

Year 12—A Streetcar Named Desire

Plot Breakdown

Scene 1: Blanche arrives in New Orleans and defends herself against possible blame for having lost her family home, Belle Reve.

Scene 2: Stanley believes that he knows where the money went from Belle Reve, and aims to prove it to Blanche and Stella.

Scene 3: The poker scene with Steve, Pablo, Mitch and Stanley. They all exhibit heavy masculinity and portray masculine stereotypes. Stella becomes embarrassed by Stanley's behaviour. Blanche sees potential in Mitch's behaviour (his sensitivity)

Scene 4: Blanche tells Stella what she thinks of Stanley – flirts and proposes her attraction towards him

Scene 5: Stanley returns from bowling and a tense conversation is had between himself and Stella. He is rude to Blanche and tells some of Blanche's past. Blanche is left shaken and discusses with Stella that she has not been honest with Mitch. She then has an encounter with the

Scene 6: Blanche confides in Mitch and dares to hope for a secure future

Scene 7: It's Blanche's birthday and Stanley confronts her to surface her past once more but in more detail surrounding her time in Laurel, Mississippi. It is also told of why she was extradited from her job.

Scene 8: Tension continues to build as Blanche tries to make conversation but Stanley snaps and is fed up of the derogatory statements that the women have been making. Blanche is uncertain why Mitch did not appear for the dinner. Stanley offers a one-way bus ticket.

Scene 9: Blanche is left uncertain and unstable, Mitch returns and whilst being a bit drunk attempts to ease the tension with Blanche however it becomes more uncomfortable as she targets him. He retaliates by questioning her specifically outlining how he does not care about her appearance.

Scene 10: The play reaches its climax as Stella delivers her baby and Stanley returns and forces himself upon Blanche.

Scene 11: Blanche's mental state has completely deteriorated and is sent away by both Stella and Stanley.

Context

A Streetcar Named Desire is set a time when the United States in general and the South were poised for major economic growth and significant social change. This period gave rise to the New South. The bourgeoisie was fading away, and a new class of people was emerging, people who were self-reliant and fought for their own eco-

The transformation of New Orleans began during the Second World War. The city was hit hard by the Great Depression with an unemployment rate that sometimes went over 30%, but during the war, New Orleans boomed. Post World War II, the city went under

Stanley represents the **American Dream**: that all people are born equally and can succeed equally. Blanche represents the **Old World** where class and race were still im-

Race relations weren't easy everywhere in the 1940s, but it's important to establish the atmosphere in this particular setting. Blanche brings her prejudice to the Kowalski

Class and race distinctions do not matter in this neighbourhood in New Orleans, which is why Stella and Stanley seem to make a **fine** match despite their back-

The theme of **pure**, and almost **savage masculinity** that is

Critical theory's of Marxism and feminist roles play im-

Characters

Stanley Kowalski – the primary male antagonist in the play, he serves as a foil to Blanche and represents the working class foreign man. He is contrasted to Blanche and eventually causes

Blanche Dubois – the primary protagonist of the play. She depicts the Southern Belle perspective where it heavily complies to traditional female perspectives whilst also flashing wealth and status in order to obtain further influence and power. She comes from a plantation where she is stuck in the Old South

Stella Kowalski – Blanche's sister and a depiction of the New South woman. She matches / rivals Stanley's aggressive masculine traits but also suffers as a result. She does not allow herself to be victimised though. She works as a balance be-

Harold "Mitch" Mitchell – the love interest of Blanche. He ultimately wants to conform the New Southern attitude and 'settle' he is blinded by Blanche's beauty as she heavily conforms him and keeps him under a tight control. He eventually

Eunice Hubbell – the wife of Steve Hubbell and the landowners of the building where Stella and Stanley live. Eunice is the

Steve Hubbell – the husband of Eunice Hubbell and the landowners of the building where Stella and Stanley live. Steve is the standard of what a normal New Orleans husband should

Allan Grey – an unseen and omnipresent character, the late husband of Blanche Dubois. He commits suicide by shooting himself in the head after Blanche discovers that he was having

A young Collector – his role is to demonstrate Blanche's reck-

Shep Huntleigh – a former suitor of Blanche's who she refers to at several points. He becomes successful and becomes somewhat of a fantasy for Blanche. Shep never appears on

Year 12—A Streetcar Named Desire

Vocabulary

Expressionism: A style of painting, music, or drama in which the artist or writer seeks to express the inner world of emotion

Realism: A genre of literature that presents ordinary day-to-day experiences as they occur in reality

Context: The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which can be fully under-

Stage directions: An instruction in the text of a play indicating the movement, position, or tone of an actor, or the sound

Semantic fields: A lexical set of semantically related items, for example verbs of perception.

