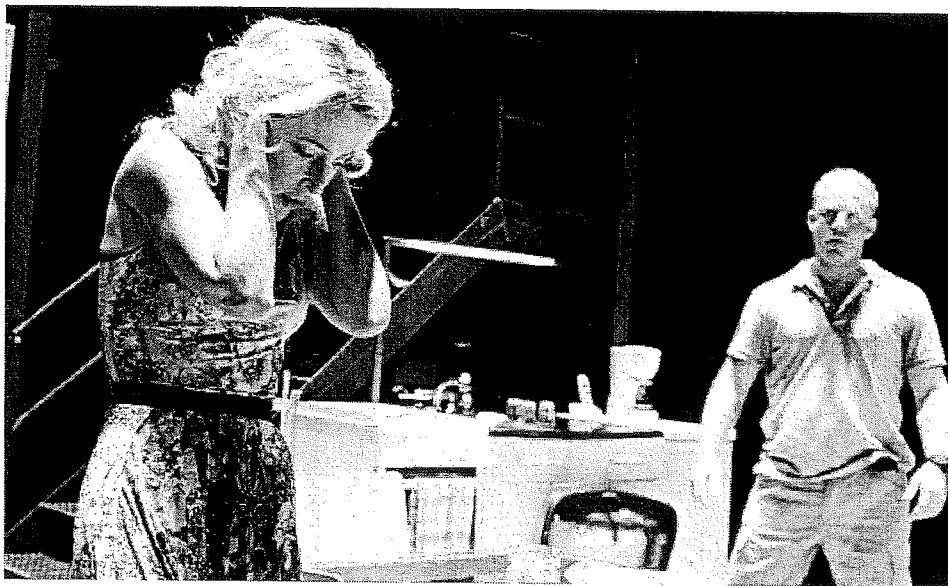




ASHTON SIXTH FORM
COLLEGE

YEAR 1 ENGLISH LITERATURE (AS)

Component 1: Drama – Exam 2016



“A Streetcar Named Desire.”

Tennessee Williams.



English Literature Component 1 – Poetry and Drama

Introduction

For component 1, students will study poetry and drama – however this booklet is just concerned with Drama and our chosen play “*A Streetcar Named Desire*” by Tennessee Williams.

Mode of Assessment

Exam – 2016.

60 % of AS English Literature.

This exam will be 2 hours long and open book – clean copies of the texts to be taken into the examination.

Total of 72 marks available – 24 marks for Section A and 48 marks for Section B.

Two sections: students answer **one** question from a choice of **two** on their studied poetry collection in Section A and **one** question from a choice of **two** on their studied drama text in Section B.

Section A – **One** comparative essay question on a named poem from the studied text, plus a free choice of second poem from the selected list. Students will draw on their knowledge of poetic form, language and conventions (A01, A02 + A04 assessed.)

Section B – Drama **one** essay question (A01, A02, A03 and A04 assessed.)

