treatment for mental illness. Some audiences may see Stanley's descent to the asylum as reflecting Williams' compliance with his own sister's incarceration. Williams suffered from severe depression and alcohol problems himself before dying in 1969.

¹ Tennessee Williams: Memoirs (Bantam Press, 1976)















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Plot Summary

Character List

-  **Blanche DuBois**
-  **Stanley Kowalski**
-  **Stella Kowalski (nee DuBois)**
-  **Harold Mitchell (Mitch)**
-  **Eunice Hubbell**
-  **Steve Hubbell**
-  **Pablo Gonzales**
-  **A Young Man**
-  **A Doctor**
-  **A Nurse**
-  **A Mexican Woman**
-  **A Man**
-  **A Sailor**
-  **A Negro Woman**

The action of the play takes place over a period of a few days, beginning with the arrival of Blanche DuBois in New Orleans in May and ending with her removal from the city. Stella Kowalski has married beneath her rank, and the tension between her sister and husband's attitudes is a major theme of the play. Stella and Blanche own a large plantation property named Belle Reve (which means 'Beautiful View' in French). Kowalski, however, is a second-generation immigrant and the 'breeding' or gentlemanly values the plantation represents.

At the beginning of the play, Blanche arrives in New Orleans with the Kowalskis. Her reasons for leaving her home in Mississippi are shrouded in secrecy, but she has lost Belle Reve because of her failed repayments on the mortgage. Stanley and Stella's sister and says they need money because of her debts.

Stanley's friends arrive for a poker party. Stanley drinks too much and becomes violent, hitting his pregnant wife and the women flee upstairs to Steve and Eunice's apartment. When Stanley sobers up, he is repentant and Stella returns to spend the night with him. Blanche, Stanley's sister, Harold Mitchell, or 'Mitch', who seems more refined than the others. The next morning, after a poker night, Stanley is insulted when he overhears Blanche refer to him as an 'ape'.

Meanwhile, Stanley has been making enquiries about Blanche. He has learnt Blanche's reason for her absence from her teaching job; she had a liaison with a 17-year-old pupil and was forced to leave. To pay the payments on Belle Reve, she moved in to a hotel called the Flamingo and there is a lot of partying and men for money. Eventually, her actions led to her being asked to leave the hotel as it was too noisy. She came to New Orleans. Stanley reveals this information on 15th September, Blanche's arrival in New Orleans takes place on this night.

There is a dramatic confrontation when Stanley gives Blanche a bus ticket back to her hometown of Kentucky, which culminates in Stella going into labour. With Stanley and Stella at the hospital, Mitch arrives, drunk and unkempt. Blanche is relieved to see him but she soon realises that he is not who she thought he was, which she refuses. When she asks if he still wants to marry her, he tells her she is a liar and she screams and Mitch leaves. Stanley returns and, finding Blanche alone in the apartment, decides to avenge himself on Blanche by raping her.

The play resumes several weeks later and we learn that Blanche has suffered a mental breakdown and she has spoken out about Stanley but not been believed. Stanley has used Blanche's mental instability and has had her committed to an asylum. The play ends with the revelation that Blanche has died, symbolising the way Stanley has gambled on Blanche not being believed. He has won the bet, but at a terrible cost, as he has raped her and had her removed permanently from his house. In the Darwinian battle of survival, Stanley the 'brute', representing humanity's animalistic savagery, has 'won'.

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Critical Reception

A Streetcar Named Desire opened on Broadway in 1947 and was a much-anticipated success, replacing *Glass Menagerie* which had first been performed three years earlier to great critical acclaim.

Early Reception

Post-war America was in love with 'the movies' and the cinematic additions of music and film to theatre were popular with theatregoers at the time. The success of the film *Gone with the Wind* in 1939 had shown the cinematic exploration of the decline of the Old South from a woman's perspective.

Early reviews were overwhelmingly favourable and the play went on to receive three prestigious awards: The New York Dramatics Critics' Circle, the Pulitzer and the Donaldson. Brooke Atkinson, writing in the influential *New York Times*, described it as 'superb' and 'perceptive'. Theodore Parker, writing in the *Hartford Courant*, described it as 'a bizarrely brilliant tragedy'. Elinor Hughes praised the play for its 'always believable and nakedly honest story'.

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However, the play was not without its detractors. The combination of a promiscuous, lower-class man was shocking to some theatregoers. Elliott Norton, writing in the *Boston Herald*, had been blamed for sordidness, a charge I think is justified'. Following the play's English tour, a British critic, called it 'squalid'.² The shocking subject matter meant the play was not given a performance licence in England. Furthermore, the Hollywood movie version was not shown to conservative cinema audiences.

Later Reception

Moral codes have changed over the years and modern interpretations perhaps focus on the play, such as references to homosexuality and misogyny. Professor of American Studies at the University of York has stated the play can be considered a feminist play as it is preoccupied with 'gender roles society enforces'. He also believed the play 'functions as a denunciation of the presentation of Allan Grey's suicide'.³

The play's enduring popularity is evident in the Young Vic's sell-out performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 2014. Susannah Anderson Best Actress at the *London Evening Standard* theatre awards. Susannah Anderson said 'There is no mistaking Williams's identification with his heroine. Yet there is no denying the dramatist's bedazzlement by the brutal Stanley Kowalski'.⁴ And in *The Guardian*, she asserted 'Anderson devastatingly captures a woman whose options are running out to the end of her rope. Suddenly her lies and fantasies of a better life seem almost almost too painful to watch'.⁵

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² www.journals.ku.edu/index.php/jdtd/article/download/1818/1781

³ www.cercles.com/n10/guilbert.pdf

⁴ www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/aug/03/gillian-anderson-compelling-streetcar-named-desire

⁵ www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/10996713/A-Streetcar-Named-Desire

Detailed Scene Analysis

Scene 1 Summary

Scene 1 opens with a lively evening on the streets of New Orleans. Stanley Kowalski is on his way to a bowling game with his friend, Harold Mitchell (Mitch) and as they pass by the Kowalskis' apartment, his wife, Stella, asks if she can join them.

Key Events
Characters
Stanley Kowalski
Stella, Mitch

Immediately afterwards Blanche Dubois, Stella's sister, arrives. She seems uncertain but soon returns and the sisters are happy to see each other. Blanche shows evident distress, which is the reason she has been given a leave of absence from her teaching position. She reveals that their childhood home, Belle Reve, has been repossessed by the bank. This exchange ends in a bathroom in tears.

While she is out of the room, Stanley returns and he and Blanche meet for the first time. During the ensuing dialogue we learn that Blanche is from a town called Laurel, that she was an English teacher, and that she is a widow.

Detailed Scene Analysis

The play opens with a lengthy set description. Remember, a play script is an instruction manual for the actors and director detailing the way in which the play should be staged. There are references to 'the warm breath of the river' and 'redolences of bananas' that the audience will be unaware of.

The sound of the 'blue piano' represents Stanley; it is full of energy but unrefined and comes from the street. (Compare with the formal Varsouviana we associate with Blanche later.)

The area is 'poor' with a 'raffish charm', again symbolising Stanley's earthy charms. The sky that heralds Blanche's arrival is a 'tender blue' and has a 'kind of lyricism', a metaphor for Blanche herself. Throughout the play, Blanche is associated with pastel colours and her arrival under this 'almost turquoise' sky conveys a softer, almost wistful, tone that is in complete contrast with the vulgarity of the opening dialogue.

None of the main characters is present in the opening exchanges. Instead, we see Eunice (the Kowalski's neighbour) and an unnamed 'Negro woman'. This woman opens the play midway through a sentence, immediately plunging the audience into the scene and emphasising the fact that Blanche's arrival is a disruption.

At first, the dialogue may seem unrelated to the conflict between Stanley and Blanche. However, as the play progresses, it reveals Tennessee Williams has introduced the play's key themes and motifs in the opening. The reference to 'tapping' on the shutters suggests Stanley is trying to get the attention of passing men. The Negro woman is referring to vengeance, and there is perhaps a hint that alcohol leads to death in the line 'you won't go out on

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Look carefully at the opening dialogue between these minor characters and complete the table below to reveal how Tennessee Williams introduces some of the play's key themes and motifs here:

Theme	Quote
Alcohol	
Death	
Food	
Gambling	
Money	
Revenge	
Sex	

Stanley and Mitch are returning from work and going straight to a bowling game. Stanley has visited the butcher and throws a 'red-stained package' at Stella.

The use of the prop 'a red-stained package from a butcher's' is a visual clue to imply Stanley's status as the traditional provider. The package has connotations of the hunt with his kill. Throwing the package to Stella mimics the hunter throwing the kill into a cave for the woman to cook. In this way, Stanley's machismo and Stella's subservience are established from the opening scene.

Stanley's exchanges are mainly monosyllabic (single word responses) 'meat!' 'Ca' responses suggest the rudimentary communication of Stone Age man. Stanley's delivered in a 'bellowing' tone and prepares us for the clashes with the refined B

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Blanche's Arrival (pp. 3–6)

Although Blanche is the protagonist, she is the last of the main characters to arrive onstage, perhaps reinforcing the idea that she does not belong here as the others do, and is 'only passing through'. Williams is also preparing us for the disruption Blanche will cause by presenting the 'normal' world Stella and Stanley inhabit before the 'incongruous' Blanche arrives to disturb the harmony.

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Contrast between Blanche and Stanley

Williams' staging of Blanche's arrival contrasts with Stanley's. The differences in character are significant differences between the two characters. Blanche is 'daintily' dressed while Stanley is 'rough'.

The juxtaposition of Stanley and Blanche's arrival onstage is a deliberate staging of conflict for the conflict that will follow. Williams uses bloodstained meat as a metaphor for Blanche. Blanche has a delicacy and uncertainty that 'suggest a moth'. Moths are nocturnal creatures that live in the dark. Blanche later describes how her love for her husband was like a spotlight in the darkness and only small flashes of light. Williams also describes how Blanche has avoided strong light.

Blanche seems out of place in the rough streets near her sister's home and her realization that her sister lives there is significant. On one level, she is surprised to find her sister here, but her own aspirations must be adjusted in line with her sister's. This places Blanche in a difficult position. The solutions Blanche is looking for to fix her life and the audience is prepared for the uncomfortable moments onstage.

Focus On: *Colour Imagery*

Blanche first appears on stage dressed entirely in white and this can be seen as a number of readings. The colour has connotations of purity, innocence and also wealth as they were hard to keep clean, unless you had servants.

When Blanche is attacked by Stanley in Scene 10, she is wearing a white gown that is 'crumpled', perhaps indicating how her chance at a new life has been stained by her past.

Blanche's character has an internal conflict and is driven by a desire for sex, in the same way as Stanley is. However, as a woman in mid-century small-town America, she is unfeminine and undesirable. Our first view of her, therefore, can be seen as the project: the innocent, pure version of herself she later presents to Mitch, and which she has lost if her husband had not betrayed her.

The 'scarlet wrapper' she wears later provides us with a contrast to the 'white' of the red silk pyjamas, symbolises sexuality and desire. Both are examples of nightgowns.

However, whereas Stanley and the men wear gaudy colours throughout the play, Blanche wears one bright garment. It can be said that Blanche's clothes represent the contrast between the mental and the physical sides to her character.

Significantly, the name 'Blanche' means 'white' in French and can be interpreted as pure. Blanche is essentially pure, but has been 'dirtied' by the world around her.

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Blanche and Eunice Talk pp. 4–6

Tennessee Williams uses dialogue between these two characters to reveal more about Blanche. Blanche's monosyllabic responses indicate she is reluctant to talk and wants Eunice to follow her. Stage directions and dialogue with Stella indicate why: Blanche has a difficult time coping with life without a drink.

Alcohol as a motif

The motif of alcohol is used throughout the play and is a method Blanche uses to cope with her life. We see from the way she tosses the whiskey down and then hides the evidence of her drinking that she has a complicated relationship with alcohol. She needs it, but feels she must hide the evidence. The stage directions concerning the drink immediately alert the audience to the fact that, to drinking liquor, she 'tosses' it down. Like sex, alcohol is an escape for Blanche and leads to her downfall. In 1940s America, it was acceptable for men to drink to excess, but not for women.

Class division

Furthermore, her interactions with Eunice reveal more about social class divisions in America. Blanche automatically speaks to Eunice as though she is of a lower status than her and is dismissive of Eunice's kindness. This foreshadows her superior attitude towards Stanley. She looks down on him while simultaneously being dependent, a behaviour which enrages the dominant Stanley.

Stella Returns pp. 6–12

The sisters are reunited and we see them together for the first time. They are obviously different. Blanche is 'above five years older' than her sister and this is clear in the way they interact. Blanche uses infantilising terms of address such as 'baby', 'child' and 'lamb'.

Blanche and Stella's relationship

There are also numerous imperatives in Blanche's dialogue; for example, she tells Stella 'let me look at you', 'don't look at me', 'turn that off', 'come back here now', again underlining that although she is a guest in Stella's house, Blanche considers herself to be in charge. Blanche also manages to insult Stella's home by asking 'What are you doing in a place like this?' Details such as 'lino' covering the table imply a working-class environment that is very different from the implied gentility of Belle Reve.

Stella appears to submit to Blanche and slip straight in to the role of little sister rather than married woman in her own home. However, the stage directions suggest Stella is merely humouring her sister. The stage directions state Stella responds 'dutifully' to Blanche's comments about her own appearance and there is an implication this is a well-worn pattern: Blanche has always been vain and needy; Stella has always 'dutifully' said the right words. The sisters' dialogue here is being used to convey to the audience more about their individual personalities as well as their relationship.

As the play progresses, we see Stella caught in the middle of the conflict between Stanley and Blanche and here this is implied. Stella feels loyalty towards her sister and their old way of life, but is also loyal to her husband and her new life in New Orleans. By the end of the play, she will be forced to make the choice between 'the place with the white columns' of her childhood or 'the coloured lights' Stanley offers.

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Blanche's current situation

We also learn more about Blanche in these exchanges. Her vanity is foregrounded and the motif of the light is introduced. Interestingly, Blanche also tells her sister 'drunkard' and asks 'you thought I'd been fired?'. Both points are, in fact, true. Blanche has been given a leave of absence from the school because she is suffering with nerves; this is a hint that she is not well.

The playwright also hints that Blanche is looking for a man in the line about Stanley. Unable to work, Blanche's only hope is to find a man to support her. This explains her looks and why she fears growing older as she believes her chances of finding a husband are diminishing with years. This also prepares the audience for her romance with Mitch.

Stanley and Stella's relationship

The prop of the photo is used as a kind of visual shorthand to convey to the audience that Stanley is in a uniform when he and Stella met, and Blanche implies Stella fell for the uniform, not the man.

When we first see Stanley, he is wearing denim, the fabric of the working classes, which can mask class differences. Stella says she had to 'adjust' to Stanley's way of life. The contrast between Stanley's army uniform and civilian clothing reinforces this.

We also see clearly that Stella is passionately in love with her husband. In her desire to stay without him the audience also sees the seeds of conflict between the sisters and Stanley. Stella is a piggy in the middle between Blanche and Stanley. We are also prepared for the ease with which she will stay loyal to Stanley rather than her sister.

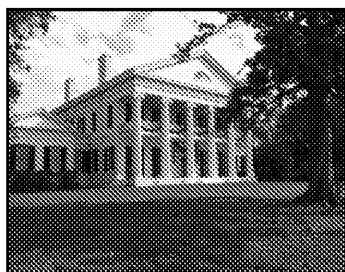
What has happened to Belle Reve? (pp. 13–15)

Blanche has been building up to this confession since her arrival. Belle Reve is a symbol of the DuBois family's status and pedigree. Without it, Blanche feels unprotected and exposed in the world.

The house with the 'white columns' goes back generations. It is a plantation house and presumably the DuBois family made their money using slaves. It is, therefore, ironic that Blanche should end up living in a neighbourhood where there is an 'easy intermingling of the races'. It is also a huge blow to her pride to find herself dependent on the charity of her brother-in-law, whom she considers beneath her socially. Blanche and Stella both display elements of snobbery in their discussion of Polish and Irish settlers in America.

Blanche as a tragic figure

Blanche can be interpreted as a tragic heroine. A convention of classical tragedy is the male hero is of noble birth. Her genteel upbringing, coupled with her French name, sets Blanche up as 'noble' by reinforcing she is from a more aristocratic background. In a domestic tragedy focuses on the plight of the 'common man' and can have a male hero. In this case, the setting is an ordinary home.



