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| |  | | --- | | ***A Streetcar Named Desire*** | | **Tennessee Williams** |   **Blance**: What you are talking about is desire - just brutal Desire. The name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another.  [**Stella**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001375/): Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar?  **Blanche:** It brought me here. Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be.  “And so it was I entered the broken world….”  "New Orleans isn't like other cities."  “…But not for long to hold each desperate choice.”  “They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries….”  “You’re all I got in the world, and you’re not glad to see me!”  “I was so exhausted by all I’d been through my nerves broke.”  I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action. | **http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcarpic.png** |
| **Deliberate cruelty is unforgivable, and the one thing of which I have never,ever been guilty of.**  I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic. I try to give that to people. I do misrepresent things. I don't tell truths. I tell what ought to be truth.  **After all, a woman's charm is 50% illusion.**  http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/tennesseewilliams.jpg | |
| Tennessee Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26,1914, in Columbus, Mississippi, the son of Cornelius Coffin Williams and Edwina Dakin. The nickname Tennessee was not acquired until he was grown and attending college. Williams had an elder sister, Rose, who was later committed to a mental institution, and a younger brother, Walter Dakin. Because their father often worked away from home, Williams and his siblings were particularly close to their mother, a Southern belle and daughter of an Episcopal minister who enjoyed her status as a pillar of town society.  In 1918 the Williams family moved to St Louis. As Cornelius began to drink heavily and became increasingly moody, Edwina voiced her resentment at losing both her place in society and her close ties with her parents. In response to this unhappiness, and to the emotional pain of being bullied by children in the neighborhood, Williams began to read books and write his own stories; years later, in the foreword to Sweet Bird of Youth he commented that writing was "an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge."  Beginning in 1929 Williams studied at the University of Missouri at Columbia, at Washington University in St Louis, and at the University of Iowa, meanwhile making a name for himself as a writer. Although this period was a creative one, and one in which his personal life settled down (he seems to have come to terms with his homosexuality at this point), there were also difficult times to endure. In response to his sister Rose's extreme mental instability, Edwina Williams consented to having a pre-frontal lobotomy performed on Rose, from which the young woman emerged severely changed.  Williams' emergence as a major new force in American theater occurred with the debut performance of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1944. He soon moved to New Orleans, the city which later figured strongly in *A Streetcar Named Desire,* and spent time in Europe and in Florida, where he bought a house. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was* the playwright's next major commercial success in 1955 but by this time Williams' physical health was deteriorating and he was relying increasingly on alcohol and drugs. Numerous other plays followed, some of them successful, but his personal life remained in turmoil. In fits of paranoia, he quarreled with his agent, Audrey Wood, and his lover Frank Merlo. In 1966 his brother Dakin was contacted when Williams' health was particularly poor, and during the time he spent with Dakin he converted to Roman Catholicism. In the following years several unsuccessful plays were written and performed, and several of his earlier, acclaimed plays were revived. In 1983, after a spell of depression, Williams traveled to Sicily, remaining only a few days before returning to New York, where he died during the night of February 24 in the Elysee Hotel after choking on a barbiturate. | |
| **http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcarimage.png**  **Historical Context**  Many of the major themes of *A Streetcar Named Desire* are embodied in the history and culture of New Orleans. The lively setting of the French Quarter, with its streetcars, bars, entertainment, and jazz and blues music, provides a rich background for the emotional events of the play; the setting also draws symbolic attention to changes which were taking place in American society, especially in the South during the post-World war II years.  On a more general level, the play represents the decline of the aristocratic families traditionally associated with the South. These once-influential families had lost their historical importance when the South's agricultural base was unable to compete with the new industrialization. The region's agrarian [farming] economy, which had been in decline since the Confederate defeat in the Civil War, suffered further setbacks after the First World War. A labor shortage hindered Southern agriculture when large numbers of male laborers were absorbed by the military or defense-based industries. Many landowners, faced with large areas of land and no one to work on it, moved to urban areas. With the increasing industrialization that followed during the 1920s through the 1940s, the structure of the work force evolved more radically yet, incorporating large numbers of women, immigrants, and blacks. Women gained the right to vote in 1920 and the old Southern tradition of an agrarian family aristocracy ruled by men started to come to an end. | |