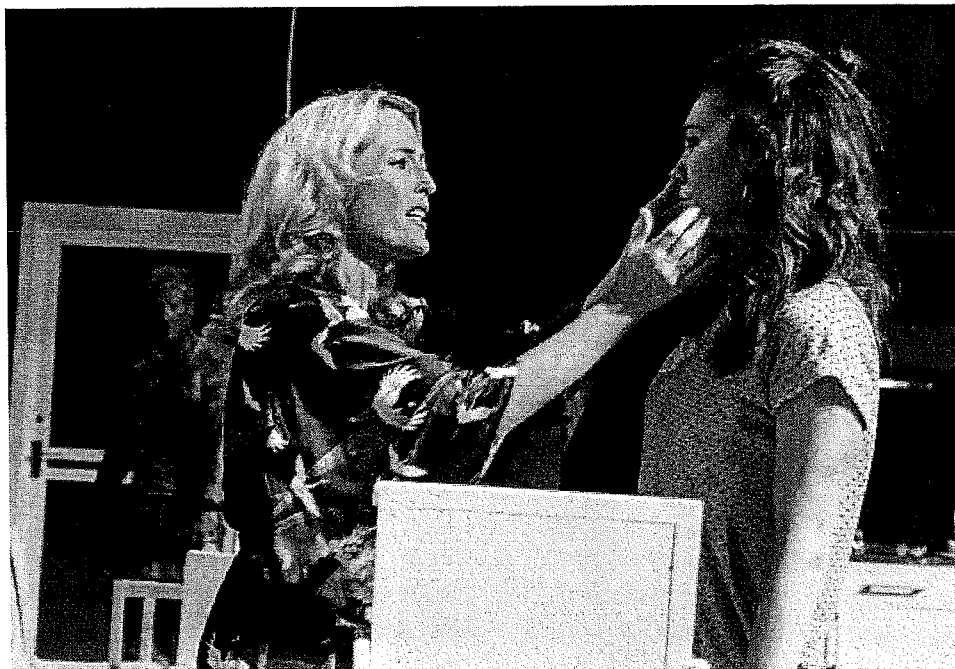
Overview of Drama Unit

Students will need to explore the use of literary and dramatic devices in the shaping of meanings in their chosen play. Teaching and wider reading should address the significance and influence of contextual factors in the chosen play and students will be expected to engage with different interpretations of their chosen drama text.

Assessment Objectives

Your work for this unit will be marked against the five Assessment Objectives (AOs) outlined below. You must:

- AO1 Articulate creative, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology and coherent, accurate written expression **16.8 %**
- AO2 Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts **16.8%**
- AO3 Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received **10%**
- AO4 Explore connections across literary texts **6.6 %**
- AO5 Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations **10 %**



Learning outcomes (Poetry / Drama)

Students are required to:

- Show knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and make connections and explore the relationships between texts.
- Show knowledge and understanding of how playwrights use dramatic forms to shape meanings and evoke a response in audiences
- Show knowledge and understating of the function of genre features and conventions in poetry
- Show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts, responding critically and creatively
- Show knowledge of the contexts in which texts have been produced and received
- Respond to and critically evaluate texts, drawing on their understanding of interpretations by other readers
- Identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts
- Communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge understanding and evaluation of texts
- Use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination
- Make appropriate use of the conventions of writing in literary studies, referring accurately and appropriately to texts.



What to look for in Drama (1) Presentation of key themes (2) Presentation of characters and interactions between them.

- Stage Directions
- Dramatic Foreshadowing
- Dramatic Irony
- Symbolism
- The role of “unseen characters”
- Extended metaphors
- Illusions / Intertextual references

Answer ONE question on your chosen text. Write your answer in the space provided.

A Streetcar Named Desire, Tennessee Williams

- 9 'Elysian Fields is a world filled with violence, in which Blanche cannot survive.'

In the light of this comment, explore Williams' dramatic presentation of violence in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In your answer you must consider relevant contextual factors.

(Total for Question 9 = 48 marks)

OR

- 10 'Mitch may be a weak character, but his treatment of Blanche is still disturbing and harmful.'

In the light of this comment, explore Williams' dramatic presentation of Mitch. In your answer you must consider relevant contextual factors.

(Total for Question 10 = 48 marks)



Question number	Indicative content
9	<p>A Streetcar Named Desire</p> <p>Students may refer to the following in their answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presentation of Stanley's generally violent behaviour, e.g. radio, trunk, plates • dramatic impact of Stanley's physical attack on Blanche • use of Stanley's psychological cruelty to Blanche to develop character and plot, e.g. his exposure of her past, the ticket back to Laurel • Mitch's psychological cruelty, e.g. she being 'not clean enough' to meet his mother • dramatic impact of the final scene as a challenge to the contention that she 'cannot survive' • contemporary social attitudes to male/female relationships etc. • presentation of the physical nature of the relationship between Stanley and Stella in Scene 1 of the play as he 'heaves' a package of meat towards her as indicative of how they relate and communicate • dramatic impact of the escalating physical and verbal violence in the play; the role of the language of violence in the play to build dramatic tension • Stanley's attack on Stella and her ambivalent response to violence • contrast between the overt sex and violence of Elysian Fields and the suppressed sex and violence of Blanche's world • description of the violent death of Blanche's husband, foreshadowing the impact of Stanley's violent attack on Blanche and the psychological impact on her of both • dramatic and structural function of violence which is central to the climactic scene of Stanley's physical attack on Blanche, precipitating her psychological collapse • the dramatisation of differing social attitudes to the role of violence in sexual relationships and how this reflects the new American taste for realism that emerged following the Depression and World War II.