Death at Belle Reve

Blanche's nerves are at breaking point here. Her claim that Belle Reve is more than just a place to live; it is part of her identity. This is reinforced when Stella asks her about it.

In her monologue, the audience sees her hysteria, and we are given an idea of how difficult the last ten years must have been for Blanche. She has been left to cope alone since

their father died and Stella left. Caring for aged relatives and paying death duties have taken their toll on her and the guilt she feels at losing Belle Reve is evident. Life and death can be seen as echoes of her husband's death and we are given our first key role in shaping the adult Blanche.

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Blanche's line 'Funerals are pretty compared to deaths... pretty flowers... gorgeous' is a number of metaphors in the play that imply hidden truths. Blanche conceals the expulsion from Laurel; Blanche allows Mitch to see a prim and proper 'illusion' rather than the truth about the rape, and the light is covered with 'a paper lantern' so that it can be made prettier. This conflict between illusion and reality is central to the drama.

Blanche's language here is lyrical, despite her obvious distress. Blanche's idiolect is in keeping with her former career as an English teacher and the frequent use of metaphors creates a sense of breathless release, as though Blanche has been storing this tirade up for some time.

Her purpose here is to assuage her sense of guilt by justifying why Belle Reve was lost, while simultaneously shifting some of the blame on to Stella. The use of vulgar lexis 'In bed with your Polack!' at the end of the speech is designed to wound Stella while reinforcing Blanche's social prejudices. The irony is, of course, it is Blanche's sexual misdeeds that have contributed to the loss of Belle Reve.

Active Learning Task

What does the audience learn about the district in which Stanley and Stella live? What early assumptions do we make about Blanche's stay here? How does this change with our first ideas about Belle Reve?

Focus On: *Setting*

All eleven scenes of the play take place in and just outside the rented 'two room flat' in Elysian Fields. This is in the 'Vieux Carre' or the old part of New Orleans (initially referred to as 'the Quarter').

The strategic placing of Elysian Fields between the 'new' fast railway and the connotations of paddle steamers and slow transportation, symbolises the conflict between outdated and decaying memories of the 'Old South' and Stanley's modern, industrial world. In this, Williams is using setting to present a key theme: that of the conflict between the old and the new. The image of the locomotive powering down the tracks conveys physicality and power associated with Stanley. The audience soon understands that gentle, literature-like language is unable to stand up to this relentless, driving force.

The area is poor, but there is less racial segregation than in other parts of America. Slavery was abolished in 1864 in Louisiana but even before then, there were many 'free blacks' in the city. Mississippi, Blanche and Stella's home state, had much tighter laws governing race. Mississippi was a cotton-farming state and it can be assumed the DuBois family were slaves. Therefore, it is almost certain slaves worked on the plantation at Belle Reve. Blanche is superior to people who are not from this privileged world.

Scene 1 Quick Quiz

1. In which American city is the play set?
2. What is Stanley and Stella Kowalski's address?
3. What is the name of the DuBois sisters' ancestral home?
4. In which American state did Stella and Blanche grow up?
5. Stanley's family is originally from which European country?

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Focus On: *Symbolic Place Names*

Blanche's journey has involved catching a streetcar with the destination Deshaus named Cemeteries. These are both genuine places in New Orleans, but Williams has a symbolic purpose here, linking sex and desire and death. Remember, 'death' is not always as a literal end to life, it can be the death of an aspect of life, such as hope, sanity or freedom.

Blanche's final destination is her sister's home, 632 Elysian Fields. This is again from Greek mythology, Elysian Fields is where heroes went after death. It signifies the final stage of life – the 'death' of her sanity and freedom and exile to the asylum. This association implies Williams sympathises with Blanche, perhaps in her heroic journey.

The girls' childhood home, Belle Reve, has an equally symbolic name: it means 'Beautiful View' in French, again a reference to the girls' alleged aristocratic antecedents. It also signifies the 'death' of the old ways of the South. The loss of the plantation house signifies that the old ways have no place in modern America. Heritage and pedigree hold little sway in New Orleans. Even Stanley, the son of Polish immigrants, is a 'king' in his own home. The girls' Southern past; the heyday of Blanche's genteel youth are long gone. Heritage has left but that is a currency with no value in the Quarter.

Extended Essay Task

Look closely at Blanche's impassioned speech about the loss of Belle Reve. What does Williams' use of language and staging reveals Blanche's state of mind here. You should consider:

- use of monologue
- repetition
- simile
- metaphor
- personification
- adjectives
- imperatives
- rhetorical questions
- vulgar lexis

Tip: use the tips to structure your answer:

- ✓ Make your point
- ✓ Provide evidence
- ✓ Analyse the effect

Check the Glossary for any unfamiliar terms.

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Scene 2 Summary

It is the evening after Blanche's arrival and she is offstage, having the first of many baths. Stella is telling Stanley she and her sister are going out. The men are due to arrive for the poker party. Stella tells Stanley about the loss of Belle Reve and he immediately assumes Blanche has cheated her sister, and, therefore, himself, out of their rightful inheritance. He goes into Blanche's trunks to look for expensive items. Stella and Stanley argue, Stella goes

Key Events
Belle Reve
Character

Stanley and Blanche are left alone. Blanche is unaware of Stanley's anger and begs him to see papers pertaining to the sale of the house. He snatches up some of Blanche's distress. These were love letters from her husband. Stanley begins to feel for Blanche that Stella is pregnant.

Detailed Scene Analysis

Stanley and Stella Talk about Belle Reve (pp. 19–23)

We briefly met Stanley in the previous scene and now we learn more about him. In particular, the stage is being set for future conflict with Blanche.

Bathing as a motif

The motif of bathing is introduced here. Blanche takes hot baths for her nerves, as a form of hydrotherapy. Finding her sister living in such a small apartment, along with the stress of having to discuss the loss of Belle Reve, has exacerbated Blanche's nervous state.

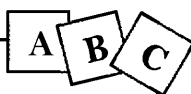
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However, Blanche's fondness for hot baths is a source of increasing tension as the inconveniences others by occupying the sole bathroom for lengthy periods and, in summer, the steam generates unwelcome heat in the apartment.

Blanche's baths are also symbolic as they represent cleansing the blood of her husband as well as washing away the 'sin' of her promiscuity.

Dramatic irony:

When the audience knows information a character on stage does not



On a practical level, the playwright uses this technique throughout the play as a way to create dramatic irony when the audience has information she is not a party to.

The seeds of conflict are sown

In this scene, we have early indications that Stanley resents not being the focus of attention. He is not happy he is not to have a proper dinner and the audience senses him bristling at Stella's behavior with Blanche. We realise that part of the issue he will have with Blanche is her relationship with his wife, even with her sister. Furthermore, Blanche's snobbery is a sharp reminder of what Stanley has had to overlook in order to marry Stanley. Perhaps Stanley is afraid his wife's sister will overshadow Blanche's genteel presence.

Stanley becomes increasingly agitated as he realises Belle Reve has been lost. It becomes clear that this is not solely about the financial aspect of the inheritance, but the idea that he has been cheated. Williams' characterisation here makes us aware that pride is an essential part of Stanley's make-up. He cannot bear to feel he has been outwitted in any way. This further prepares the ground for his difficult relationship with Blanche.

Stanley
becomes

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Stanley's anger grows in this scene. We see him using legalistic terms in a bid to discuss topics he knows little of. His inability to recognise that the items in Blanche's trunk betrays his lack of education; for example, in the way he cannot differentiate between jewellery. In this way, Williams is perhaps encouraging us to question Stanley's judgement. His perception of events is perhaps not always to be trusted.

The theme of class underpins the play and emphasises the divisions between the families and it is at the heart of the conflict at 632 Elysian Fields. The seeds of this conflict are sown from the start as Blanche is infuriated by the way the more educated Blanche looks down on him. Blanche's superior intellect and manners while living off his charity and this is made clear the following day when she refers to him as an 'ape'.

He becomes angry when his wife sides with her sister as he recognises the comfortable life he has made for himself is threatened by the arrival of this intruder. Later, she also threatens to 'steal' his friend, Mitch.

The stage directions in this exchange with Stella are highly significant in what they reveal about Stanley. Williams uses a series of dynamic verbs to convey the aggression Stanley uses towards Blanche's possessions. The way he rips through her clothes in her trunk can be seen to foreshadow his attack on her at the end of the play and also implies that Stanley uses force because he is unable to articulate his thoughts: he cannot compete with the DuBois sisters on an intellectual level, so to be dominant, he uses his superior physical strength.

As the play progresses, we see Stella increasingly caught in a conflict of loyalties between her old life in Mississippi and her new life in Louisiana. She frequently has to act as the middle ground between her husband and her sister and the audience is prepared for this in this scene. The motives for conflict are presented to the audience at a very early stage. We are led to believe the play will become a battle for supremacy between Stanley and Blanche.

Debate Gender

In 1947, the play was seen as coming from behind the times, rather than a play. A consideration of what the play says about women.

Why is Stella so loyal to Stanley?

Active Learning Task

Look at the stage directions Williams uses for Stanley between pages 20 and 21. What do we learn about the character from this? Make notes.

Stella Goes Outside and Blanche and Stanley Talk (pp. 23–30)

Costume

Stella is angry with her husband and has gone outside when Blanche emerges from a red satin dressing gown. This contrasts with her earlier appearance when she is in a white dress. White traditionally symbolises purity and red sexuality. This can be seen as symbolic for Blanche: she is an innocent victim and a woman ruled by desire. This echoes the way Stanley is seen on his wedding night and that he wears again when he attacks Blanche in Scene 3.

Gender roles

Blanche lives in a patriarchal society where single women have limited options for survival. Without a husband, a job or Belle Reve to protect her, she only has her looks and her youth, which are fading. In a poignant stage direction, Williams has Blanche put on glasses when she gives them to Stanley; perhaps she is too vain to wear them all the time. The fact that she is trying to forget and the glasses are a reminder of ageing.

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Blanche uses her sexuality as a way of asserting power over men and we see this interaction with Stanley, spraying him with perfume and asking him to fasten her dress. We see Blanche use cigarettes as a way of getting men to move physically closer to her. When Blanche asks if she can share Stanley's cigarettes. Asking him to fasten her dress is an act. Giving him 'permission' to touch her clothing here foreshadows the access he has to her in Scene 10 when he rapes her.

Stanley is taken aback by her flirtatious behaviour, commenting it is not how he would behave. The subtext is her behaviour is like that of a prostitute, an idea that is reinforced throughout the play.

Blanche's past

We see Blanche's vulnerability when Stanley touches the letters her dead husband wrote and her flirtation abruptly changes to distress. The letters are clearly very precious to her as a memento of happier times. Later in the play, the audience learns that the circumstances in which she was widowed had a profound impact on Blanche and shaped the course of her life.

The 'poetry' here is in marked contrast to her relationship with Mitch, which manifests itself in prosaic details and a mutual desire to escape the crushing loneliness of their everyday lives.

Blanche explains to Stanley (and by extension, the audience) that Belle Reve had been mortgaged and parcels of land sold. We see how she blames the generations of male ancestors who used Belle Reve to fund their immoral lifestyles. Although these 'epic fornications' are not specified, this could be a reference to her father's prostitutes, mistresses, drinking and gambling. However, it can also be argued that her own 'epic fornications' have contributed to the loss of the estate.

Blanche's final line is taken from the Bible: 'If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall'. It is a joke about asking Stella for directions, but the sense that disaster will cause a fall is implying that both sisters are 'blind' to the true extent of Stanley's desire to dominate her. Her refusal to believe Blanche's version of events at the end of the play.

Debate Prompt *Allan Grey*

Although we do not see her husband until late in the play, references him to her. Firstly, we have her married once, we have her tune concluding the letters the 'dead' prop physically on stage. Writers of or significant of

Why do you think this event in Blanche's life is significant?

Quick Quiz Scene 2

1. What bad news does Stella tell Stanley?
2. What does the 'Napoleonic Code' state?
3. What does Blanche describe as her 'passion'?
4. What does Blanche keep wrapped in a ribbon?
5. How is Stella's life about to change?

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Extended Essay Question

Look at the table below containing some of the key characteristics of Blanche and Stanley's idiolects. With close reference to the text, write about the ways Williams crafts Blanche and Stanley's speech to highlight similarities and differences between them.

Idiolect

The way a particular individual uses vocabulary, grammatical use

Influences include parents, geographical location and time

In your response, you may wish to consider:

- Education
- Social background
- Career
- Attitudes and values
- Gender

Significant Features of Stanley's idiolect	Significant Features of Blanche's idiolect
Slang	Elevated lexis
Vulgar lexis	Figurative language
Non-standard grammar	Euphemisms
Figurative language	Imperatives
Imperatives	Literary allusions

Focus On: *Language*

The way the characters speak in the play is as important as the words they say. Williams' characterisation is conveying class differences through the linguistic choices the characters make. Blanche and Stanley's idiolects are markedly different in the contrasting attitudes and values.

Scene 3 Summary

Stella and Blanche have been out and when they return, the poker party is in full swing. They sit in the bedroom and Mitch and Blanche meet when he goes to use the bathroom.

Key Event: The poker party
Characters: Steve, Mitch, Blanche, Stella, Eunice

They talk and listen to music. This enrages Stanley, who is drunk and losing the game of the window. In the ensuing confusion, he hits Stella and she and her sister flee. Stella goes outside and shouts to Stella, who is persuaded to come back home.

Detailed Scene Analysis

The Men are Playing Poker (pp. 31–32)

This scene reinforces Stanley's dominance over those around him and his need to be in control. The poker game is not going his way and the combination of alcohol and losing at cards is making him angry. He does not want the card game to end before he has the chance to recoup his losses. He is irritated with Mitch for not participating as it lessens his chances of winning back the money.

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Money is a particularly sore point for Stanley as the audience is aware he has just learned his wife's inheritance has gone.

Masculinity

Stanley is particularly disparaging towards Mitch, mocking him for saying he has to look after Mitch's mother, we learn, is sick and not expected to live long. We learn here that Stanley's friends, foreshadowing his later mistreatment of Mitch when he callously destroys Mitch's business in order to avenge himself on Blanche. He implies Mitch is emasculated by being a womanizer.

This poker party is very different from the kind of gentlemanly get-togethers Blanche and Stella represent. Stella tries to maintain a note of gentility by introducing the men by their names, but the mood and rudeness keep the tone low. Stanley, again perhaps lacking the ability to control the situation verbally, smacks Stella on the leg. In this way, he is asserting physical dominance over everyone else; he is the boss.

This reminds us that when Stanley finds himself in situations he cannot control, he reasserts himself as the dominant male.

Gambling as a motif

Gambling is a motif used throughout the play to represent Stanley's belief in himself. The jubilant Stanley is playing poker with his friends in a parallel to this scene. Stanley is a gambler and is, therefore, infuriated when he loses.

Active Learning Task

Look at the opening stage directions, in particular the many references to colour. Tennessee Williams references a picture by the artist Van Gogh. What do the descriptions of colour add to our understanding of both the men and the women in the play?

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Blanche and Mitch Meet (pp. 33–40)

There is perhaps a bitter humour in the use of setting here. The way Blanche and Mitch's first meeting occurs with him walking out of the bathroom is very different from the romantic encounters with the likes of Shep Huntleigh that Blanche must have dreamed of as a girl.

She immediately senses Mitch is more sensitive than the other men and her first question to Stella is about his marital status, foregrounding that finding a man is Blanche's priority.

Blanche and Stella's discussion of the men and their wives betrays their snobbery, and their criticism of Eunice is particularly grating as they rely on her help later.

Use of props and costume

Props and costume help to move the plot on and tell us more about the characters here. Stanley's bad mood is continuing and there is a confrontation between him and Blanche when he switches the radio off. Here, the radio is used as a symbol of the power play between Stanley and Blanche and adds to the increasing tension.

The prop of the cigarette case is significant as Williams is conveying to the audience that Mitch is slightly different from the other men. Blanche is again asking a man for cigarettes and she uses the cigarette case to encourage Mitch to move physically closer. The inscription is a link and conversation starter between Blanche and Mitch as she recognises the poem.

The irony is, of course, that Mitch did not choose the inscription as the cigarette case was a gift. This is a poor echo of the poetry her husband wrote to woo her and is symbolic of the way Blanche has never been able to recapture the overwhelming love she felt for Allan Grey. The fact Blanche asks whether it is silver implies she is assessing Mitch's financial worth and weighing up his potential as a partner.