Social commentary: Social commentary is an element of a narrative that levels a comment — usually a critique — on soci-

Psychological instability: In psychology, a tendency toward lack of self-control, erratic behaviour, shifting attitudes and

Vulnerability: The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically

Tragedy: A play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of

Tragic hero: A tragic hero is a type of character in a tragedy, and is usually the protagonist. Tragic heroes typically have heroic traits that earn them the sympathy of the audience, but also have flaws or make mistakes that ultimately lead to their own downfall.

Vocabulary

Perpetuate: Make (something) continue indefinitely.

Hamartia: A fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine.

Hubris: Excessive pride or self-confidence.

Structure: The way in which a text is organised

Critical Perspective: To have a critical perspective on a subject means to be able to compare and discuss different attitudes towards and interpretations of that subject.

Antagonist: A person who actively opposes or is hostile to someone or something; an adversary.

Patriarchy: A system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.

Gender: Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed.

Feminist Criticism: Feminist literary criticism is literary criticism informed by feminist theory, or more broadly, by the politics of feminism.

Ideology: A system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy.

Reinforce: Strengthen or support (an object or substance), especially with additional material.

Subvert: Undermine the power and authority of (an established system or institution).

Shifts: move or cause to move from one place or another, especially over a small distance.

Defy: openly resist or refuse to obey.

Themes

Naturalistic: Based on the theory of naturalism in art or literature.

Foregrounding: Make (something) the most prominent or important feature.

Representation: The description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way.

Modernisation: The process of adapting something to modern needs or habits.

Melodrama: A sensational dramatic piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions.

Gratuitous: Done without good reason; uncalled for.

Foils: Prevent (something considered wrong or undesirable) from succeeding.

Climax: The point at which the highest level of interest and emotional response is achieved.

Mood: Refers to the emotional response that the writer wishes to evoke in the reader through a story.

Elegy: (In modern literature) a poem of serious reflection, typically a lament for the dead.

Conversational Maxims: Conversational maxims are a set of principles proposed by philosopher Paul Grice to explain how speakers and listeners cooperate to create successful communication.

Year 12—A Streetcar Named Desire

Themes

Fantasy Vs. Reality: the idea that characters within prefer to focus on an ideal scenario rather than face the reality of their actions. Blanche in particular portrays this as her trauma and past experiences forces her into a sense of delusion where she struggles to see the difference between fantasy and reality. For other characters, specifically Stanley he encapsulates the American Dream to which is an ideal fantasy however he uses it as a driving factor in his own working reality.

Femininity and dependence: Femininity throughout the play differ exponentially between the characters of Blanche and Stella. Which Blanche specifically taking on the *Femme Fatale*, and the southern Belle, she adopts a falsehood which deliberately distinguishes herself as an ideal and stereotypical female figure that pursues the eyes of men. Stella portrays quite the opposite as she stands opposing Stanley throughout the play and challenges him on multiple occasions

Masculinity and physicality: Primarily displayed through Stanley, Williams depiction of masculinity links to more of a brutal, aggressive animal force that adopts carnal lust. This equally transitions into violence as well as aggression in language . Where Stanley ultimately becomes more irate he begins to take it out on others around him.

Interior and Exterior appearance: linking to both characters and setting, there is a primary illusion of a façade where the setting / appearances of New Orleans echo the attitudes of characters. Where tension arises the world begins to change to mirror the appearance of characters like Blanche. Equally, the interior and Exterior appearance link closely to notions of Fantasy vs. reality

Themes

Sex and Death: taking the form of lust more than honest compassion, the themes of sex transpire to reflect either the animalistic tendencies of man through the character of Stanley, whereas sex is used to flaunt by Blanche as she adopts her Southern Belle attitude. Equally, death is used as a fear for Blanche as it reflects aging and her levels of beauty which her become her focal point of how she presents herself to others (Mitch) she continues to assert her sexuality and promiscuity in order to avoid the impact of her actions and the deaths of her ancestors earlier in the play.

Further Reading

Non Fiction:

- Biography
- The Bible
- Nineteenth Century short stories
- Nineteenth Century charity pamphlet
- Nineteenth Century book of advice on childrearing

Scholarly articles:

Bloom, Harold, ed. A Streetcar Named Desire. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988.

Griffin, Alice. Understanding Tennessee Williams. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.

Leverich, Lyle. Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995.

The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams. New York: Da Capo Press, 1997.



Stanley Kowalski



Blanche Du Bois



Stella Kowalski