Question number	Indicative content
10	<p>A Streetcar Named Desire</p> <p>Students may refer to the following in their answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dramatic portrayal of Mitch's positive qualities, e.g. love for his mother • structural parallels between his past and Blanche's, eliciting sympathy, e.g. "And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this kitchen candle." • use of contrasts between Mitch and Blanche to develop themes of class and education, e.g. "I guess we must strike you as being a pretty rough bunch". • Stanley's attitude to Mitch, developing dramatic complexity, e.g. "There isn't no millionaire! And Mitch did not come back with roses..." • Mitch's character as a commentary on contemporary attitudes to masculinity, sexuality and marriage • dramatic effect of the contrast between Mitch and Stanley in the poker scene; his caring qualities contrasted with the more physical and coarse behaviour of the others • dramatic irony of the attraction between Blanche and Mitch; her perception of him as a gentleman and his perception of her decency • structural parallels between Mitch's past and Blanche's, expressed in their mutual need for each other as misfits in the violent world of the Elysian Fields – eliciting sympathy • contrast in Mitch's behaviour towards Blanche before and after learning the truth about her and the impact of his harm towards her in her subsequent breakdown, e.g. the moment when Mitch tears the paper lantern off the lightbulb is a shocking violation, and it mirrors the rape in the succeeding scene • dramatic contrast between Mitch's care of and loyalty to his mother and the contrast with his treatment and abandonment of Blanche – indicating his weakness • the use of Mitch to explore gender roles in the 1940s.

Please refer to the specific marking guidance on page 2 when applying this marking grid.

Level	Mark	AO1 = bullet point 1 Descriptor (AO1, A02)	A02 = bullet point 2
	0	No rewardable material	
Level 1	1-4	Recalls information/descriptive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recalls basic points with few accurate references to texts. Recalls limited concepts and terms. Ideas are unstructured with frequent errors and technical lapses. Uses a highly narrative or descriptive approach. Shows overall lack of understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts and the writer's craft. 	
Level 2	5-9	General understanding/approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes general points and references texts, though not always securely. Gives general explanation of concepts and terminology. Ideas are organised but writing has errors and technical lapses. Gives surface readings of texts by commenting on straightforward elements. Shows general understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts and the writer's craft. 	
Level 3	10-14	Clear understanding/exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers a clear response, providing examples. Accurate use of concepts and terminology. Ideas are expressed with few errors and lapses in expression. Demonstrates clear approach to how meanings are shaped in texts. Has clear knowledge which shows understanding of the writer's craft. 	
Level 4	15-19	Consistent application/exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructs a consistent argument with examples, confident structure and precise transitions. Uses appropriate concepts and terminology. Expression is secure with carefully chosen language. Displays a secure understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts. Provides evidence of effective and consistent understanding of the writer's craft. 	
Level 5	20-24	Discriminating application/exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a consistently effective argument with textual examples. Applies a discriminating range of concepts and terminology. Secure expression with carefully chosen language and sophisticated transitions. Displays discrimination when evaluating how meanings are shaped in texts. Shows a critical understanding of the writer's craft. 	

Please refer to the specific marking guidance on page 2 when applying this marking grid.