It is significant Blanche is wearing the red satin dressing gown again with all its artifice, the same robe she was wearing when she tried to flirt with Stanley.

Blanche presents herself

Blanche is slurring her words here, which indicates she has been drinking. She lies when she says she only ever has one drink. We have seen this before in her denial that her protestations actually imply the opposite: she is fully aware that she drinks too much. She presents an edited version of herself by playing up her French ancestry and claiming to be older than Stella when the truth is nearer five.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry enjoyed her native England as well as popularity from ill health for

She was the daughter of a sugar plantation owners (her father was in Jamaica) and her upbringing until the decline in her father's

The inscription on the cigarette case is from arguably her most famous Sonnet 43.

Read the full text of the poem at [zigzagged.uk/640](https://www.zigzagged.uk/640)

For more information on Elizabeth Barrett Browning, read the full text at [zigzagged.uk/640](https://www.zigzagged.uk/640)

Debate Prompt

Blanche and Mitch
What may the audience learn from Blanche and Mitch's first meeting?

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The romantic spiel about her name feels like flirtation, presenting herself as a woman of breeding and, therefore, a 'catch'. Blanche continues to be economical with the truth when she tells Mitch she has come to New Orleans to look after Stella. She also does not refer to the fact she no longer teaches. Blanche uses a number of literary allusions to impress Mitch here and build the myth of herself as a respectable widow. She also talks about love, introducing the concept from their first meeting.

Allusion

A reference within a text

The paper lantern

An important prop first appears here – the paper lantern – and it becomes a sign. She buys it to cover the naked light bulb and by asking Mitch to put it on, she is symbolising the harsh reality of her life. She wants 'magic' not the grim truth. Mitch could provide the truth of her recent past. Furthermore, the paper lampshade represents covering up a gentle glow in which Blanche's age is less apparent. It is Mitch who tears the lantern and the deceit is revealed.

Stanley Loses His Temper (pp. 40–45)

Stanley is drunk and he is angry because the poker game is not going his way. He is resentful of Blanche's presence and this is reinforced by the fact she is distracting Mitch from the game and, therefore, preventing Stanley from winning his money back. They have clashed over control of the apartment, symbolised by the radio, and as Blanche switches it back on to dance with Mitch, an enraged Stanley throws it out of the window. He then hits his pregnant wife.

Violence

Violence is a key theme in the play and it is here we first see physical violence against women. This episode can be said to foreshadow the final scene where Stanley uses force to subdue Blanche. Williams is showing the audience Stanley is capable of violence.

Stanley's friends treat him kindly, implying that violence against women, while not acceptable, is to a certain degree. This reinforces the underlying theme of gender differences: men are stronger than women financially, physically and emotionally. They put Stanley in the shower and strip him of his senses.

Eunice refers to the 'last time' Stanley was violent towards his wife, alerting the audience to the fact he is a serial domestic abuser, and the women seek refuge in the upstairs apartment. However, the newly sober Stanley wants Stella to come back and shouts from the street.

Eunice
hose of

Here, we begin to realise arguing and reconciling is part of the pattern of their marriage. Their relationship is largely based on sexual attraction and, with Blanche on the other side of the street, their marriage has been curtailed.

The stage directions at the end of this scene imply Stella and Stanley's relationship has been damaged. They have spent the night together with Blanche out of the way as Stella's 'eyes go blind'. The scene ends with Mitch and Blanche connecting over a cigarette again.

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Active Learning Task

We were introduced to some of the key themes and motifs of the play in Scene 1. Revisit the table now, adding examples from Scene 3.

Theme	Quote/Reference
Alcohol	
Death	
Gambling	
Money	
Revenge	
Sex	

Scene 3 Quick Quiz

1. How is Mitch's homelife different from the other men's?
2. Where does Mitch work?
3. Where does the inscription in the cigarette box come from?
4. What does Stanley throw out of the window?
5. What does Mitch say about poker?

Extended Essay Question

How does Tennessee Williams use language and staging techniques to present the meeting between Blanche and Mitch?

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Scene 4 Summary

Blanche returns from Eunice's to find a very contented Stella still in bed. Stanley has gone to have work done on the car. Blanche tries to persuade Stella to leave but she makes it clear she is happy to be with Stanley, despite his violence. She implies that their sexual relationship compensates for his outbursts. Unbeknown to the sisters, Stanley has returned and is standing on the porch. He overhears Blanche making highly derogatory remarks about him.

Detailed Scene Analysis

Blanche and Stella Talk (pp. 46–54)

Blanche has only been in the apartment for two days and already the tension is evident. Stella is expected to be distraught but instead finds her half asleep after a night of passion with Stanley. Stella is attracted to the animalistic side of Stanley. Stella has been reading a 'bride' magazine, a symbol of Stanley's world, where primary colours rule and ideas are simple and direct, contrasting with Blanche's literary allusions and reverence for art.

Attitudes to sex and men

In this scene, the sisters are euphemistically referring to sex and we see their contrasting attitudes towards it. Blanche refers to it as 'the devil' and 'brutal desire', implying she views love and sex as two separate experiences whereas Stella's love for Stanley is intertwined with physical attraction. Blanche thinks Stanley is fine for a casual encounter but unsuitable as a husband.

Shep Huntleigh is mentioned for the first time in this scene and although he never appears onstage, is a key figure in Blanche's mind. He represents the life she feels she should have had. Here we see Blanche's fantasy world intrude on reality: she thinks she can call Shep Huntleigh and he will give her the money to take Stella away from Stanley.

Blanche's Monologue (pp. 54–55)

This is the second lengthy and impassioned speech Blanche has made to her sister. The first was criticising her for leaving Belle Reve and this second is criticising her choice of husband. The use of dramatic irony here is key to the way Blanche and Stanley's relationship develops, or deteriorates, over the rest of the play. Stanley refers to this speech later in the play, confirming that Blanche's words have had a significant impact. The staging here is crucial: Williams makes it very clear that Stanley overhears the dialogue but the women are unaware of his presence. Coming on top of the new revelations cements Stanley's animosity towards Blanche. Remember, Williams uses Blanche's speech to raise Stanley's suspicions regarding Blanche's true nature.

In the monologue, Blanche refers to him as an animal and describes him as a cave man. She implies that Stanley's friends beneath her and her snobbery is apparent. Even though the audience may sympathise with her, they may also find her evident snobbery grating.

At the end of the monologue, Stanley makes his presence known by pretending to be asleep. Stella immediately runs to the door and embraces him 'with both arms, fiercely'. The stage direction indicates that Stella is rejecting the life she had with her sister in favour of the new life with Stanley. This indicates that Stella is choosing Stanley over Blanche and this foreshadows the choice she makes at the end of the play.

Key Events
Blanche's return
Character

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Debate Point
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Extended Essay Question

To what extent do you agree with Blanche's assessment of Stanley? Explain using close reference to this and previous scenes. Remember to use quotes from the text to support your points.

Scene 4 Quick Quiz

1. What has Stella been reading?
2. What is lying on the bathroom floor?
3. What did Stanley do to the light bulbs on his wedding night?
4. Who did Blanche bump in to in Miami?
5. What is Stanley doing as Blanche calls him an animal?

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Scene 5 Summary

Some weeks have passed since the night of the poker party. Blanche is writing a letter to Shep Huntleigh that describes her summer as she would wish it to be. This daydream is interrupted by the intrusion of reality in the form of Steve and Eunice arguing in the hallway. The tension between Blanche and Stanley is evident in their sarcastic exchanges. Stanley asks 'what's the name of that young man named Shaw?' and we immediately see a change in her. She tells Stella about the man from in Laurel and it appears her past is catching up with her. A 'young man' comes with newspapers and subscriptions and she kisses him. As he leaves, Mitch arrives.

Key Events: Stanley has some information about Blanche; the young man comes.
Characters: Stella, Blanche, Steve, Eunice, Mitch.

Detailed Scene Analysis

Stanley Hints He has Information about Blanche (pp. 56–59)

Blanche seems relaxed with her sister as they gleefully listen to Steve and Eunice argue as Blanche is writing a letter to Shep Huntleigh. Eunice is accusing Steve of visiting the prostitutes who work upstairs at The Four Deuces. The way Stella and Blanche accept the violent row as part of life in the Quarter perhaps foreshadows how no one will come to Blanche's aid when she is attacked by Stanley.

Debate
Stanley
 It is clear that Blanche is in trouble in Laurel.

What does Stanley do to her?

Blanche's lies

There is humour here, as Williams makes Blanche's letter tell a very different story from the actual events. This serves another purpose: to remind us that the truth is usually uncovered. Williams juxtaposes Blanche's evident fabrication to Shep Huntleigh with the very real threat of Stanley's investigation into her past. This prepares us for the revelation of the truth of Blanche's past: we are aware that Blanche often presents an illusion rather than reality.

Juxtapose
 Placing the two sides to the story side by side.

Steve and Eunice can be seen as illustrations of the couple Stanley and Stella will become. It is significant that they own the building and are, in effect, Stanley and Stella's landlords. Their snobbery towards them seem even more out of place. Without Belle Reve, Stella

Tensions rise

When Stanley arrives, the tension rises and the dialogue between them is filled with sarcasm and insults. Stanley makes a lot of noise and when Blanche protests, he makes even more as if to assert his right to make noise in his own home. The discussion about horoscopes has a sexual subtext. When Blanche refers to Stanley 'banging around' in the army, there is a deliberate double meaning of noise and also his preoccupation with sex. This is why she says he must be Aries, the ram. Again, she uses animal imagery to refer to Stanley which, like the overheard monologue, he finds infuriating.

Blanche's star sign is Virgo, the virgin. Stanley laughs at this and the tension rises. This is to be ironic. The stage directions following Stanley's 'do you know anybody in the Quarter?' show Blanche is rattled. This is the first time we see her past catching up with her. Stanley and Blanche says she has never stayed there. This is later revealed to be untrue.

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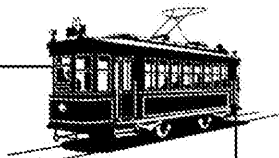
Active Learning Task

Look closely at the stage directions on page 59. What do they reveal about Blanche's state of mind at this point?

Blanche and Stella Talk (pp. 60–63)

The undercurrent of threat introduced in Steve and Eunice's comical argument is made real for Blanche here. She is terrified that events in Laurel are about to catch up with her and derail her relationship with Mitch.

Blanche reveals part of her innermost secret fear to Stella but her sister does not want to hear. Using euphemistic language, Blanche reveals that she has had sexual encounters with a number of men but she is worried because she still hasn't found anyone to protect her and her looks are fading. The line 'pay for a night's shelter' implies Blanche may have been working as a prostitute at the Flamingo Hotel.



Active Learning Task

Look closely at Blanche's monologue on pages 60 and 61. She appears to be dropping her façade here and revealing her true feelings and worries to her sister. What are Blanche's fears and why is she confiding in her sister at this point?

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The white skirt

Blanche becomes hysterical when she spills the coke on her skirt and 'gives a piece' evident here. The coke 'stains' Blanche's white skirt in the same way her reputation liaisons with men in Laurel. The stain could also be said to represent the blood of her life since the moment he shot himself.

Blanche's hysteria points to her fears that Stanley knows the truth about events in position to do Blanche harm and this can be said to foreshadow the rape scene at the play, Stanley wields complete power over Blanche and she retreats into 'hysteria'.

Blanche needs Mitch

The sisters' dialogue here reveals that Blanche and Mitch have been seeing each other for a while and that Blanche has been refusing to sleep with him as she wants 'his respect'. However, perhaps the truth is she is not sexually attracted to him. She tells Stella that Mitch represents an escape route from her current situation and a place of safety. As Mitch's wife, she would gain respect and a home.

Blanche
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Debate
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The Young Man Comes to the Door (pp. 63–66)

The young man who comes to the door is selling subscriptions to the *Evening Star*, a newspaper.

Perhaps Blanche is instantly attracted to him because youth is a quality she admires. Furthermore, she wants to relive the blissful days when she was being courted by the young man she discovered the young man she adored had married her to try to 'cure' himself of her.

She tells the bewildered young man he makes her 'mouth water', a clear sexual reference with its implication that sexual encounters with younger men reinvigorate her and so her lost youth.

She seduces him with a kiss before dismissing him by saying she has to keep her distance from the affair that cost her teaching career.

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Mitch's arrival

When Mitch arrives, she orders him to present the flowers to her as a 'Rosenkavalier'. She may be unaware this literary allusion is referencing a character from an opera. The audience may be asserting her intellectual superiority to ensure Mitch's admiration or to remind her of her culture and breeding despite her current circumstances.

However, Blanche's behaviour appears to directly contradict her previous words to Stanley about the security Mitch can offer her, but then immediately jeopardises it by kissing a stranger to arrive at any minute. Williams implies here that Blanche would not be satisfied with a safe life, questioning whether Blanche's promiscuity is so deeply ingrained that she would not be able to resist.

As a character, Blanche is a paradox: she tells Stella she wants the safety and refuge offered by Mitch and then is prepared to sabotage it for a stolen kiss with a 17-year-old. The audience is left wondering whether Blanche's downward spiral is actually a self-destructive response to the burden of guilt she has carried since her husband's death.

Page 10
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Scene 5 Quick Quiz

1. To whom is Blanche writing as the scene begins?
2. Why does Stanley find Blanche's star sign funny?
3. How does Stanley know Shaw?
4. Where does Blanche move to when she loses Belle Reve?
5. What is Mitch carrying when he arrives?

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Scene 6 Summary

Blanche and Mitch's Date (pp. 67–72)

Blanche and Mitch have returned from their date, both in low spirits. It transpires Blanche has tried to be cheerful and entertaining but been unable to. They return to the apartment and Blanche invites Mitch in for a nightcap. She tries to create a romantic scene, and how much he sweats. There is a marked contrast between the two characters as Blanche talks about Stanley's attitude towards her.

The conversation takes a serious turn when Blanche tells Mitch about the circumstances of her life. Mitch is obviously moved by this and the scene ends on a high note as Blanche and Mitch, although they may not have much in common, they could be each other's salvation.

Detailed Scene Analysis

Blanche and Mitch and the 'Artist's Café' (pp. 60–72)

The date has proved to be a fairly dismal one; perhaps because Blanche is comparing the dependable 'bear-like' simplicity of Mitch with the youthful vitality she found irresistible in the 'young man'. The stage directions imply they have been to an amusement park, a working-class location that seems at odds with Blanche's ideas of romance.

Williams' juxtaposition of the two scenes deliberately contrasts the fantasies of Blanche's youth with the reality of her position as a dependent relative, desperate for the security offered by a man she considers beneath her. Blanche's question 'is that streetcar named Desire still grinding along the tracks' has a symbolic resonance, with the innuendo of 'grinding' and use of the word 'still' perhaps underlining her lack of physical attraction to Mitch as well as reinforcing how Blanche's sexual desire has brought her to this desperate point.

Illusion and reality

They have now returned to 632 Elysian Fields and Blanche invites Mitch into the apartment as Stanley and Stella are out. Creating a make-believe artists' café in Paris, she tries to inject some glamour into their relationship.

Illusion is a fundamental part of Blanche's persona: she retreats into fantasy in order to cope with the less palatable realities of her life. This is used throughout the play to foreshadow her complete breakdown after the rape, when she retreats from reality entirely.

Her 'utter exhaustion' in this scene could be the play-acting taking its toll. She is wearing herself out trying to ensure Mitch's affections, and adopting the persona of the girl who refuses to get 'lost' in desire. Furthermore, Williams is conveying Blanche's depression as she is forced to make the best of the world she finds herself in. She is living a life that is very different from the one she envisaged as a naïve young girl growing up at Belle Reve and perhaps the stolen kiss with the 'young man' has brought that into sharp focus.

Stanley's earlier veiled threats regarding 'Shaw' may also be significant here as Blanche's fear is caused in part by fear that her past is about to catch up with her.

Sometimes the façade breaks, such as when Mitch tells her he has never known a girl who makes a direction makes it clear she laughs at the absurdity of the comment: he only knows the surface, not the true Blanche.

Key Event Characters

Debate Point
Marrying Mitch
Blanche's decision to marry Mitch is a desperate attempt to escape her current situation.

What was Blanche's motivation for marrying Mitch?

What was the outcome of their marriage?