| **http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetbook.jpg**  **A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams**  The play was first produced in New York and Boston in 1947. A film version directed by Elia Kazan followed in 1951.  Set in New Orleans, Louisiana shortly after World War II, the play explores the plight of impoverished Southern gentry and the rapid changes of Southern society in the industrial age.  The protagonist, Blanche DuBois, has come to visit her sister, Stella, who lives in a shabby neighborhood in New Orleans near the railroad tracks. Blanche is immediately at odds with this backdrop, being at once judgmental of Stella's blue-collar, rough and tumble husband, while simultaneously being at the mercy of his hospitality.  **Setting**  **New Orleans, Louisiana:** Stella and Stanley Kowalski live in a poor neighborhood in New Orleans between the L&N railroad tracks near a bowling alley and jazz bar. They live in a two-room apartment that is part of a two-family house. The apartment is quite small and very cramped with three adults sharing the space. Additionally, the upstairs neighbors, Eunice and Steve, can often be heard fighting through the thin walls.  http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/settinghouse.png  Blanche and Stella grew up in a far different environment. They were the last members of the DuBois family to be raised in their ancestral home, an old plantation house in Laurel, Mississippi. The DuBois family was part of the dying generation of Southern gentility; these once important families began to lose their place in society after the Civil War as agriculture [farming] was overtaken by modern industrialization. The DuBois family sold off parcels of land until they were left with just the once majestic plantation house. Blanche, a widow and school teacher, did her best to keep Belle Reve, but eventually she lost the house.  Keep in mind the contrast between these two settigns. If Belle Reve is roughly French for "a beautiful dream" then the Kowalski's residence on Elysian Fields is as far from the mythical Greek heaven as possible.  http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/plantation2.png | |
| **Character****: Blanche DuBois**   |  | | --- | | * Age: 30 * Home Town: Laurel, Mississippi * Marital Status: widow (married at 16) * Occupation: School teacher / English | | Blanche is a complicated and complex character with strong but often contradictory desires. She has a need for men, and yet a fear of men. She has a facade of innocence, yet her past belies this purity. She often appears strong and fierce, yet she is constantly on the verge of a nervous breakdown.  She has a weakness for alcohol and a tendency toward promiscuity, yet she also attempts to hang onto the image of the Southern Belle. She is intensely self-centered, constantly saying things that offend her hosts. She is quite the inconsiderate and unforthcoming houseguest.  She is intelligent, but prefers to view the world though illusion rather than reality. She prefers shadow to light, magic and illusion to the truth. She attempts to live in the world that she has created inside of her head, rather than the harsher and more difficult realities of her current situation. The physical representations of this in the play come in the form of the paper lantern and her avoidance of bright light. | | | |
| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   **Vocabulary**   1. **Elysian Fields** were the final resting place of the blessed chosen by the gods 2. **Tragedies** evoke the disillusionment and agony of life. Tragic protagonists are destroyed by their own self-destructive tendencies, or by external forces over which they have no control—nature, rivals, society, war, poverty, illness. Their downfall and death often seem predestined. 3. **Flat** is another term for an apartment. 4. **Portiere** is a curtain hanging across a doorway. 5. **Bohemian** is a person living an unconventional life, often an artist or writer.   **Study Guide Questions, Scene One**   1. When we first meet Blanche DuBois, she has traveled to see her sister Stella. She took streetcars named Desire and Cemeteries to arrive at her sister’s apartment. What might these names represent? 2. Describe Blanche’s appearance when she first emerges in the play. Be specific and detailed. What might her clothing represent? How well does she fit into her surroundings? What inferences might you make about her character? 3. Describe Stanley’s appearance when he first enters the play. Be specific and detailed. What does the package he is holding represent? How does his behavior give an insight into his character? What inferences might you make about Stanley Kowalski. 