Level	Mark	A03 = bullet point 1 Descriptor (A03, A05)	A05 = bullet point 2
	0	No rewardable material.	
Level 1	1-4	Recalls information/descriptive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a highly-descriptive approach and there is little awareness of the significance and influence contexts. • Has explanatory approach to reading texts. Shows little awareness of different interpretations. 	
Level 2	5-9	General understanding/exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes general points supported by examples, though not always securely. Has a general awareness of the significance and influence of contextual factors. • Offers straightforward explanations with general awareness of different interpretations. 	
Level 3	10-14	Clear understanding/exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers clear points supported by examples. Shows clear understanding of contextual significance and influence. • Shows clear understanding of different interpretations and alternative readings of texts. 	
Level 4	15-19	Consistent application/exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deals in a consistent way with how context is significant and influential. Able to explore links in a detailed way. • Displays consistent analysis of different interpretations and alternative readings to texts. 	
Level 5	20-24	Discriminating application/exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays an evaluative approach. Deals in a discriminating way with the significance and influence of contextual factors. • Evaluates different interpretations and alternative readings of texts and explores these confidently. 	

AO3 – Context

Context of the author:

- Williams is thought to have been able to identify with a fragility and vulnerability in women and once said:

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.
- He found examples of universal experience in the fringes of acceptable behaviour – maybe this relates to his personal experiences.

Dramatic / Theatrical context:

- “*A Streetcar Named Desire*” is an *Expressionistic Play* and stage directions, colours & music are all used to develop and illuminate aspects of character.
- As the Twentieth Century dawned, so too did a distinct Southern Literature. Writers’ fascination with the past began to turn towards the economic decay symbolised by the decaying beauty of the plantations (see Belle Reve).
- In the 1920s, playwrights were looking at the behaviour of the world and addressing the question “why did this happen?” through their works. Williams asked “what did it feel like to have this happen?” His focus was on the workings of the human psyche.

Historical context:

- Tennessee Williams was working on *Streetcar* at the end of WW2 but there is very little mention made of the war. Despite the fact that the events of the war had been cataclysmic, they receive only a brief mention in the play. This is characteristic of all of Tennessee Williams’ plays.
- That said, many writers at the time were concerned with the idea that, whilst great leaps forward were being made in a variety of spheres, man’s capacity for evil and destruction also continued to grow. In one sense, the journey from desire to death can be linked to this theme.
- As a Southerner, he was more affected by the events of the American Civil War (1861 – 1865). Following their defeat by the Northern states, the South suffered economically. However, this air of decaying grandeur added to the romantic appeal for many writer including Williams.
- As time moved on, industrialisation continued in the cities. Whilst the plantations continued to decay, urban growth and capitalism flourished in the cities.
- Williams was interested in the progress of American history – not only where it had been, but also where it was going and how it would get there.
- Stanley represents the American Dream that all men are born equal and can succeed equally, whilst Blanche represents the old world, where class and race are still important issues.

- Williams was homosexual and whilst this is clearly an aspect of his work, it is important to remember that for most his life, homosexuality remained illegal. It was, however, tolerated in some places, such as New Orleans.

Cultural and political context:

- Tennessee Williams saw the 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.

- Williams is an almost completely non-political writer. More than any other American dramatist, he began to move away from writing about the large political issues to writing about the emotional burdens of everyday life.
- The tensions in this play come partly from cultural conflict – the worlds of Stanley and Blanche are so opposed that neither can understand the other.

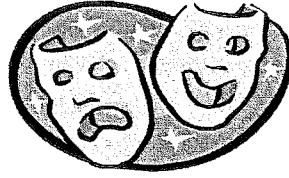
- **Task** (A03) Explore the cultural context in the section at the end of scene 4. Look at the stage directions and at how Blanche characterises the sisters' upbringing.