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Williams reveals Blanche's true thoughts in the moments when she mocks Mitch she acts the part of the prim woman, who needs to keep her 'emotions' in check French if he would like to sleep with her.

In this way, she is asserting her intellectual superiority over Mitch. She needs him needs him. Later, she describes herself as having 'old-fashioned ideals' with rega stage direction has her rolling her eyes, again mocking Mitch. The phrase also ha propositioning a client, very out of keeping with the prim persona she has adopt creates bittersweet comedy.

Blanche and Mitch's relationship

Mitch and Blanche's exchanges throughout this episode highlight their fundamental incompatibility. Blanche wants to recreate the romance and beauty of Bohemian Paris. In turn, Mitch is concerned with physicality, discussing how much he sweats, his weight and his 'belly'. Blanche talks about literature in order to recapture the romance she had with her poetry-writing husband. Mitch is not from that world and so discusses what he is familiar with: the physical rather than the intellectual.

By juxtaposing the two, Williams is preparing the audience for the ultimate failure of Blanche and Mitch's relationship. Unlike Stella, who has compromised the expectations of her upbringing (symbolised by the comic she is reading in bed in Scene 4), Blanche is unable to let go of the past, even though she tries.

Blanche and Mitch Discuss Stanley (pp. 72–74)

The conversation turns to the difficulties of Blanche's present situation. Remember, time has elapsed between Scenes 4 and 5, during which Blanche and Mitch's relationship has been developing offstage.

Scenes 5 and 6 take place on the same evening and Williams uses the dialogue to inform the audience how Blanche and Stanley's relationship has deteriorated.

At this point, Blanche is feeling particularly threatened by Stanley's insinuation that he has uncovered information about her life in Laurel. She twists the truth to present Stanley in an even worse light by implying she is in New Orleans primarily to help Stella with the baby.

Blanche's thoughts on Stanley

It is significant that Blanche speaks half to herself about Stanley 'perhaps in some perverse kind of way he...' before leaving the thought incomplete. The audience may assume she is wondering whether Stanley's behaviour derives from sexual motives. Do his actions of failing to close the bathroom door and walking around in his underwear have a more sinister purpose than simply trying to irritate her?

Blanche's unfinished sentence and shudder of revulsion unwittingly presage the c also makes the audience aware that, despite her earlier flirtatious behaviour, Bla Stanley. Williams implies here she is no longer the naïve 16-year-old who failed to sexuality, but a mature and experienced woman who is able to interpret men's ac

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The Truth about Allan Grey (pp. 74–77)

The revelations contained in this dialogue are crucial in understanding what shapes Blanche as a character. Blanche and Mitch finally share some common ground: they both know how it feels to be lonely.

Blanche's monologue here details the fate of her husband. The language is fairly euphemistic as any public discussion of homosexuality would have been frowned upon in America in 1947. It would have been impossible for Williams to stage a play that presented homosexuality sympathetically at this time. However, we are able to piece together what happened: Blanche fell completely in love at 16 with a young man. They eloped and married but Williams hints that the marriage was unconsummated.

It is implied that Allan married Blanche in the hope sex with a woman would 'cure' him of his homosexuality. Unaware of this, Blanche felt she'd failed her husband in some way, but was too naïve to understand how.

This incident in Blanche's teenage years had a profound impact on her and modern audiences may see her nervous disposition as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition that had yet to be identified in Williams' day. The episode also links sex and violence in the audience's mind, a connection that will be significant later in the play.

By the end of the scene, Mitch and Blanche seem to have reached an understanding that perhaps their relationship could end in the everyday stable union Blanche simultaneously despises and craves.

Structure

Blanche tells Mitch about Allan Grey in Scene 6, at a point which is almost exactly the structural centre of the play. Furthermore, if Blanche was 16 when she fell in love and is now in her early thirties, we can deduce that Allan's death came midway through her life so far.

In this way, Williams reinforces for the audience the significance of this episode. It is the climactic moment of Blanche's life. It changed her fundamentally as a person and the ramifications of that moment have impacted on every aspect of her life.



Focus On: *Light Imagery*

Light and dark imagery is significant in this scene. The setting is two o'clock darkness reflects Blanche's current hopeless situation. She desperately wants lights a candle. The dim candlelight is romantic, but can also be seen as representation of happiness Mitch can offer. This is made clear when she talks about describing it as 'a blinding light on something that had always been in shadow' out the light and Blanche says nothing since has shone brighter than 'this kite

The light imagery symbolises the impact her marriage has had on her. Remember the metaphor of a moth to describe Blanche when she first arrives at 632 Elysian Fields, attracted to light in the same way Blanche is endlessly doomed to seek out the 'blinding light' of true love again.

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Focus On: *The Past*

“‘A Streetcar Named Desire’ makes it clear that for Williams the act of fleeing is reliving the past. Flight forces the presence of the past on his characters as they attempt to flee.’⁵

Blanche may have physically left Laurel, but her past has followed her to Louisiana always with her and the events of the last few years are about to catch up with her. Reve has its roots even further back as her ancestors’ ‘epic fornications’ ran rampant. Blanche was unable to pay. Blanche’s whole persona is rooted in the elegant South. Her sense of self-worth stems from her ancestry and genteel upbringing and social dances and beaux. Even her trunk is filled with clothes and jewellery that are reminders of her past. Events from Blanche’s past seem doomed to be repeated in the present. Mitch and attempts to treat her as a prostitute in their final scene together. Both Stanley for sex: Allan to renounce his homosexuality and Stanley as an act of revenge.

Her husband’s betrayal and subsequent death literally haunt her in the hallucinations of Varsouviana and the shot. The shot indicates the end of the flashback but also Blanche’s ability to move forwards. Her fear of ageing is tied in with this, as is her men. She wants to cling on to the last time she was truly happy, when she was young. In her passing year, the fantasy that she will somehow recapture that happiness is for her.

Context**The Polka Tune**

The polka tune is first referenced in Scene 1, although its relevance is not made clear until Allan’s death: it is what he and Blanche were listening to after she discovered his death out during the dance and her words ‘you disgust me’ were the trigger for his suicide.

The music stopped that night when the shot was fired and when Blanche hears the tune stops there also. Blanche has blamed herself for his death ever since, citing her help him as the reason for his death. She is forced to mentally relive the event whenever she is in stressful situations and as the play progresses, the polka tune appears more as a compulsion to recapture the love she felt for Allan in her liaisons with other men. Elysian Fields and the decision to ‘rest’ with Mitch, a man very unlike Allan’s.

Active Learning Task

In what ways do you think the adult Blanche’s promiscuity may have its roots in the trauma she suffered as a young widow?

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Scene 6 Quick Quiz

1. What is the name of the amusement park Mitch and Blanche have visited?
2. What happened the night they parked up at the lake?
3. How does Mitch say he knows Stanley?
4. How did Allan Grey die?
5. What is Mitch's final line in this scene?

Extended Essay Question

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche flees her hometown of Laurel, Mississippi, to escape her past. However, Williams makes it clear that the past will always be with her. With close reference to the play so far, explore to what extent you agree with this.

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⁶ Donald Pease in *Tennessee Williams: A Tribute* (Ed. Jac Sharpe, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 101.

Scene 7 Summary

This scene takes place on 15th September, Blanche's birthday. Stella has baked a cake and Mitch has been invited over to join in the celebration. Stanley, however, has been busy exacting his revenge on Blanche by informing Mitch of the salacious details of Blanche's reputation in Laurel. As a result, Mitch stays away from the party. We learn that Blanche was fired from the Flamingo after losing Belle Reve, but her sexual exploits led to the management

Key Event: Stanley informs Mitch that he has discovered all Blanche's secrets.
Characters: Blanche, Stanley, Stella, Mitch

A local army barracks designated her house as 'out of bounds' (because, we learn, she was a prostitute at Belle Reve) and we discover, along with Stella, that Blanche was fired from the Flamingo for having an affair with a 17-year-old student. He has also bought Blanche a bus

Stanley gleefully imparts this information to Stella while Blanche is soaking in the tub. Stella tries to catch up with her. When she exits the bathroom, she immediately senses some

Detailed Scene Analysis

Stanley Tells Stella What He has Found Out about Blanche (pp. 108-110)

This short scene opens with Stella caught in the middle between Blanche and Stanley. This state of affairs is becoming increasingly familiar and reaches its climax in Scene 11 when Stella is forced to choose between her sister and her husband. Williams prepares us for this incrementally by sequencing episodes in which Stella is forced to take sides.

As Stanley apprises Stella of the gossip he has learned, Williams creates pathos by having Blanche happily singing in the background. The sense of foreboding increases through the use of dramatic irony as the audience is aware that Blanche is about to have her happiness quashed by Stanley's words and actions. The tension builds as the scene progresses and the previous scene's closing hint of a possible happy ever after for Blanche is soon snuffed out.

The Flamingo Hotel

We learn more about Blanche's life in Laurel via Stanley's cruel gossip. A work acquaintance of Stanley's named Shaw, referenced earlier, met Blanche at the Flamingo Hotel.

After Belle Reve was lost, Blanche was forced to move to this hotel and the subtext is she became a kind of prostitute and was asked to leave. Her comments to Stella in Scene 5 about having to 'be seductive' to 'pay for one night's shelter' now make sense in this context. Reading between the lines, the audience can assume this is how Shaw met her, when he was staying at the hotel on one of his sales trips. The euphemistic language is typical of Blanche and her dislike of facing the naked truth, but also appropriate for the attitudes of the era in which Williams was writing.

Stanley also informs Stella that Blanche is not allowed to return to teach in Laurel because of the revelation she had an affair with a student in the cryptic comment

The audience then sees Stanley refer to Mitch as his 'best friend' and lists their common interests: work and the bowling team. We learn that Mitch is no longer likely to marry Blanche

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Return to Laurel

With that particular avenue closed off, Stanley has organised a plan B for Blanche: a ticket on the bus back to Laurel. This is a particularly cruel scheme as Blanche will be forced to return penniless and homeless to her hometown where there is no hope for her.

When Stanley says ‘her future is mapped out for her’, the metaphor echoes the fate motif of the streetcar and implies Blanche will become a prostitute in order to survive. The audience’s attitude towards Stanley is changing now. Earlier, we may have felt sympathy towards him as Blanche’s snobbery and ingratitude were brought to the fore. Now, however, Williams is ensuring our sympathies lie more with Blanche. We have already heard of the difficulties she has faced in her life and now we see Stanley being deliberately cruel.

The Greyhound Bus
The Greyhound bus (which does) low-cost intercity travel had negative connotations as a travel option of the time. Stanley’s offer of a ticket rather than a ride in his car is a final insult from Stanley to Blanche. It is the most economical option available to Blanche’s status as a social outcast. Stanley claims ‘Blanche was 100 miles from New Orleans, but in the 100 stops, this would be a bus journey.’

Blanche Finishes Her Bath (pp. 85–86)

Again, the bath has been used as a dramatic device to ensure Blanche is out of the way as her past, present and future are being discussed. Blanche intuitively senses the tension when she exits the bathroom, indicated in the stage direction ‘a frightened look appears on her face’. The stage direction of ‘the distant piano breaks down’ is used to underline that chaos is about to befall her.

Debate Prompt

‘Mitch is a buddy’
Stanley justifies his actions by expressing his loyalty to Mitch. Do you think this is Stanley’s

Scene 7 Quick Quiz

1. How many candles does Stella put on the birthday cake?
2. How did the school find out about Blanche’s affair?
3. What has Stanley bought for Blanche’s birthday?
4. What gives Blanche a ‘new outlook on life’?
5. What is Blanche’s final line in this scene?

Extended Writing Task

Stanley tells Mitch ‘the truth’ about Blanche offstage. Imagine what he would respond. Write this missing scene in script form, using appropriate dialogue and stage directions. Remember, the aim is to make your scene read as though Williams wrote it:

- Is factually accurate and in keeping with the information that is revealed
- Uses appropriate stage directions
- Uses set description
- Has action as well as dialogue
- Uses appropriate grammar
- Uses appropriate lexis
- Is in keeping with Williams’ characterisation
- Conveys both characters’ emotions and states of mind at this point in the play

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Scene 8 Summary

It is still the evening of 15th September; three quarters of an hour have elapsed since Blanche got out of the bath. The birthday meal has been eaten and Mitch has not arrived. Blanche is aware she has been stood up, but does not know why at the beginning of the scene. There is tension which Blanche desperately and unsuccessfully tries to lighten. She rings Mitch, but there is no reply.

Stanley becomes increasingly annoyed at Stella's critical comments. She is angry with him and siding with her sister at this point. Then Stanley shouts and throws his plate to the ground. The three of them argue and Stanley presents Blanche with the bus ticket back to Laurel. She responds by running to the bathroom and being sick, at which point Stella goes in to labour.

Detailed Scene Analysis

The Dismal Birthday Supper (pp. 87–90)

The empty chair at the table is visual shorthand for Mitch's absence and a reminder that he has failed to appear. Blanche's joke is reminiscent of Steve's joke in Scene 3 (p. 32) as both are concerned with birds. However, the contrasting content emphasises the class differences between the worlds of Belle Reve and Elysian Fields.

Class Divisions

Blanche can't resist a sly dig at Stanley's 'vulgar' speech and Stella continues the insults as her anger towards her husband spills over. By criticising his table manners, using imperatives such as 'go and wash up' and using an animal metaphor to describe him as a 'pig', the audience is aware that she is allying herself with her sister.

Stella is echoing the manner in which Blanche refers to Stanley and the class difference and DuBois come to the fore again, as they did in Scene 2 during the unpacking of Scene 4 when Stella chose Stanley over Blanche.

Stella's haughty commands and insults (perhaps coupled with guilt) infuriate Stanley's behaviour, throwing his plate on the ground, as he did in Scene 3. This is typical of someone who feels threatened and wants to regain control.

It seems as if Stanley knows he is unable to compete intellectually with the sisters and so asserts his physical superiority. The dynamic verbs here 'hurls' and 'seizes' are in contrast to Stella's passive shaking her head 'helplessly'. In the stage directions, Williams is making it clear that Stanley is therefore, foreshadowing the ending of the play. Williams uses convergence in Stella taking her sister's part at this point, as she addresses Stanley using imperatives and

Where is Mitch? (pp. 90–94)

Blanche is still unaware of what has happened, although it is clear she knows something is wrong as he's not there. Presumably he is out drinking as when he arrives at the apartment

Stanley is trying to placate Stella, who is still angry with him. Physical attraction is a key factor in their relationship and Stanley reminds Stella of this in order to regain her affection. The presence of Blanche in the small flat, only curtains separate the two rooms and Stanley is alone with his wife so they can 'get those coloured lights going'.

Key Event
birthday party

Characters

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Blanche is upset about Mitch and again this triggers a response from Stanley, as he feels guilty and constantly needs to remind himself that Blanche deserves this harsh treatment.

Blanche's baths have been a source of contention between the two since her arrival and she manages to insult Stanley here, using a xenophobic slur to imply he is incapable. The heat in the apartment is increased with the steam from the bathroom and this antagonises Stanley.

Blanche's bathing has a symbolic relevance, almost as though she is cleansing herself. Her bath also serves as a staging device, as in the previous scene, to ensure Blanche is out of the room so Stanley can discuss her.

Stanley Gives Blanche the Bus Ticket (pp. 92– 94)

The Varsouviana music accompanies moments of stress in Blanche's life, so it is no surprise that she gives her the bus ticket. The idea of returning to Laurel and the prostitute's fate is reinforced by Blanche and she is physically sick, as she was when she first arrived in New Orleans.

The exchange between Stanley and Stella that follows has Stanley justifying his actions as 'he took off her' and it is clear he believes Blanche's arrival triggered a change in Stella. Stella goes into labour at this point and Stanley takes her to hospital. When he returns, he is exhausted.

Blanche's Song (p. 94)

The words of this Mexican folk song are sometimes sung to accompany the Varsouviana. Translated, they mean 'bread without salt'. The Mexican connection is reinforced later with the appearance of the Mexican woman selling objects to commemorate the day of the dead.

The fragments and Blanche's actions here indicate a nervous response to her fears and the beginning of her mental breakdown. Remember, she still does not know for certain why Mitch has not arrived.

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Active Learning Task

Stella is obviously upset about the revelations about her sister and her husband. Stanley's response to this is, 'It's gonna be all right after she goes and she's happy' (p. 90). What does this tell us about Stanley? Look at Stella's reaction. What does it tell us about their relationship?

