Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Notes on Cultural Context and Author Information**

“A Streetcar Named Desire” *by Tennessee Williams*  
  
**I.** According to the author, this play is about “the ravishment of the tender, the sensitive, the delicate, by the savage and brutal forces of modern society.” Why does Williams describe the play this way? Explain what this quote means and HOW could it still apply to our society today? Write one paragraph.

Fill in the following based on the Power Point:

**II. Tennessee Williams**

**Born** March 26, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Columbus, Mississippi

**Died** February 24, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ New York City

**Occupation** Playwright

**Genre** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Influences** Anton Chekhov, D. H. Lawrence, August Strindberg, Hart Crane

**Background** He lived in New Orleans from 1938, a bohemian place where all manner of behaviour was tolerated, if not encouraged. It was here that he was inspired to create *Streetcar*. It is said that he saw, on the streets of this area, two streetcars. One was named “Desire” and the other “Cemetery” – which he thought was somehow symbolic of life itself.

Consider the two quotes below:

* “*I draw every character out of my very multiple split personality. My heroines always express the climate of my interior world at the time in which those characters were created.”*
* From an early age, Williams used writing as *“an escape from a world of reality in which [he] felt acutely uncomfortable”.*

**What do these tell us about the kind of person he was? Write your one paragraph response in the space below.**

**III. Southern Writers**

* As a Southerner, he was more affected by the events of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (1861 – 1865) than \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Following their defeat by the Northern states, the South suffered economically for decades during and after the Civil War. However, this air of decaying grandeur added to the romantic appeal for many writers, including Williams.
* Take a second to picture what this “decaying grandeur” and “fallen gentry” of the American South would look like. What images come to mind? Write OR DRAW your response in the space below.
* Tennessee Williams saw the America South as a broken and damaged place in which the decay was somehow charming. He said:

*“I write out of love for the South … once a way of life that I am just able to remember – not a society based on money … I write about the South because I think the war between romanticism and the hostility to it is very sharp there*.”

* All of the Southern writers of his time seemed to have vivid imaginations which were often bizarre and grotesque – a genre called Southern Gothic (think *American Horror Story*).

* The roots of this literature lay perhaps in the fact that the writers knew that they were part of a dying culture – where the “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” (as in *Gone with the Wind*) were actually founded on an economy based on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* The author’s life was characterized by alcoholism, drug abuse, depression from closeted sexuality, a controlling father, and a struggle for identity.
* Williams once said of his writing:

*“I have always been more interested in creating a character that contains something crippled. I think nearly all of us have some kind of defect, anyway, and I suppose I have found it easier to identify with the characters who verge upon hysteria, who were frightened of life, who were desperate to reach out to another person.”*

**IV. Themes of the Play:**

**Are these themes still relevant today? Explain in the line below each theme:**

* American “Masculinity” vs. “Femininity” and Changing Roles of Women
* Judgement of those in other “social classes”
* Stigma surrounding \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Tradition vs. progressivism in society
* Living with a sense of harsh realism vs. depending on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**V. Key Techniques**

* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ features (music, lighting used to represent the workings of the protagonist’s inner mind) allow the audience to experience the psychic condition of the central character.
* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_: Williams structures *Streetcar* using a vast array of imagery arranged in patterns of\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Look for the following symbols as you read (take notes):

* Names,
* The streetcars named “Desire,” “Cemetery,” and Elysian Fields;
* Blanche’s bathing;
* paper lanterns;
* “Shep Huntleigh;”
* the old flower vendor’s cry;
* light and darkness;
* Stella’s baby

**What’s In a Name?**

*Tennessee Williams chooses names carefully in his plays to suggest certain symbolic or representative meanings. For each of the names below, answer the questions that follow, paying attention to the connotation of these characters’ names. Don’t overthink things – just go with your gut. You may need to look up some of the meanings of names drawn from other languages.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name: Blanche DuBois** | **Name: Stanley Kowalski** |
| What does “blanche” mean in French?  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Based on literature from past years, what connotations might be associated with this name? What can you assume about a character with this name? | From which ethnic group is the last name “Kowalski”?  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  What connotations are associated with this name? In other words, what are the assumed traits of someone with this name |
| **Name: Stella DuBois-Kowalski** | **Name: Belle Reve** |
| “Stella” is the English equivalent of the French name “Estelle,” meaning “star.” What could this information suggest about this character? | What does this name translate to in French? How might that translation be significant? |