Social context:

- Women in the Old South had a social and symbolic role, were expected to be passive and chaste. This world could not give Blanche what she needed (see scene 5) and so she tried to marry into the 'light and culture', she discovers that there is corruption and deceit behind the façade.
- All of the Southern writers seemed to have vivid imaginations which were often bizarre and grotesque (Southern Gothic). The roots of this literature lay perhaps in the fact that the writers knew that they were part of a dying culture – where the dashing and romantic were founded on an economy based on injustice and cruelty.
- Blanche and Stanley are from different worlds where money has different values.

- **Task** (A03) It is clear Blanche and Stanley represent different classes and values, however where do Williams' sympathies lie? Find evidence to support your points. Do you feel either character is fully supported / endorsed by Williams?

Remember there are no right or wrong answers, you are developing your own individual line of enquiry in preparation for the exam and drawing on a range of different interpretations. (A01 / A05)



Research Theatrical Contexts (A03) How do the elements of “Plastic Theatre” add to your understanding of the play?

Think about those aspects of theatre which Williams himself used in what he called “plastic theatre”. Now that you have seen the play, you should have a greater understanding of the significance of these things.

BLUE PIANO

VARSOUVIANA

SOUND EFFECTS

A Streetcar Named Desire (1948) Tennessee Williams Plot Overview

BLANCHE DUBOIS, A SCHOOLTEACHER from Laurel, Mississippi, arrives at the New Orleans apartment of her sister, Stella Kowalski. Despite the fact that Blanche seems to have fallen out of close contact with Stella, she intends to stay at Stella's apartment for an unspecified but likely lengthy period of time, given the large trunk she has with her. Blanche tells Stella that she lost Belle Reve, their ancestral home, following the death of all their remaining relatives. She also mentions that she has been given a leave of absence from her teaching position because of her bad nerves. // Though Blanche does not seem to have enough money to afford a hotel, she is disdainful of the cramped quarters of the Kowalskis' two-room apartment and of the apartment's location in a noisy, diverse, working-class neighborhood. Blanche's social condescension wins her the instant dislike of Stella's husband, an auto-parts supply man of Polish descent named Stanley Kowalski. It is clear that Stella was happy to leave behind her the social pretensions of her background in exchange for the sexual gratification she gets from her husband; she even is pregnant with his baby. Stanley immediately distrusts Blanche to the extent that he suspects her of having cheated Stella out of her share of the family inheritance. In the process of defending herself to Stanley, Blanche reveals that Belle Reve was lost due to a foreclosed mortgage, a disclosure that signifies the dire nature of Blanche's financial circumstances. Blanche's heavy drinking, which she attempts to conceal from her sister and brother-in-law, is another sign that all is not well with Blanche.

The unhappiness that accompanies the animal magnetism of Stella and Stanley's marriage reveals itself when Stanley hosts a drunken poker game with his male friends at the apartment. Blanche gets under Stanley's skin, especially when she starts to win the affections of his close friend Mitch. After Mitch has been absent for a while, speaking with Blanche in the bedroom, Stanley erupts, storms into the bedroom, and throws the radio out of the window. When Stella yells at Stanley and defends Blanche, Stanley beats her. The men pull him off, the poker game breaks up, and Blanche and Stella escape to their upstairs neighbor Eunice's apartment. A short while later, Stanley is remorseful and cries up to Stella to forgive him. To Blanche's alarm, Stella returns to Stanley and embraces him passionately. Mitch meets Blanche outside of the Kowalski flat and comforts her in her distress.

The next day, Blanche tries to convince Stella to leave Stanley for a better man whose social status equals Stella's. Blanche suggests that she and Stella contact a millionaire named Shep Huntleigh for help escaping from New Orleans; when Stella laughs at her, Blanche reveals that she is completely broke. Stanley walks in as Blanche is making fun of him and secretly overhears Blanche and Stella's conversation. Later, he threatens Blanche with hints that he has heard rumors of her disreputable past. She is visibly dismayed.