Scene 8 Quick Quiz

1. What time of day does the set description show?
2. How does Stanley clear his place?
3. How does he refer to the two sisters on page 89?
4. How old does Blanche claim to be?
5. Look back at pages 2 and 3. Roughly how old is Blanche?

Extended Writing Task

An interior monologue conveys the character's thoughts. In Shakespeare's plays, these are often presented as soliloquys. Write Stanley's interior monologue at the end of this scene, as he stands in the hospital. You could consider:

- His reflections on what has happened that evening
- His attitude towards his wife
- His attitude towards Blanche
- His thoughts about telling Mitch what he has discovered

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Scene 9 Summary

It is still the evening of Blanche's birthday. Blanche has been drinking steadily since Stanley and Stella left for the hospital and the scene opens with her clutching a bottle of liquor as the Varsouviana plays in her head.

Mitch arrives and for a moment, her hopes are raised. Mitch is clearly drunk when he enters and his bitterness is evident in his attitude towards Blanche. He is sullen and rude, demanding to see her in the light as he tears the paper lantern down.

It soon becomes apparent that Blanche's fears have been realised and Mitch now knows her prim and proper façade is fake. The Mexican pedlar woman is outside, selling items for the Day of the Dead and Blanche's death and desire. Mitch's response is to try to have sex with her, but he refuses to 'clean'. Blanche's response is to scream 'Fire' until Mitch runs out of the house.

Detailed Scene Analysis

Mitch Finally Arrives (pp. 95–101)

As the tension increases towards the climax, the themes Williams has introduced are conveyed through staging as well as dialogue. Blanche is wearing the red satin robe of a fallen woman. As is her custom, she has been drinking heavily to numb reality.

Alcohol has become another source of contention with Stanley. With little money, Blanche is drinking her way through Stanley's personal supply. Money and alcohol are both part of the former's life, and the latter is part of the reason for Blanche's dependence on the former.

Mitch's demeanour

Mitch's appearance indicates a change in his habits and attitude towards Blanche. He has told her about Stanley at work and he has been drinking ever since. Both his costuming and his actions convey he is very upset at Stanley's spiteful gossip.

Blanche is initially overwhelmed to see him and kisses him, but it is immediately rejected. The stage directions 'pushes' and 'stalks' and 'tears' are reminiscent of her domineering attitude.

Mitch's behaviour towards Blanche is totally different from that we have seen in previous scenes. He tells her to see her in the light and tears the paper lantern away and it is significant that Mitch is the one who gave her some glimpse of hope and now he is the one symbolising the end of Blanche's make-believe as the harsh light bulb exposes her. That Stanley's investigations have stripped her of her façade of respectability.

Mitch tells her he checked up on Stanley's story and found it to be true. Blanche is at the Tarantula Arms, which she uses as a metaphor for herself ensnaring victims in her head.

Like the light-bulb motif, Blanche's life is now bare and exposed as she tells the truth. Her hopes and fears collide here and Blanche's honesty is heartfelt and poignant. We learn she has been searching for protection, but she never found it. Instead, there were more and more men until finally, she had an affair with a student.

She tells Mitch how pleased she was to find him and uses the metaphor of the kite. Since the three men – Stanley, Shaw and Kieffer – have weighted the kite with their lies, she will never be free.

Key Events
Characters

Boxed Set
Straight Set
Merchandise
Coronas
Flores
Paddy

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The Mexican Woman Appears (pp. 101–103)

The vendor is blind, symbolising how we all ‘blindly’ go forward in life towards death and echoing the ‘blind are leading the blind’ biblical allusion of Scene 2.

The Mexican woman is selling flowers and crowns for people to place on the graves of their loved ones. (See *Mexican Day of the Dead* for further detail). The irony here is Blanche does not need a day to commemorate death as it is always with her in the form of flashbacks to Allan’s suicide. The woman is a symbolic reminder of all the deaths that have affected Blanche. She also foreshadows the imminent ‘death’ of Blanche’s hopes.

Blanche speaks honestly

Blanche speaks half to herself, explaining why she sought the ‘intimacies with strangers’ as an escape from the difficulties of her everyday life. She was surrounded by death as the sole carer of her aged relatives, and with the expense of funeral costs and probate, money was in increasingly short supply. The fragmented speech here is a consequence of not only her intoxication but also her confusion as the make-believe world she has constructed crumbles around her.

When Williams gives Blanche the line ‘the opposite of death is desire’ we are given personality. Sex is a way of proving to herself she is still alive and, like alcohol, sex

The streetcar

However, perhaps this is not entirely true for Blanche. Like the streetcar, there is or not. Blanche chose to take the streetcar and now she must pay the price. The streetcar are Desire and Cemeteries, implying giving into sexual temptation leads to the streetcar and her overwhelming passion for Stanley means he is the focus of her life, society is accepting. When she is forced to choose between Blanche and Stanley, she is shocked but not surprised that she chooses Stanley.

Mitch attacks Blanche

Blanche’s honesty here is moving but Mitch completely fails to empathise or show concern. He focuses on his own needs and attempts to get what he feels is his due. As Blanche thought she was, he considers her dirty and that she owes him casual sex. His failure to have sex with her foreshadows Stanley’s violent attack in the following scene.

The Mexican Woman

The Mexican Woman is a symbol of the Mexican Day of the Dead. Even though she is blind, she is a significant figure in Mexican culture. Various traditions are associated with the Day of the Dead, including the use of flowers and the belief that the dead return to the land of the living.

Source:

Source: [Zig Zag Education](#)

Active Learning Task

Blanche doesn’t shout ‘Help’ or ‘Rape’; instead she screams ‘Fire!’ Why do you think she chooses this particular word?

Scene 9 Quick Quiz

1. What is Mitch wearing when he eventually arrives?
2. What is Blanche drinking and how is this ironic?
3. What animal image has Stanley used to describe Blanche?
4. Who would come to Blanche’s house on Saturday nights?
5. What does Blanche ask Mitch to do?

Extended Essay Task

Symbolism and imagery add richness and layers of meaning to the play. Consider how Williams uses symbolism to shape the audience’s perception of Blanche.

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Scene 10 Summary

Blanche has been drinking since Mitch left. She's been trying to pack her trunk, ready to leave, but has been side-tracked by the memories her possessions hold. She has dressed herself in an old evening gown and some costume jewellery and is talking to herself, reliving an old night out.

She looks in a mirror and then smashes it. Stanley arrives and tells her the hospital sent him home. Blanche is instantly nervous that she is to be alone with Stanley.

Stanley humours her as she tells him she has received a telegram from Shep Huntleigh, but of course he dismisses it. Emboldened, she then tells him Mitch returned to beg her forgiveness. Stanley's argument follows in which he insults her, and months of resentment come spilling out. In the end, exhausted by the fight, the situation quickly gets out of hand. Blanche, even in her drunken state, is too weak to fight back.

Frantically, she calls Western Union to get a message to Shep Huntleigh, but of course he dismisses it. Emboldened, she then tells him Mitch returned to beg her forgiveness. Stanley's argument follows in which he insults her, and months of resentment come spilling out. In the end, exhausted by the fight, the situation quickly gets out of hand. Blanche, even in her drunken state, is too weak to fight back.

Detailed Scene Analysis

This scene represents the climax of the play as the tension that has been building between Blanche and Stanley finally explodes.

Again, props and motifs play a significant role here. Blanche's dressing in her old glad rags creates a sense of pathos while her rambling indicates she is losing her grip on reality. Deliberately breaking the mirror is symbolic of her fear of ageing and prepares us for the catastrophic events that are about to follow: Blanche's identity is about to be as smashed as her reflection.

Stanley initially seems in a good mood, as indicated in the stage directions 'amiably'. He engages in a friendly chat with Blanche, even telling her a humorous anecdote about his cousin. He seems to be trying to win her over, perhaps to celebrate the imminent birth of his child.

However, there is an abrupt change of tone when Blanche refers to Mitch and Stanley as 'swine'. Blanche's insult irritates Stanley and tips him from good-humoured drunk to vicious.

As she continues in her fanciful ramblings, creating what she considers ought to be a happy ending, Stanley's increasing anger, and as he confronts her with her lies, she is speechless.

Costume

With his red silk pyjamas echoing Blanche's red robe, their similar appetite for sex is also clear. However, at this point Blanche is wearing a 'white' gown, symbolically returning to the Blanche of the start of the play and providing a structural clue that Blanche's time in New Orleans has come full circle.

The white gown could also be seen as a symbol of her status as a victim. Although in the opening scenes, she has never attempted to seduce him. Stanley's reference to her as a 'fancy girl' reinforces the theme of illusion: Blanche is using clothes from her youth to retreat back into her old life. She is trying to escape her current situation by putting on a fancy dress (like the rhinestone tiara) because those days are long gone.

Key Event: Stanley's arrival
Characters: Blanche, Stanley

Debate Prompt: What is the significance of Blanche's birthday in this scene?

Tiffany: An old friend
Put on the dog: A phrase
Red letter day: A day of good luck
Mardi Gras: A festival in New Orleans
Queen of the South: A title
Rolled: Rolled back

Debate Prompt: How does Blanche's costume reflect her character?

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Stanley uses figurative language here to attack Blanche. Perhaps surprisingly, Stanley's imagery and this is another way Williams links the two. Blanche's fear rises with Stanley's staging as Blanche creates physical distance between the two of them indicates Stanley's desire for her safety.

Blanche's Mental Deterioration

Blanche's hallucinations have now moved from being solely auditory to visual as the stage directions state 'menacing shapes' and 'lurid reflections' appear. The atmosphere of menace is unmistakable. The motifs of money, sex, alcohol and violence are presented in the spectacle of the prostitute and the drunkard. This has symbolic relevance to events in the apartment, where these themes are also about to be played out. The 'jungle' noises echo Blanche's earlier reference to Stanley and his friends behaving like jungle animals.

Parallel Scenes

The scene is paralleled with Scenes 3 and 4. During the poker party, the drunken Stanley became angry and used physical violence against Stella because he was losing. That night, without Blanche, the couple had sex. At the same time, Stanley's rage, intoxication and violence are repeated, but this time it is Stella who is raped. Stanley rapes Blanche on the bed he sleeps in with her sister and 'wins' his revenge on Blanche.

The rape scene happens offstage but there is no ambiguity: the audience knows from the stage directions as Stanley carries Blanche to the bed. Stanley's chilling final line is 'I've got to go to work' and turns the blame on Blanche by implying she has invited this. Unlike Mitch, Stanley does not protest and any sympathy the audience may have felt for Stanley has disappeared.

The Mirror
Tennyson's poem 'The Mirror' is a well-known example of a mirror bringing a person looking directly at it. In the play, the incarcerated Blanche is the world's reflection. She gazes out of the mirror and a curse befalls her. This is a reference here to the relationship between illusion and reality.

Scene 10 Quick Quiz

1. How does Stanley know Mitch never returned to apologise?
2. Who does Blanche try to call for help?
3. What does Stanley say wouldn't be bad to do?
4. What does Blanche threaten Stanley with?
5. What animal does Stanley use as a term of address of Blanche?

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Scene 11 Summary

This scene concludes the action in the play and begins 'some weeks' after Scene 10. We learn that Blanche has told of the rape but not been believed. All the main characters are onstage.

Key Event: Blanche is released.
Characters: Blanche, Stanley, Stella, Matron, Eunice, Mitch, Mitch's friend.

As the scene begins, Blanche is in the bath as Eunice and Stella prepare her possessions. Eunice she had to believe Stanley, and the baby is there as a reminder that Stella is his wife, not his husband more than ever. Meanwhile, the men are playing poker.

When we see Blanche, it is evident she has suffered a complete mental breakdown and is living in a fantasy world where she believes she is about to go on a trip with Shep Huntleigh. As the asylum arrive to take her away and there is a struggle.

Stanley's smug attitude enrages Mitch, who attacks him and then cries. Blanche is comforted by Stella by touching her in a way that implies the sexual side of their relationship is still alive.

Detailed Scene Analysis

After the high drama of the preceding scene, Scene 11 has a subdued atmosphere as mundane activities such as packing and discussing clothes dominate. Under this apparently downbeat, ordinary feel is the knowledge that Blanche is about to be taken away.

Maldita sea!
Salerno: A city in Italy
Jacket: Stanley's

Stanley 'Wins'

Stanley has triumphed, leaving Blanche mentally broken, and the stage direction is 'elated'. Now the status quo has been restored and he has his home, his wife, his job, and the bonus that his wife has chosen him over her sister. Also, incarceration is a more permanent solution than a bus ticket as there is very little chance Blanche will escape. Stanley punished Blanche and got away with it.

Stella's Motives

Initially, the audience may find it difficult to understand Stella's motives in choosing her husband. But if we consider her position as a woman with a baby at this period in time, it is easier to understand. With no income, a mentally ill sister to support as well as a newborn, leaving Stanley is unthinkable.

Debate Prompt:
Shep Huntleigh: What do you think his purpose in life is?

Furthermore, if we consider the point at which Stella left the action, we realise it is about the truth of Blanche's past and the 'gift' of the bus ticket. Perhaps William may consider Blanche's 'story' to be an act of desperation or revenge. Stella is also a woman who fabricates events.

Elements from the rest of the play can be seen here. Blanche is bathing, which serves as a dramatic device so Eunice and Stella can bring the audience up to speed with what has happened. Blanche's birthday, and a reminder of Blanche's need to ritually cleanse away her past. In this scene, Stella is packing Blanche's trunk, paralleling the unpacking episode in Scene 10. The time in Elysian Fields has come full circle and she must now leave.

When Blanche enters, the use of imperatives reminds us of her superior nature and how others are there to serve her. She orders Stella about and is quite dismissive of Eunice's concerns about the grapes. Her obsession with clothing and accessories is also what we expect from her. It is a hollow note as we learn she is dressing to be sent away.

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The repetition of the word 'clean' could be an echo of Mitch's cruel words in Scene I. Blanche is not 'clean enough' for him. The rambling passage about her death expresses a desire for a 'clean white sack' after being seen by a young ship's doctor, images reminiscent of her white clothes.

The ocean is as blue as Allan's eyes; the simile reinforces the link between Allan and the asylum. This is underlined when the audience hears the music of the Varsouviana which prepares us for the upset Blanche is about to suffer.

Doctor and Matron

The arrival of the Doctor and the Matron jars with the illusion Blanche has created for them in her fantasy and begins to panic. The staging shows the audience Blanche's rape as the same sinister shadows and jungle cries are heard.

Stanley hands her the paper lantern and Blanche screams as the violence of the rape is a symbol of the brutality of the real world. Even the other men are critical of the way she behaves; there is a sense perhaps their attitude towards Stanley has changed, particularly in the light of her actions.

Perhaps the most chilling line is the Matron's dehumanising 'these fingernails have been on the rape; another person is trying to assume control of Blanche's body and we are her future. We have to assume she is being sent to a state asylum where her freedom will be taken away'.

Blanche Leaves with the Doctor

Blanche's final exit on the Doctor's arm is poignant and restores her dignity. She leaves the house as a lady, on a gentleman's arm. He may not be Shep Huntleigh, but the audience is left with the sense of how Blanche's destiny may have been very different if she had not fallen in love with Allan Grey.

The irony here is that as Blanche leaves, her life destroyed because of her sexual reputation, it is Stella and Stanley who are behaving in a sexual way as he puts his fingers inside her blouse. With Blanche out of the picture, Stella is left with Stanley and his relationship with Stella. The play concludes with Steve's line 'this game is seven or eight years old' suggesting how life will go on as before for Stanley. He has gambled on no one believing Blanche's story.

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Active Learning Task

How do we know Stanley and Stella have had a son? In what ways could the gender be considered significant?

Scene II Quick Quiz

1. What is Stella doing as the scene opens?
2. What are the men doing?
3. What item does Stanley hand to Blanche?
4. How does the Doctor address Blanche?
5. What is Blanche's final line in the play?

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Character Analysis

Blanche DuBois

Williams creates the character of Blanche using a variety of dramatic, linguistic and dialogue, costume and stage directions, Blanche is revealed to us through the use of the colour white and the paper lantern. Blanche's idiolect is an intrinsic part of her. We learn much about her not just from what she says but the way she says it. Her melodramatic monologues reveal an educated woman who peppers her conversation with love of literature.