4. Blanche goes into Stella’s apartment to wait for her to come home. What does she do while she is waiting? 5. What does Belle Reve mean? What does it refer to in the play? 6. At the end of Scene One, what music “rises up, faint in the distance”? How does this effect the mood of the scene? What other sound effects has Williams’ included in the first scene? What moods did these sound effects evoke? 7. How does Blanche react to Stella’s living situation? Why might this set a negative tone for her visit? 8. When did Stella meet Stanley? How have their circumstances changed since that time? 9. What happened to Belle Reve? Why? 10. Near the end of Scene One, what do we learn about Blanche’s husband?   **Scene Two**   1. What is Stanley’s reaction at the news that Belle Reve has been lost? 2. What is Blanche doing while Stanley and Stella discuss Belle Reve? 3. What does Stanley think that Blanche has done with the money he believes she made from selling Belle Reve? 4. What does Stanley tell Blanche about Stella as they are going through her business papers? 5. How does Blanche describe a woman’s charm? 6. What does Stanley discover in Blanche’s trunk that she doesn’t want him to touch? 7. What news does Stanley reveal to Blanche about Stella?   **Scene Three**  1. Where are Stella and Blanche going while the men play poker?  2. Why is Mitch preoccupied during the poker game?  3. Whom does Stella introduce Blanche to? What does she say about him?  4. What lie does Blanche tell Mitch about herself? Why?  5. Who gave Mitch his silver cigarette case? What is the inscription on it?  6. When Stanley asks Blanche to turn off the radio and she does not comply, what does he do?  7. Why doesn’t Blanche like bright lights?  8. What happens between Stella and Stanley that ends the poker game?  9. What kind of relationship do Stella and Stanley have?  10. Why is the paper lantern so important to Blanche?  11. Complete the Venn Diagram comparing Blanche and Stanley.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Stanley** | **Both** | **Blanche** |   http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcar_clip_image001.gif  12. Complete the Venn Diagram comparing Mitch and Stanley.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Stanley** | **Both** | **Mitch** |   http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcar_clip_image001.gif  **Scene Four**   1. What did Stanley do on his wedding night? How did Stella say she reacted? What does this reveal about each of their characters? 2. Who is Shep Huntleigh? How does Blanche know him? 3. Blanche is writing a letter to Shep Huntleigh. Why does she not tell him the truth of her situation? 4. What idea does Blanche have to escape New Orleans with Stella? Is this idea feasible? 5. When Blanche and Stella are discussing Stanley, his entrance to the apartment is washed out by a passing train. What does he hear Blanche say about him?   **Scene Five**   1. Blanche discusses astrological signs. What sign does she think Stanley was born under and why? What sign does she say she was born under? What does it mean? 2. Seemingly out of the blue, Stanley asks Blanche if she knows someone named Shaw. He says that Shaw knew Blanche from Laurel, but must have mixed her up with someone else who partied at the Hotel Flamingo. What is Blanche’s response? 3. Who is coming over to see Blanche on this night? Why is this important to Blanche? 4. After Stella and Stanley leave, a young man comes to the door collecting money for the local newspaper, *The Evening Star*. What does Blanche do to him? What does this scene reveal about her character? 5. Why does Blanche flirt with the newspaper boy?   **Scene Six**   1. Blanche and Mitch discuss Stanley. Blanche asks Mitch if Stanley talks much about her and explains how horrid he is making her life there with them. How does Mitch respond? 2. At the end of the scene, Blanche is confiding in Mitch by telling him the story of how her husband died. How did he die? What events preceded his death? 3. Why do you think Blanche drinks? [Don’t say she’s an alcoholic. Dig deeper.] 4. Where and what kind of music is mentioned in scenes four, five, and six?     **Scene Seven**   1. It is now mid-September and Blanche’s birthday. Stella has prepared a party for her. Stanley lets Stella know that he has learned some things about Blanche. What does he reveal about Blanche? 2. During the talk between Stanley and Stella, Blanche is in the tub singing. What does she sing about? What larger significance in the novel might these lyrics have? 3. What has Stanley bought for Blanche? 4. Who is supposed to come over for Blanche’s birthday? Why does Stanley say this person won’t be coming? What significance might this have for Blanche’s future?   **Scene Eight**   1. Blanche is stood up. They sit talking at the table and Stanley gets angry at Stella for telling him his face and fingers are disgustingly greasy. What does he do in response? 2. According to Stanley, how has Blanche acted as a catalyst and changed his relationship with Stella? 3. What happens at the end of scene eight?   **Scene Nine**   1. Who stops by unexpectedly to see Blanche? 