While Blanche is alone in the apartment one evening, waiting for Mitch to pick her up for a date, a teenage boy comes by to collect money for the

newspaper. Blanche doesn't have any money for him, but she hits on him and gives him a lustful kiss. Soon after the boy departs, Mitch arrives, and they go on their date. When Blanche returns, she is exhausted and clearly has been uneasy for the entire night about the rumors Stanley mentioned earlier. In a surprisingly sincere heart-to-heart discussion with Mitch, Blanche reveals the greatest tragedy of her past. Years ago, her young husband committed suicide after she discovered and chastised him for his homosexuality. Mitch describes his own loss of a former love, and he tells Blanche that they need each other.

When the next scene begins, about one month has passed. It is the afternoon of Blanche's birthday. Stella is preparing a dinner for Blanche, Mitch, Stanley, and herself, when Stanley comes in to tell her that he has learned news of Blanche's sordid past. He says that after losing the DuBois mansion, Blanche moved into a fleabag motel from which she was eventually evicted because of her numerous sexual liaisons. Also, she was fired from her job as a schoolteacher because the principal discovered that she was having an affair with a teenage student. Stella is horrified to learn that Stanley has told Mitch these stories about Blanche.

The birthday dinner comes and goes, but Mitch never arrives. Stanley indicates to Blanche that he is aware of her past. For a birthday present, he gives her a one-way bus ticket back to Laurel. Stanley's cruelty so disturbs Stella that it appears the Kowalski household is about to break up, but the onset of Stella's labour prevents the imminent fight.

Several hours later, Blanche, drunk, sits alone in the apartment. Mitch, also drunk, arrives and repeats all he's learned from Stanley. Eventually Blanche confesses that the stories are true, but she also reveals the need for human affection she felt after her husband's death. Mitch tells Blanche that he can never marry her, saying she isn't fit to live in the same house as his mother. Having learned that Blanche is not the chaste lady she pretended to be, Mitch tries to have sex with Blanche, but she forces him to leave by yelling "Fire!" to attract the attention of passersby outside.

Later, Stanley returns from the hospital to find Blanche even more drunk. She tells him that she will soon be leaving New Orleans with her former suitor Shep Huntleigh, who is now a millionaire. Stanley knows that Blanche's story is entirely in her imagination, but he is so happy about his baby that he proposes they each celebrate their good fortune. Blanche spurns Stanley, and things grow contentious. When she tries to step past him, he refuses to move out of her way. Blanche becomes terrified to the point that she smashes a bottle on the table and threatens to smash Stanley in the face. Stanley grabs her arm and says that it's time for the "date" they've had set up since Blanche's arrival. Blanche resists, but Stanley uses his physical strength to overcome her, and he carries her to bed. The pulsing music indicates that Stanley rapes Blanche.

The next scene takes place weeks later, as Stella and her neighbor Eunice pack Blanche's bags. Blanche is in the bath, and Stanley plays poker with his buddies in the front room. A doctor will arrive soon to take Blanche to an insane asylum, but Blanche believes she is leaving to join her millionaire.

Stella confesses to Eunice that she simply cannot allow herself to believe Blanche's assertion that Stanley raped her. When Blanche emerges from the bathroom, her deluded talk makes it clear that she has lost her grip on reality.

The doctor arrives with a nurse and Blanche initially panics and struggles against them when they try to take her away. Stanley and his friends fight to subdue Blanche, while Eunice holds Stella back to keep her from interfering. Mitch begins to cry. Finally, the doctor approaches Blanche in a gentle manner and convinces her to leave with him. She allows him to lead her away and does not look back or say goodbye as she goes. Stella sobs with her child in her arms, and Stanley comforts her with loving words and caresses.

Themes, Motifs & Symbols

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Fantasy's Inability to Overcome Reality

Although Williams' protagonist in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is the romantic Blanche DuBois, the play is a work of social realism. Blanche explains to Mitch that she fibs because she refuses to accept the hand fate has dealt her. Lying to herself and to others allows her to make life appear as it should be rather than as it is. Stanley, a practical man firmly grounded in the physical world, disdains Blanche's fabrications and does everything he can to unravel them. The antagonistic relationship between Blanche and Stanley is a struggle between appearances and reality. It propels the play's plot and creates an overarching tension. Ultimately, Blanche's attempts to remake her own and Stella's existences—to rejuvenate her life and to save Stella from a life with Stanley—fail.