Allan's Death

From her heartfelt conversation with Mitch in Scene 6, we learn falling in love with Allan Grey at the age of 16 was the defining moment of her life. They eloped and married, but returned with the sense something wasn't quite right. The fallout from discovering his subsequent adultery has never left Blanche. Williams conveys how she is plagued with flashbacks, indicative of the monstrous burden of guilt she has carried since that night. Staging is significant here: use of the Varsouviana and the gunshot only Blanche and the audience can hear reinforce this.

Sex

Williams presents the way sex is an escape for Blanche as well as her downfall. Following Allan's death, Blanche became what Stella euphemistically describes as 'flighty' in Scene 7, explaining how Blanche caused 'sorrow at home'. Allan's death appears to have been the trigger for Blanche's promiscuity, perhaps as she failed to give him 'the help he needed but couldn't speak of!'; sex and death have become intertwined. In her honest confession to Mitch, she describes how sex became an escape from her despair. 'The opposite is desire'. She also tells him that after her husband died, 'intimacies with men' were 'forced' upon her, forcing her to go from 'one to another' in the hope of recapturing the blinding love she once had. Seeking 'protection' from the harshness of reality. Here, Williams conveys how her attractiveness to men in her obsession with clothes and make-up. Therefore, the 'water-spout' and her beauty is 'fading' causes her to 'panic' and 'run' from one man to the next.

This pattern of behaviour seems to have become more and more of a problem as she struggles of maintaining Belle Reve after 'Dad died and [Stella] left' ten years earlier. Her relatives 'Father! Mother' Margaret... Cousin Jessie' have taken their toll on Blanche.

Blanche as a Helpless Victim

Williams presents Blanche as helpless to prevent, and at the same time the architect of her downfall. Belle Reve had already begun to 'slip through [her] fingers' due to debts that her predecessor had incurred. Being fired and moving to the Hotel Flamingo, where she had to 'be seen' to survive, 'shelter' can be said to be a result of her inability to face up to the truth and adapt. Williams' earlier use of the moth motif is significant as Blanche has a self-destructive tendency, like a moth to a flame.

Blanche, Stanley and Stella

Williams uses Stella as a foil for her sister. Stella has been able to adapt to the new life she has made. Blanche's snobbery grates with the Kowalski household, as Stella bristles at Blanche's criticism of her husband, stating her 'superior attitude' is 'out of place'.

Allan's death
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Stanley mockingly refers to Blanche as a 'Queen' and this is symbolic of the conflict in the household: Stanley is the 'king' of his own home and is not prepared to have his dominance overthrown. The language here foregrounds that the conflict between them is inevitable.

However, Williams presents Blanche's pretension and obsession with her appearance as a calculated move to catch a man. Aware her attractiveness is fading, Blanche needs to create the fantasy of herself as a respectable, 'prim', educated woman in order to present herself as potential marriage material. If she is to be married, she needs to conform to the morality of the society in which she operates.

Stanley Kowalski

The audience's attitudes towards Stanley fluctuate during the course of the play, as Blanche patronise him until the penultimate scene when we realise he is a brutal man. Stanley represents aspects of Williams' own sexuality in the presentation of the character. Despite his uncouth vulgarity, he is sexually magnetic. He is, as Blanche recognises, a man who loves sex, drink, bowling and the admiration of his friends. He presents himself as a man who loves sex, drink, bowling and the admiration of his friends. He is male in his dealings with everyone and is prepared to fight and use violence to maintain his position.

The American Dream

As the play begins, Stanley is presented as a representation of modern America, a man who lives his own life the way he wants it. Stanley embodies the American dream: ambitious, self-reliant, and successful in his own domain. Stella implies he has ambitions to do well at work. He may not have the education of the DuBois family but he has a drive and a vigour that serve him well. He is particularly successful because she is living in his home and on his charity, trying to turn his back on the past by pulling Stella 'off them columns', signifying he is aware his sexual magnetism has been a factor in his upbringing. He resents his sister-in-law reminding his wife of Belle Reve and his inheritance.

Gambling

Stanley's love of games is significant and Williams uses the simple pursuits of bowling and poker as a theme of survival of the fittest: Stanley cannot bear to lose. In this way, Blanche's nature is accurate. This foreshadows and underlines the growing conflict with Blanche. Stanley's gamble on the fact people will believe his version of events rather than Blanche's version is a gamble that pays off and his jubilant acknowledgement of this cements the audience's view of him at the end of the play.

Williams presents Stanley's initial straightforwardness as increasingly sinister as he uncovers the shocking truth, he is able to avenge himself for her near-constant abuse by repaying her ingratitude with cruelty, destroying her relationship with Mitch and with her family.

Brutality

The rape may happen offstage but Stanley's brutal nature is explicitly revealed as an antipathy towards him. This is Stanley's 'animal' side at its worst. He has the pyjama top, red silk like Blanche's robe and perhaps here, Williams is drawing a parallel between the two, able to separate sex and love.

Williams uses the motif of the light bulb to link Stanley and Blanche. On his wedding night, the lightbulbs and the rape is a horrific parallel to that night. Mitch has already told Blanche that now Stanley is symbolically smashing Blanche's reality. By raping Blanche, he is putting his presence on her and consequently depriving her of sex with his wife. He is also in the upper hand, as foreshadowed by his earlier violence when he 'tears' Blanche's dress. Williams uses the rape as a representation of the many ways Blanche has been seen as a victim.

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By the time we see him sneering over Blanche as she leaves for the asylum, his actions were to save his friend from marrying a woman like Blanche, but the audience is more by revenge than by loyalty. In a final grotesque turn, as Blanche is driven away, Stella grieves by groping her.

Stella Kowalski

From the first moment we see Stella, Williams makes it clear she is from a different world. She mildly rebukes him for shouting at her but catches the package of meat he throws (this includes to foreshadow Blanche's description of him as the caveman hunter).

Blanche's use of infantilising terms of address and bossy tone make it clear Stella is the start.

We learn that she genuinely loves Stanley and is upset when he is away from her 'in the streetcar' and it has led her to 632 Elysian Fields but, unlike her sister, she has passion as well as passion. In order to stay married to Stanley, she has had to learn to adapt and forget about her childhood at Belle Reve. Here, Williams is drawing a direct parallel.

In his presentation of the Kowalskis, Williams is implying the Old South must learn from Blanche, Stella is able to adapt her values. The son she has with Stanley is a symbol for the Kowalski family, but also for the South.

Harold Mitchell

Williams presents Mitch as different from the other men: perhaps because he lives in the North he has developed a sensitive side that Blanche instinctively recognises. He uses respect as Stanley, but has a more polite and deferent way of addressing the women. This implies he is a mummy's boy and referring to him as a 'cry-baby'.

He is kind to Blanche in the aftermath of Stanley's violence in Scene 3 and as they go out, he brings flowers and takes her on dates. Williams presents Mitch as a gentle man up to the point of Stanley's violence.

However, clumsy Mitch, with his talk of sweating and weight, is very unlike the Southern man who has been desperately seeking to rescue her since her husband died. Williams makes it clear he is beneath her and mocks him, although he is not capable of recognising he is being mocked. Mitch is practical and recognises she has few options left. She finds some common ground with Allan: they are both mourning the loss/imminent death of a loved one and Mitch is seen as a kind man who may offer the 'protection' Blanche needs.

Mitch as a Suitor

Williams uses Mitch as a way of preparing us for Blanche's downfall and to reinforce the idea that Stella has in order to live harmoniously with Stanley. Blanche's unwillingness to take a lower level is part of her game plan: by holding back, she thinks she can dupe Mitch into a marriage that is proper. However, perhaps she simply does not find him sexually attractive, partly because he is prepared to throw that security away for a stolen kiss with the paperboy. In this way, Stella as a foil for Blanche, Mitch can be seen as Stanley with the sexual magnetism that Blanche needs. This makes it clear Mitch can never be a suitable husband for Blanche.

At the end of the play, we can again compare Stanley and Mitch's attitudes towards Blanche. Mitch's fumbled attack with the rape scene and as she is taken away, Stanley sees it as his good fortune in being believed. In contrast, Mitch is angry with Stanley. When Williams puts Mitch on stage, he is sobbing with his head on the table as the asylum doors close.

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Eunice and Steve Hubbell

Eunice and Steve Hubbell live upstairs and own the apartment that Stella and Stanley live in. Eunice is a kind woman who offers Blanche help in Scene 1 and grapes in Scene 11. On both occasions, Stanley is dismissive of her and treats her as an inferior, which is ironic considering she is a poor woman and Stanley is rich. Blanche is penniless and destitute. In the interaction between the two women, there is an inherent snobbery.

Eunice and Steve can be paralleled with the future Stanley and Stella. Eunice bears a resemblance to Stella as both are poor women and Stanley doesn't have a problem with committing adultery. Perhaps when their sexual attraction has faded they will become like the bickering Hubbells.

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Relationships

Stanley and Stella

Stanley and Stella's marriage operates along very traditional gender lines. Williams underlines this from the beginning when Stanley, in work clothes, throws meat from the butcher's at Stella, like the hunter returning to the cave.

Throughout the play, Williams makes it clear this is a marriage founded on a very strong sexual attraction; strong enough, in fact, for the genteel Stella to be able to overlook Stanley's numerous flaws.

This is perhaps most evident after the poker party when Stella forgives Stanley's night together. Stella tells Blanche that when Stanley is away she goes 'wild' until she is the dominant partner in the relationship and when his status is threatened by the prospect of her leaving, she removes her so the status quo can be restored.

It is significant, however, at the end of the play that Stella says she 'couldn't' rather than 'won't' leave Stanley. In this way, Williams is perhaps encouraging the audience to see Stanley as a man who is not the way it was before. Stella is making a conscious decision to choose Stanley rather than herself, believing he is capable of rape.

Blanche and Mitch

This couple's nascent relationship is founded in mutual need for comfort and companionship. Mitch is lonely when his mother dies and Blanche is desperately seeking 'protection' and a 'home' of the world' where she can find some peace. However, Williams presents their relationship as a flawed one from the beginning. They have very little in common and, although the sensible part of Blanche might be attracted to him, her snobbery and desire simultaneously reject him. When Blanche tells Mitch that she is a 'poor thing' when she mocks Mitch by asking in French if he'd like to sleep with her, Williams suggests a happy outcome for Blanche as she will never adapt to a man like Mitch.

Mitch could have rejected Blanche's past and still agreed to marry her, but in the end, he chooses to stay with her. It is difficult for a man like Mitch who moves in macho circles to have a wife with a reputation like Blanche, but he puts himself and his masculine pride first.

Blanche and Stella

Blanche and Stella's early reunion shows them embracing joyfully, and Williams' stage directions convey genuine affection. This makes Stella's 'betrayal' of her sister in Scene 11 even more poignant for the audience. We soon see Blanche assert her dominance over Stella in her use of informal language, her 'blessed baby' and being critical of her hairstyle and her home. Throughout the play, Blanche's moments of camaraderie with her sister, such as berating Stanley during the 'disgrace' of her husband; for example, in Scene 4 when Blanche has called him an 'ape'. Blanche is forced into choosing between the two once and for all and selects Stanley, telling Stella 'I'll tell you the story and go on living with Stanley'. The audience is aware Stella's choice is a practical one. If Blanche leaves, she will have to leave Stanley and place herself and her child in poverty with no one to support her.

Blanche and Stanley

Blanche prides herself on her ability to read men, telling Stanley his wife 'doesn't love him' the day after they meet. An arrogant statement and one that is untrue as when Stanley reciprocates, she is the one who is the dominant partner. The play centres on the rising conflict between these two characters. In the end, Blanche's performance, the audience is able to sympathise with both of them. By the final scene, Stanley has come to the fore and Blanche has retreated into madness. Stanley emerges triumphant and they spend together, whereas Blanche is defeated.

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Extended Essay Question

To what extent would you agree with the view that marriage is good for men and women in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

Form

Domestic Tragedy

A Streetcar Named Desire is often classed as a modern domestic tragedy. Epic or classical tragedies were characterised by their noble protagonists, typically male and often kings (think *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*).

Tragic Hero/Heroine

The central character would have a fatal flaw or commit a fatal error. He would then have a moment of epiphany, a sudden realisation of his mistake, and then commit suicide or deliberately put himself in a situation where death was inevitable.

Tragic Villain

The tragic villain is an opponent or antagonist, with a negative influence on the hero's life. The villain engages in a battle for power with the hero and contributes to the hero's demise.

Modern Domestic Tragedy

Modern domestic tragedies (*A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, *Death of a Salesman* and *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller are well-known examples) are set in the home) and focus on ordinary people rather than the aristocracy. These plays do not always end in death (although some do) and death is not always literal, but can mean the ending of a relationship, an ambition or some other aspect of the protagonist's life.

In the play, Blanche can be considered a tragic heroine and Stanley a tragic villain.

Realist Drama

A Streetcar Named Desire is a realist drama in its presentation of genuine social attitudes towards women, people of colour and homosexuality presented in the play. However, Williams also draws on elements of magic realism in his depiction of Blanche's deterioration, in particular the auditory and visual hallucinations, such as the 'jungle' of course, the polka tune and the gunshot.

Morality Play

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, there is certainly 'sin' and definitely 'punishment'. The streetcar itself is a symbol of how giving in to desire will end in punishment: Blanche rides the streetcar and is told to get off at Cemeteries. Her own sexual desires lead to the 'death' of the life she has known: Belle Reve and her teaching job. She is incarcerated in the asylum, a form of living death. The moral of the tale appears to be promiscuity will be punished.

Societal changes during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries mean that modern audiences may have a very different take on the moral aspect of the play than an audience of Williams' contemporaries.

Are Other Characters Punished?

Homosexuality was illegal in America at the time and widely condemned as a sin. Mitch's internalisation of the idea of his sexuality as a transgression of moral codes that deserves to be punished is evident.

Mitch lacks the compassion to 'forgive' Blanche and has his hopes dashed; Blanche's mother passes away. Stella must live with the knowledge she has been complicit in her sister's downfall. Stanley must live with the knowledge that he has committed a terrible crime with it, those around him may have lingering suspicions. But is the audience left with any appropriate outcomes?

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Structure

The structure of the play perhaps owes more to the cinema than the theatre. Unlike *Named Desire* does not have three acts with a clear break for an interval. Instead which ends on a dynamic action to propel the story forwards. These work like scene cliffhanger, or dramatic moment, before cutting to the next.

The play is Blanche's story and, as such, is made up of a sequence of episodes that lead to her downfall. The end of each scene typically has Blanche caught in a moment of her words in the play belong to Steve.

'This game is seven card stud' symbolises Stanley's 'gamble', that no one would be he is smugly playing cards as she is taken away. The echoes of the poker party in which she is asked if she could 'kibitz' or join in and was told in no uncertain terms she could not. 'poker should not be played in a house with women' also resonates at the end of the play when she is removed during a game of cards.

The Dramatic Unities

Traditional drama often relied on the three unities of character, place and time. Events must take place in sequential time order, in one location and focus on one character with no subplots. Williams drew on elements of this in his writing but adapted them to suit.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche is the focal character. The play is structured around her visit to 632 Elysian Fields and her arrival and departure frame the action of the play. The other characters are significant for their interactions with Blanche and their contribution to her tragic downfall at the end of the play.

Even when it is dramatically necessary for her to be absent in order for information to be conveyed, characters in Scene 7, the actress playing Blanche can be heard singing. The only time she is heard is when Stanley and Stella unpack the trunk in Scene 2 and at the beginning of the play. Blanche's frequent bathing is used as a dramatic device to enable characters to discuss her.

The use of time is interesting as events over the play span five months but time is compressed into the scenes. For example, periods of time are omitted and the events of 15th September are shown as only events from six days from the five months are seen onstage. The audience is aware of the passage of time and Blanche's increasing animosity and her courtship with Mitch.

Stella's pregnancy is used as a dramatic technique to mark the passage of time. In Scene 5 (Stella's arrival in May) Stella's 'belly is curving with signs of maternity' and she goes in to have a baby.

Unity of Time
The events of the play
derive from a single
action in a single
Unity of Place

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Conflict in the Play

Scenes 1–6

The first six scenes cover Blanche's initial period in New Orleans. Conflicts are seen introduced as early as the second day, when Stanley is taken aback by Blanche's annoyance to learn Belle Reve has been lost, which means by the time he is losing it Stanley is a man who expects to win. The following day, Stanley overhears Blanche and Mitch are in place for the conflict. By Scene 5, Stanley is plotting his revenge behind the scenes to hope Mitch may want to marry her.