2. What does Blanche say about reality in this scene? What does that reveal about her character? What things that Blanche has done and said earlier in the play can you relate this to? 3. What does Blanche admit happened after her husband’s death? Why did she say she did this? 4. Why does Mitch say he won’t marry Blanche now? 5. Why does Blanche scream “fire” at the end of the scene? [Consider why she yells “fire” and not something else.] What effect does it have? 6. What is the symbolic meaning of the Mexican woman selling flowers for the dead at the end of the scene? 7. Why does Mitch rip the paper lantern off the light bulb? What does this symbolize?   **Scene Ten**   1. Stanley comes home from the hospital. Blanche has been drinking fairly steadily since Mitch left. Who does she tell Stanley she heard from? What invitation does she say he extended? 2. Blanche tells Stanley that Mitch came to see her that night. What does she tell him the reason was? 3. What happens at the end of scene ten?   **Scene Eleven**   1. Several weeks have passed and Stella is packing Blanche’s things. Where does Blanche think she is going? Where is she actually going? 2. Why did Stella agree to send Blanche away? 3. If you were Stella, a poor woman with an infant, would you do the same thing? Fully explain your answer.   **Directions:** As you read, consider each of the following themes as they emerge in the play. Write down how you think each theme works in the play. Why is it a theme? What evidence from the play supports the theme? What lesson is the reader intended to learn? Think about what other themes are also emerging.  **Theme #1-** Fantasy versus Reality  **Theme #2-** Woman’s Dependence on Man  **Theme #3-** Social Class Conflict | |
| **Literature Journal**  For each of the eleven scenes you will be expected to write a journal entry. Each scene entry is worth 20 points for a total of 220 points. This will have a significant impact on your journal grade. The following are the requirements for the journal:   1. Create a relevant title for each entry and include the scene number. (2 points) 2. Write a five sentence scene summary. (4 points) 3. For each scene choose a *different* character to focus on.    1. Name the character.    2. Choose a quote from the scene that you think best represents the character. (3)    3. Explain why you chose that quote.    4. Describe his/her best and worst qualities. (2)    5. In one paragraph describe the character’s role in the novel. (2) 4. For each scene choose one meaningful quote, and then describe its significance in the play. (3) 5. For each chapter note at least two sightings of one or more of the following symbols: strong light / bare light bulb, paper lantern / shadow, white clothing, package of meat, bathing, music (polka, jazz, Paper Moon), moth / butterflies. (2) 6. Explain the significance of each symbol. (2) | |
| **Tracking the Symbolism in A Streetcar Named Desire**  **Symbolism** is the use of an object, a person, a place, or an experience that represents something else, usually something abstract. A symbol may have more than one meaning, or its meaning may change from the beginning to the end of a literary work (see next page):   |  |  | | --- | --- | | http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcar_clip_image002.gif  Light Bulb | The "naked" light bulb symbolizes truth and reality. The light bulb also symbolizes an epiphany. An epiphany is an "a-ha!" moment, the moment when some new idea or concept occurs to a person. | | http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcar_clip_image004.jpg  Paper Lantern | The paper lantern symbolizes something flimsy that is used to disguise reality, create illusion, and hide the truth. However the paper lantern cannot last, it can only temporarily create a romantic glow and keep the truth in shadow. The paper lantern is used by Blanche to disguise her fading beauty and indecent past. | | http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcar_clip_image006.gif  White Clothing | White symbolizes purity and innocence. | | http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcar_clip_image008.gif  Package of Meat | The package of meat that Stanley throws at Stella and her eager catching of the the meat is a symbol of their sexual relationship. Stanley is the provider (hunter & gatherer) and Stella waits happily at home for his return. The meat represents Stanley's almost barbaric manliness. | | http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcar_clip_image010.gif  Bathing | Blanche's constant bathing shows her need to cleanse herself (metaphorically) of the impurities and disappointments in her past (the Hotel Flamingo, her own sinful behavior with her young husband). The bathing helps relax Blanceh's nerves and allows her mind to imagine that she is in better (and more pampered) circumstances. Bathing also makes Blanche feel young and girlish, laughin, singing, and splashing in the tub like a child. | | http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/streetcar/streetcar_clip_image011.gif  Polka Music | The polka music that Blanche hears whenever her young husband is discussed reminds Blanche of the frenzied manner in which she lost her husband. This music haunts Blanche and is one of the realities that she desires to escape. | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | | |
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