Scenes 7–11

Scene 7 is the beginning of Stanley's triumph over Blanche. He has uncovered her relationship with Mitch and planned to send her back to Laurel. In the following scenes, the conflict continues: he rapes her (blaming her flirtatious manner on day 2); convinces everyone of his rumours (using her sexual history and penchant for make-believe as evidence); takes her to the asylum before smugly praising his own luck in the final scene.

Focus on: *Setting*

How does Williams use setting to create conflict?

The play has only one location and that is the Kowalski's downstairs apartment. Although other places are mentioned, all the action takes place in this two-room apartment, which plays a claustrophobic atmosphere.

The house is crowded and the lack of internal doors is a major problem for Stanley. He becomes increasingly sexually frustrated. It also means there is nowhere for Blanche to escape. Stanley attacks her. The apartment becomes a metaphor for Blanche's situation. It is a place where she has nowhere to go.

The bathroom is another huge cause of conflict as Blanche's lengthy baths make Stanley uncomfortable. Furthermore, the steam from the bath exacerbates the discomfort of the humidity.

Stanley becomes increasingly irritated by Blanche's attempts to 'prettify' the apartment. In Scene 10 when he shouts about the changes she has made to turn 'the place into a 'Queen of the Nile'.

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Active Learning Task

Fill in the table to track the development of conflict in the play.

Remember, conflict means an obstacle that has an impact on Blanche.

Scene	Time	Conflict Track
1	Early in May	
2	The following day	
3	The same day – evening	
4	The following day	
5	Some time after	
6	The same evening	
7	15 th September	
8	15 th September	
9	15 th September	
10	15 th September	
11	October	

Language

The dialogue Williams gives to his characters is significant not only for the information it reveals about the characters and their relationships with others.

One of the most striking aspects of the play is the way class divisions are immediately apparent through speech. Blanche, as an educated woman from the genteel South, has a particular idiolect. Her former career as an English teacher and the manner in which she teeters on the edge of hysteria add a characteristic flavour to her speech. She uses cultural allusions ranging from Poe and *La Dame Aux Camellias*, among others. Her lexis is usually elevated and she draws on rhetorical devices such as repetition for effect and figurative language. In her speech, with euphemisms often employed to discuss difficult topics: unmarried men and women who have premarital sex are 'lost'.

Stanley's speech is peppered with vulgarisms such as 'you gonna shack up here', 'ain't' and slang terms such as 'cut the re-bop'. He tells Blanche he once went out and presents his sexual objectification of women. In contrast, Blanche talks about her relationship in a romantic term.

The contrast between Stanley's speech and his wife's underlines their different class backgrounds. Stella may be grammatically correct, but that does not mean she talks exactly like her sister. She tends to be theatrical and overblown, Stella's is usually matter-of-fact.

Mitch has a similar sociolect to Stanley, as you would expect from two men who fought together in the war, live near each other and now work in the same factory and mix in the same social circles. However, where Stanley has made little effort to converge with his wife's way of speaking, Mitch tries to speak more like Blanche; for example, using elaborate grammatical constructions such as 'are you not?' and more elevated lexis such as 'perspire' rather than the vernacular 'sweat'.

Surprisingly, Stanley and Blanche both use figurative language throughout the play and in this way, Williams is underlining there are similarities between the two. Stanley may not have Blanche's education, but has the ability to use language descriptively.

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Key Themes

Sex and Desire

Sex is a central theme in the play. Rather than the streetcar unable to alter its direction, sex is seen as an unstoppable force. Blanche and Stella both admit to having 'ridden on that streetcar' (a euphemism for desire); however, in Blanche's case, it has led to her downfall. Stella has married the object of her desires and has sacrificed the more elevated aspects of her upbringing in order to marry Stanley. He is vulgar, uncouth and rough, but Stella's infatuation for him overrides this and we see this clearly in how she physically assaults her before they spend the night together. At the end of the play, in the asylum Stanley 'kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of [Stella's] blouse'.

Sex and Violence

Sex and violence are often linked in the play. When Stanley physically assaults Stella through sex. She tells Blanche that 'what happens' between her and Stanley 'in the end is seem-unimportant.' While Stella is in hospital, first Mitch then Stanley decide to have sex with her. We know Blanche has been withholding sex from Mitch in order to gain his affection. When she discovers she's not the 'prim' lady he thought, he feels he deserves 'what I've been getting.' This abortive assault foreshadows the rape episode when Stanley uses sex to punish Stella for her status as king of the household.

Sex is presented as a largely destructive force in the play, particularly for Blanche. It links sex and death with its destinations of 'Desire' and 'Cemeteries'. Allan's guilt are tied up in sex, after she walked in on him with another man. Blanche uses sex to recapture her youth; she also uses it to support herself when she loses her teaching job after an affair with a student. This promiscuity destroys Blanche's reputation in the town and is the cause of her break-up with Mitch. Her mental breakdown occurs after she is forced to leave her home.

Stanley's life revolves around sex. He is depicted as 'the gaudy seed-bearer' and involves him assessing women by 'sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind.' This frustrates him and is a major source of conflict when Blanche's proximity limits his ability to punish Blanche and assert his masculine authority. Mitch also attempts this when he demands the sex he believes he deserves from Blanche in Scene 10.

Class Divisions

'The Kowalskis and the DuBois have different notions' says Stanley in Scene 2, and highlights the divisions between the two families. Blanche tells Mitch the DuBois family is descended from the aristocrats who fled the French Revolution of 1789. The family's history is the Belle Reve, the 'beautiful dream' of the past Blanche has tried desperately to cling to. Stanley, an immigrant, does not have the social pedigree of his wife.

Blanche's economic reliance on Stanley coupled with her snobbery causes Stella to question her superior attitude is a little out of place? Stella has managed to successfully adapt to the traces of her upbringing are evident when she accuses him of 'making a pig of himself'.

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Madness

Blanche's mental breakdown appears to have its roots in her younger years and is deteriorating. She is aware of this, telling her sister 'I'm not well' when she arrives and in Scene 7, Stella tells Stanley that the family had concerns over Blanche's behaviour when she was younger. However, it is clearly the suicide of her husband and the attendant guilt that is at the heart of her mental decline.

Manifestations of Madness

Blanche's mental instability is presented on stage as a retreat from reality, accelerated by the realisation Stanley has revealed the 'truth' of her time in Laurel. The auditory hallucinations of the polka tune and the gunshot have become part of her life to the extent where she can talk about them matter-of-factly to Mitch. In this way, the audience is aware the illusory world is becoming Blanche's reality.

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On the night of her birthday, Blanche starts to lose her grip on reality as she dresses an episode from her youth. Stanley's attack snaps her back into reality, but by then she's tipped over the edge. She hears 'jungle noises' and sounds are distorted. She has which Shep Huntleigh, representing the men who desired her when she was young. When the Matron appears, she becomes feral with fear. We learn that she is to be incarcerated. One believed her 'story' and Stanley has managed to twist this into the evidence of a crime committed.

Death

Death haunts the play. Allan Grey's suicide was the pivotal moment in Blanche's life. She has to move on from it, reliving the sound of the gunshot at stressful moments. Death is a theme in *Reve* where she cared for dying relatives on her own; sex and death are linked together. The motif: the streetcar rattles on its tracks from Desire to Cemeteries. Blanche tells Stanley 'I desire' and this is an explanation for Blanche's promiscuity. In order to feel alive 'the Reaper had put up his tent', Blanche had casual sex with men from the town, soldiers in camp and also one of her students.

Stanley, on the other hand, appears to believe he has cheated death by surviving when many others did not. This adds to his arrogance as he smugly asserts, 'To hold on to life, you got to believe you're lucky.'

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Attitudes and Values

Gender: Masculinity

Williams conveys attitudes towards masculinity in the play through Stanley's attitude. His self-worth is tied up with his belief he is 'king' in his own home and when Blanche appears to threaten him, he responds with aggression and even violence. William as an animal force. He is a 'richly feathered male bird among hens' and his sexual gamble, but only if he is going to win, and uses physical violence when he loses. He is 'the king around here', asserting his dominance through violence. Stella finds the idea of masculinity exciting whereas Blanche finds it frightening.

This version of masculinity is juxtaposed with Allan Grey, Blanche's husband, whose tenderness wasn't a bit like a man's'. He wrote poetry and letters to Blanche and when his homosexuality was discovered, he killed himself. In this way, Williams can be said to be of the Old South, with the New (symbolised by Stanley) prevailing.

Mitch is somewhere between the two. He tries to be the suitor Blanche admires, but when he is disappointed, responds with Stanley's characteristic aggression. William 'tears' the paper lantern down, echoing Stanley 'seizing' the lantern in the final scene. Mitch flees when Blanche rebuffs his advances.

Gender: Women

Sex is also a key factor in the lives of the women presented in the play. Williams conveys the little economic power of their own in post-war America and are economically dependent. Stella, from Stanley and Blanche is 'ashamed' of her status as a 'poor relation' also dependent on Stanley. The prostitute featured in the play echoes the character of the Flamingo. She is desperately seeking a man who will offer her 'protection' and that she would never have considered, had her plan to find a 'millionaire' in Miami not failed.

Blanche is vilified for her promiscuity and yet her partners do not appear to suffer. In America in 1947, a single woman was not expected to have sex and this is why in her relationship with Mitch she refuses to sleep with him, in order to gain his respect. In Blanche's history, he feels cheated. As Blanche has slept with numerous men, Mitch does not have sex with her as well whether she is willing or not.

Race and Nationality

Attitudes to race have changed significantly since Tennessee Williams wrote the play. Audiences may be uncomfortable with some of the language used in the play. That there is an 'easy intermingling of the races'. Blanche and Stella's upbringing and family's fortunes were reliant on slavery, although this is never explicitly stated. When she goes to fetch Stella, Blanche's dismissive 'thanks' indicates that this is an action she would not expect a 'coloured girl' to do. Later, when Blanche is discussing the deaths at Belle Reve, she relives a conversation where a 'coloured girl' could do it. Both these episodes imply Blanche has an ingrained belief that she is superior to those who serve her.

Blanche equally views Stanley as inherently inferior as he is of Polish descent. She mocks him with Stella, who joins her in mocking him, saying he is less 'highbrow' than 'the inferior' derogatory term 'Polack' to describe Stanley, a term he finds highly offensive.

Sexuality

Attitudes to homosexuality are very different in America today than they were in 1947. In the play, Williams conveys this through Blanche's marriage to Allan Grey. She has sex with a woman to 'cure' him but Blanche 'failed him in some mysterious way' and he kills himself. Another man, her use of the word 'disgust', or perhaps the threat she would expose his secret to kill himself. Furthermore, Stella uses 'degenerate' to describe Allan Grey, a term that was used to describe homosexuals at the time.

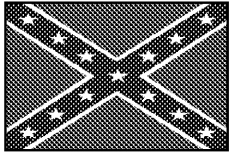
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Historical context

Two wars are important in the play: The American Civil War (1861–1865) and the



The American Civil War was fought between the northern and southern states. Abraham Lincoln, then president, wanted the states to remain united, but slavery proved too difficult to resolve. The northern states argued for the abolition of slavery whereas the southern states argued for the continuation of slavery. Plantations, such as Belle Reve, were part of the southern economy. They grew cotton and relied on slave labour to create their wealth.

As northern opposition to slavery grew stronger, seven southern states (including Mississippi and Louisiana) broke away to form the Confederacy and civil war broke out between the Union (north) and the Confederacy (south). The war ended four years later when the Confederates surrendered and the wealthy Southern way of life was gone. Slavery was abolished in this year but racial segregation continued.⁷

Jim Crow Laws

Although slavery had been abolished, laws governing racial segregation (known as Jim Crow Laws) were passed. Many of these stayed in force until 1975.

In the opening stage directions, Williams notes there is 'easy intermingling of race' in New Orleans, something Blanche (coming from Mississippi) would have found complex. The play shows a place that segregated public places such as streetcars, hotels, restaurants, schools, and playgrounds. Blanche's references to a 'coloured girl' helping with the housework and a 'negro woman' imply inherent racial prejudice.⁸

World War Two

This war is barely referenced in the play, which is surprising considering it was the last major war ended. However, it is clear in terms of Blanche's story, the American Civil War had a greater impact. Perhaps in Stanley's case, it is significant that he is part of a war effort in Europe, far from his Polish, land of his antecedents.

Stanley references the landing in the Gulf of Salerno (Italy) in September 1943 when Allied forces forced the German army to retreat.⁹

Social Changes

Stanley and Mitch fought together in the same army unit and when Stella and Stanley see Stanley in his military uniform. When Blanche sees the picture of Stanley she snobbishly asks about the connotations of class. Stella assures her she wasn't won over because of Stanley's war connections with Mitch to justify delving into Blanche's past.

The war was significant in bringing about social change. As black soldiers and black Americans played a role in the war effort, the segregation laws began to grate with many people and were challenged, leading to the civil rights movement gaining momentum during the war.

'Property' is a word that narrated sugar plantations and exploitation complicated with a few

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⁷ <http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war>

⁸ <http://www.knowla.org/entry/735/>

⁹ <http://www.historynet.com/operation-avalanche-us-navys-4th-beach-battalion-assault-on-salerno>

¹⁰ http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/02/0215_tuskegee.html

Social Change

Following the end of the Confederacy and the abolition of slavery, the Old South began a steady decline. Plantations relied on free labour to be profitable and once this was no longer available, the way of life enjoyed by families such as the DuBois fell into decay. Many audiences have considered the conflict between Blanche and Stanley to be a metaphor for the rise of the New and the fall of the Old South.

Old South

Blanche and the DuBois family are representative of the upper classes during the nineteenth century. Old money and an established family name gave the DuBois significant status in Laurel and Blanche's genteel pretensions and sense of superiority stem from her family background.

As wealthy plantation owners, they would have been firmly entrenched in the values of the Old South and Blanche's mannerisms are indicative of the archetypal Southern Belle. It is significant Shep Huntleigh remains a mysterious figure: he is a myth, a symbol of the extinct Southern Gentleman Blanche dreams will rescue her.

Belle Reve ('beautiful dream'), the family homestead, is equally a beautiful dream of the Old South. However, it has become that: simply a dream. The estate has been nibbled away over generations, reflecting the shrinking fortunes of the Old South until only the house and graveyard remained. By the time Blanche 'washed up' in New Orleans, 'Death had set up camp' at Belle Reve, heralding the end of the Old South.

New South

Stanley can be said to represent the vigour and drive of the New South. His Polish family name pinpoints him as a more recent immigrant and his uncouth and vulgar ways are at odds with the genteel pretensions of the Old South; for example, when he says the men will not stand up when a lady enters the room. The fact Stanley works in a factory is also significant in its echo of the industrialisation of the South and the move from the traditional plantation model. The symbol of the locomotive is significant as it represents modernity; the fast and intrusive changes that the Old South underwent after the American Civil War. The coming of the railways opened the South up to investors and allowed industrialisation to take over from traditional farming.

The rape of Blanche is also significant in this context as in Scene 10 she describes who is aware beauty is transient. When Stanley rapes her, he takes even this away from her to an animal level when she 'wildly scratches' at the Matron. This can be seen as a metaphor for the Old South destroyed by modernity.

The joining of the Kowalski and DuBois families represents the way the South is evolving. Stanley's child becomes the symbol of the next generation in which Old and New coexist. Stanley has made compromises to enable her to move on from Belle Reve. Blanche still uses her old family name, and clings on to her memories of the past like old luggage.

The play ends with Blanche's descent into madness and Stanley's boastful comment. It is clear that in the brutal battle for survival, Stanley and the New South will emerge victorious.

Old South

Old South literature, the pre-Civil War literature, as a time of and genteel plantation

New South

the South, slavery was states began industrial time of huge immigration

Southern Gentleman

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Dramatic Approaches

Non-naturalistic Dramatic Devices

Although the play is realist drama in many way, Williams employed a number of non-naturalistic techniques to convey Blanche's decline. At times, the audience is immersed in Blanche's psychological state through the use of sound effects such as the gunshot and lighting in the projection of 'lurid shapes'. This enables the audience to experience the altered reality Blanche is living in and ensures by the end of the play, our sympathies lie with this broken woman.

Music

The play opens with the sound of the 'blues piano' drifting down from the Four Ds throughout the play. Again, this adds a cinematic quality to the play as the music events on stage.

The piano represents the easy-going, pleasure-seeking attitude of the Quarter, and the other side of this is at the end of Scene 7 when it goes into a 'hectic breakdown' as Blanche as events quickly spiral downwards from this point onwards. The discord and chaos the rape will cause.

The piano contrasts with the quaint Varsouviana, a popular tune from Blanche's youth with Allan's death. We hear the tune as Blanche does, although none of the other characters in Blanche's mind and reinforces for us that this is Blanche's story. The polka tune experiences moments of extreme emotional stress and acts as a flashback to the life forever.

Extended Stage Directions

Tennessee Williams opens the play with lyrical prose that describes the scene in detail that the audience is not aware of. For example, he describes the 'redolences' on the air and the 'warm breeze' from the distant 'river warehouses'. None of these can be shown on stage, but we need to have a set of instructions for the director and actors involved in a performance of the play to create the atmosphere for the play even though the specific descriptions cannot be shown.

The Set

All the action of the play takes place in the Kowalskis' apartment, although other scenes are shown throughout. In Scene 10, the back walls of the apartment 'become transparent' to be visible to the audience. This is significant because it causes a dip in the unbearable audience time to catch their breath. The scene depicted also has symbolic value. It shows a prostitute who has just robbed a drunken customer as a policeman. The themes of alcohol, sex, money and illegal activity linked in much the same way as the play. This foreshadows Blanche's fate as Stanley takes his 'payment' for Blanche's silence.

Using one set and having no interval adds to the sense of claustrophobia in the play. Blanche's fate. Like the streetcar, it implies Blanche's life is set on a predetermined path where 'her future's all mapped out for her'.

Sound

Williams uses the sound of the locomotive in the play as a staging device. The apartment is located on the 'L & N tracks'. In Scene 4, two trains pass as Blanche and Stella discuss Stanley. On a practical level, the trains mask the sound of Stanley's entrance. The locomotive is associated with Stanley and represents the industrialisation of the New South and the influx of 'outsiders' after the American Civil War.

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Wider Reading




Fiction

-  *Gone With The Wind* – Margaret Mitchell
-  *As I Lay Dying* – William Faulkner
-  *The Color Purple* – Alice Walker
-  *The Yellow Wallpaper* – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
-  *Property* – Valerie Martin
-  *12 Years a Slave* – Solomon Northrup
-  *Beloved* – Toni Morrison
-  *All my Sons* – Arthur Miller
-  *A Doll's House* – Henrik Ibsen
-  *The Great Gatsby* – F Scott Fitzgerald

By Tennessee Williams

-  *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
-  *Sweet Bird of Youth*
-  *The Glass Menagerie*
-  *Suddenly Last Summer*
-  *The Rose Tattoo*
-  *Memoirs*

Critical Works

-  A Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams – Alycia Smith-Howard (Checkmate Press)
-  Reality and Illusion in *A Streetcar Named Desire* – Ilona Sontag (GRIN Verlag)
-  The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams – Edited by Matthew R. Guterl (Cambridge University Press)

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Glossary

Allusion	A reference to another text within a text
Antagonist	A character who complicates the main character's journey
Catastrophe	The climax of a tragedy; the moment when the hero's fate is sealed
Catharsis	The release of tension following the catastrophe
Convergence	Adapting your own speech to talk like the characters in a text
Costume	The clothes the characters wear, often symbolic
Dialogue	The speech between two or more characters
Dramatic irony	When the audience knows information a character does not
Elevated lexis	Sophisticated language
Euphemism	A softening word, a milder tone for something harsh
Figurative language	Hyperbole, simile, metaphor; when words are used to create a picture
Foil	Contrasting character to highlight qualities of the main character
Foreshadowing	Hinting at what will happen later
Genre	Form; the type of drama, e.g. tragedy, comedy
Gesture	A movement made by a character on stage
Imperative	A command, e.g. 'Don't hang back with this'
Juxtapose	Place two scenes/characters side by side to compare/contrast
Monologue	An extended speech by a single character
Motif	A repeated symbol; can be a word or an object
Paradox	Anything that appears to contradict itself
Prop	An object onstage, e.g. the cigarette case
Protagonist	The main character
Symbol	Something that represents something else
Tragic flaw	The character defect that causes the hero's downfall
Vernacular	Ordinary, everyday speech
Vulgar lexis	Crude speech

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Suggested Answers

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Scene 1 Activities: Indicative Content

Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genuine affection Blanche is dominant and bossy, treats Stella as a child Stella doesn't like it but stays quiet Stella stays quiet as Blanche talks, a childhood custom They haven't seen each other for a while 	Active Learning Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belle Reve was a place of wealth and country New Orleans vibrant, mixing, poverty in the city, hectic life Blanche is not going to stay 																
Scene 1 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> New Orleans 632 Elysian Fields Belle Reve Mississippi Poland 	Active Learning Task <table> <thead> <tr> <th>Theme</th><th>Quote</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Alcohol</td><td>'Blue moon'</td></tr> <tr> <td>Death</td><td>'You won't see me again'</td></tr> <tr> <td>Food</td><td>'Red hot'</td></tr> <tr> <td>Gambling</td><td>'Four deuces'</td></tr> <tr> <td>Money</td><td>'Don't worry, I'll clip joint'</td></tr> <tr> <td>Revenge</td><td>'She says she's got his dog'</td></tr> <tr> <td>Sex</td><td>'I've got a plan'</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Theme	Quote	Alcohol	'Blue moon'	Death	'You won't see me again'	Food	'Red hot'	Gambling	'Four deuces'	Money	'Don't worry, I'll clip joint'	Revenge	'She says she's got his dog'	Sex	'I've got a plan'
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Extended Essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly defensive. Impassioned and hysterical indicates importance to Blanche Had a drink, a long journey, the shock of seeing the Quarter adds to hysteria Lyrical speech: uses figurative language throughout Paints Blanche as the victim of circumstance / Accusatory tone, blaming Stella Links sex, money and death Almost seems prepared, as though she's been planning this on the journey 																	

Scene 2 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 2 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Belle Reve has been lost A husband owns his wife's property Clothes Letters from her husband She's having a baby 	Active Learning Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tone 'ominously' Physical, animalistic Violent 'pulls' 'jerks' Not refined 'sits on the edge of the bed'
Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> His death was the catalyst for Blanche's downward spiral; prepares us for his centrality to the plot Makes an early connection between sex, violence and death Roots of Blanche's fragile mental state 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A man's reputation A man could drink A man had more control over marriage Men weren't usually the ones to be seduced A promiscuous man would be more respected in society A man having an affair would be more respected
Extended Essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlights class and social differences in lexical and grammatical choices Both use figurative language – indicates similar intellect and thought process Blanche uses infantilising term and elevated lexis to gain power, Stanley uses sarcasm Both use sarcasm Blanche's job as a teacher has had an impact on her language Stanley was a soldier and worked with men – less refined company and professional 	

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Scene 3 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 3 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He lives with his mother 2. At the same factory as Stanley 3. A poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning 4. The radio 5. It shouldn't be played in a house with women 	Active Learning Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female characters in shades, e.g. Blanche • Male characters in primary colours (primitive) • Cinematic quality • Primary colours, e.g. red • Women paler, men darker • Forced in to the house • Red dressing gown • Blanche and Stanley 														
Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blanche is looking for a husband • She projects an image of herself that is not entirely accurate, embellishing some truths and omitting others • She is very flirtatious and very practised at this • Mitch is bemused but interested, implies he's not used to attracting women's attention • Meeting by the toilet is not very romantic! • Blanche may have a happy ending with Mitch, but they don't seem to have a lot in common 	Active Learning Task <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Theme</th><th>Quote/Reference</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Alcohol</td><td>Whisky</td></tr> <tr> <td>Death</td><td>'I'll be alone (his mother)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Gambling</td><td>The poker</td></tr> <tr> <td>Money</td><td>He'll depend on a piggy bank</td></tr> <tr> <td>Revenge</td><td>'I hope to</td></tr> <tr> <td>Sex</td><td>The anecdote</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Theme	Quote/Reference	Alcohol	Whisky	Death	'I'll be alone (his mother)	Gambling	The poker	Money	He'll depend on a piggy bank	Revenge	'I hope to	Sex	The anecdote
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Revenge	'I hope to														
Sex	The anecdote														
Extended Essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convergence: Mitch adapts his speech to try to fit Blanche's • Location is unromantic, does not fit with Blanche's notions of love • Blanche uses a cigarette as a prop to get Mitch in close • Blanche is wearing the 'scarlet woman' dressing gown of the seductress • She pretends to be unable to read the inscription so Mitch leans in closer • Blanche uses elevated lexis and literary allusion; figurative language in contrast to Stanley's dialogue • Blanche is in control here and she lies from the beginning, covering up her motives • Blanche sets the agenda using the word 'love' 															

Scene 4 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 4 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A comic book 2. Stanley's red pyjamas 3. Smashed them 4. Shep Huntleigh 5. Listening in 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both feel uncomfortable discussing sex and use euphemisms • They both recognise sexual attraction is a driving force • Stella is able to overlook Stanley's less refined qualities and his animalistic side of him • Blanche thinks men should be refined and cultured, not just for an affair but not as a husband • Both rely on men economically
Extended Essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stella clearly loves her husband and it is insensitive of Blanche to criticise him • Blanche is shocked to find her sister living in a place that is so far removed from her own world, so incomprehensible that Stella could be happy. • Blanche is being very ungrateful. Her sister and Stanley have taken her in and she has strict ideas about other people's manners but does not appear to always apply them • Stanley and his friends have a camaraderie and affection. However, Stanley bullies Stella by making disparaging remarks about him and mocking him. • Stanley has created a life he is happy with and it is one Blanche considers beneath her • Stanley does seem unrefined, but his true brutality does not emerge until much later • He is vulgar and has few table manners and his casual violence is animalistic. 	

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Scene 5 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 5 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shep Huntlegih 2. Because it represents the virgin 3. From work 4. The hotel flamingo 5. Flowers 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple curiosity • A desire for revenge • A suspicion Blanche • To verify the facts
Active Learning Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice: breathlessly / note of fear / answers carefully • Actions: dabs her face with the handkerchief / closes her eyes / hand trembles • Words are at odds with the actions which betray her; audiences knows Stanley has uncovered the truth 	Active Learning Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The past is catching up • She may be worried because she is ashamed of her past • Playwright is encouraged by Blanche and her situation • Deepest fear: losing her home completely tied up
Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We see Blanche uses cigarettes to flirt with Stanley (p. 24) and Mitch (p. 37) • The silver cigarette case is significant and it is this prop that first piques Blanche's interest in Mitch (pp. 37-38) • Women who smoked were often characterised as femme fatales • It's a technique Blanche uses to get men physically close to her 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That she finds young men attractive because they remind her of her happiest times • She fears getting old and alone • She is a victim of her past; she arrives and she is perceived as a stolen kiss; that she is not (similarity to Stanley's attitude about her predilection)

Scene 6 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 6 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lake Pontchartrain 2. Blanche discouraged Mitch's advances 3. From the war 4. He shot himself 5. Could it be – you and me Blanche? 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respectability as a goal • Financial stability • A secure home • A steady husband • An escape from Stanley • A rest from worry
Active Learning Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Williams implies Allan married Blanche in the hope sex with a woman would 'cure' his homosexuality • Williams implies Blanche found her husband in bed with another man – sex broke up their marriage • Allan killed himself because Blanche said this caused her 'disgust' – sex is at the root of Allan's death and Blanche's guilt • There is a hint the marriage was unconsummated – perhaps Blanche blames herself for not being attractive enough • She loved her husband passionately and has since constantly sought to feel that love again • She felt surrounded by death, sex is a reminder she is alive 	Extended Essay Question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The loss of Belle Reve and her past status and the impact on Blanche • Blanche's attitude towards the stereotype of the Southern woman; it doesn't fit in the modern world, she is out of place • Blanche's upbringing in the old world, she is a relic of a bygone era • The polka music – a reminder of Allan's death • Stanley's dislike of her and how he rakes up her recent past and her security with Mitch • Her brief marriage and how it has shaped her life since then • Death – surrounded by death metaphorically 'dies' again

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Scene 7 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 7 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 25 The boy's father contacted them A bus ticket back to Laurel A hot bath and a cold drink You're lying! Something has! 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He often seems to bully M the poker games, implying He doesn't discuss with S news to Mitch, implying him He could have kept Mitch His motive appears to be protecting his friend Perhaps he wants Blanche is nearby with Mitch, she marriage; he wants Stella
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Scene 8 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 8 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Dusk Throws his plate on the floor A pair of queens 27 Early thirties 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humiliation No chance of finding a hus Reputation has been des Only option would be to
Active Learning Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puts himself and his needs first Doesn't want to share Stella with Blanche Stella goes along with it Sex is a fundamental part of their relationship; with Blanche gone and Stella's 	

Scene 9 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 9 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Work clothes Southern comfort – it's her downfall, not her comfort Wildcat Young soldiers Marry her 	Active Learning Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look back at the comedic page 57. When Eunice sho Houses in the Quarter we overcrowded. There was that the people of New Or would be far more effecti 'Help' or 'Rape'.
Extended Essay Task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colour imagery – pastel colours and white imply delicacy, scarlet implies sexu Blanche's nature between the intellectual and the physical The moth – attracted to what may be destructive The Mexican Woman – symbol of death / the repetition of the past / no escape The Varsouviana – Allan's death / contrast with the jazz piano implies progres The streetcar – sexuality and fate Bathing – ritual cleansing The paper lantern – illusion masking reality / fear of growing old 	

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Scene 10 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 10 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He knows where he is 2. Shep Huntleigh 3. Interfere with Blanche 4. A broken beer bottle 5. Tiger 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubly cruel of Stanley to have his birthday • With every year, Blanche loses her happiest time • Blanche's fear of a
Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the costume notes, Williams describes the silver shoes as 'scuffed'; the satin and the tiara as 'rhinestone'. All signify an illusion that has been dirtied in some way, used and soiled by the men in her life. • Stanley's red silk pyjamas have echoes of Blanche's 'wrapper', indicating sexual possession. Last time we saw these was in Scene 4 after his night alone with Stella. Indicate sexual possessions. 	

Scene 11 Activities: Indicative Content

Scene 11 Quick Quiz <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Packing Blanche's things 2. Playing cards 3. The paper lantern 4. Miss Dubois 5. I have always depended on the kindness of strangers 	Debate Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shep Huntleigh was a man who was from a good background but was discovered at Christmas • He represents everything that is wrong with the marital status symbol • He also represents the Southern gentleman on stage reinforced by the fact that a man no longer exists
Active Learning Task <p>How do we know Stanley and Stella have had a son? In what ways could the baby's presence reinforce Stanley's character?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a blue blanket • Reinforces Stanley has 'won'. The son bears his name and is a symbol of New America • Stanley values men above women • Stanley only said he'd wave his pyjamas round if he had a son / a son reinforces Stanley's way a daughter would not 	

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Characters – Indicative Content

Debate Prompt

- Attitudes to sex / flirting
- Alcohol
- Bathroom
- Superiority/power
- Relationship with Stella
- Lies
- Education
- Intelligence

Relationships –

Debate Prompt

- Stella stays at home and goes out to work
- Stella cooks the meals
- Stanley becomes dependent on her
- Ultimately, Stella is the one who saves Stanley and not her sister

Characters – Indicative Content

Extended Essay Question

- Women financially dependent
- A social expectation
- Sex outside marriage frowned on for women
- Men – domestic duties fall to women
- Men's lives still independent despite marriage
- Not necessarily 'unhappy'; Stella seems happy and Blanche's marriage was atypical

Conflict – Indicative Content

Active Learning Task

Scene	Time	Conflict Trigger
1	Early in May	Has to leave Laurel
2	The following day	Flirts/argues with Stanley
3	The same day – evening	Poker night – witnesses Stanley's violence
4	The following day	Blanche is overheard making disparaging remarks
5	Some time after	Stanley hints he has uncovered secrets
6	The same evening	Kisses the young man; Mitch and Blanche are separated from their loneliness
7	15 th September	Stanley has told Mitch the gossip from the past
8	15 th September	Stanley gives Blanche the bus ticket
9	15 th September	Mitch arrives and drunkenly attacks Stanley
10	15 th September	Stanley rapes Blanche
11	October	Stella has not believed Blanche and Stanley