One of the main ways Williams dramatizes fantasy's inability to overcome reality is through an exploration of the boundary between exterior and interior. The set of the play consists of the two-room Kowalski apartment and the surrounding street. Williams' use of a flexible set that allows the street to be seen at the same time as the interior of the home expresses the notion that the home is not a domestic sanctuary. The Kowalski's' apartment cannot be a self-defined world that is impermeable to greater reality. The characters leave and enter the apartment throughout the play, often bringing with them the problems they encounter in the larger environment. For example, Blanche refuses to leave her prejudices against the working class behind her at the door. The most notable instance of this effect occurs just before Stanley rapes Blanche, when the back wall of the apartment becomes transparent to show the struggles occurring on the street, foreshadowing the violation that is about to take place in the Kowalski's' home.

Though reality triumphs over fantasy in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams suggests that fantasy is an important and useful tool. At the end of the play, Blanche's retreat into her own private fantasies enables her to partially shield herself from reality's harsh blows. Blanche's insanity emerges as she retreats fully into herself, leaving the objective world behind in order to avoid accepting

reality. In order to escape fully, however, Blanche must come to perceive the exterior world as that which she imagines in her head. Thus, objective reality is not an antidote to Blanche's fantasy world; rather, Blanche adapts the exterior world to fit her delusions. In both the physical and the psychological realms, the boundary between fantasy and reality is permeable. Blanche's final, deluded happiness suggests that, to some extent, fantasy is a vital force at play in every individual's experience, despite reality's inevitable triumph.

The Relationship between Sex and Death

Blanche's fear of death manifests itself in her fears of aging and of lost beauty. She refuses to tell anyone her true age or to appear in harsh light that will reveal her faded looks. She seems to believe that by continually asserting her sexuality, especially toward men younger than herself, she will be able to avoid death and return to the world of teenage bliss she experienced before her husband's suicide.

However, beginning in Scene One, Williams suggests that Blanche's sexual history is in fact a cause of her downfall. When she first arrives at the Kowalski's, Blanche says she rode a streetcar named Desire, then transferred to a streetcar named Cemeteries, which brought her to a street named Elysian Fields. This journey, the precursor to the play, allegorically represents the trajectory of Blanche's life. The Elysian Fields are the land of the dead in Greek mythology. Blanche's lifelong pursuit of her sexual desires has led to her eviction from Belle Reve, her ostracism from Laurel, and, at the end of the play, her expulsion from society at large.

Sex leads to death for others Blanche knows as well. Throughout the play, Blanche is haunted by the deaths of her ancestors, which she attributes to their "epic fornications." Her husband's suicide results from her disapproval of his homosexuality. The message is that indulging one's desire in the form of unrestrained promiscuity leads to forced departures and unwanted ends. In Scene Nine, when the Mexican woman appears selling "flowers for the dead," Blanche reacts with horror because the woman announces Blanche's fate. Her fall into madness can be read as the ending brought about by her dual flaws—her inability to act appropriately on her desire and her desperate fear of human mortality. Sex and death are intricately and fatally linked in Blanche's experience

Dependence on Men

A Streetcar Named Desire presents a sharp critique of the way the institutions and attitudes of postwar America placed restrictions on women's lives. Williams uses Blanche's and Stella's dependence on men to expose and critique the treatment of women during the transition from the old to the new South. Both Blanche and Stella see male companions as their only means to achieve happiness, and they depend on men for both their sustenance and their self-image. Blanche recognizes that Stella could be happier without her physically abusive husband, Stanley. Yet, the alternative Blanche proposes—

contacting Shep Huntleigh for financial support—still involves complete dependence on men. When Stella chooses to remain with Stanley, she chooses to rely on, love, and believe in a man instead of her sister. Williams does not necessarily criticize Stella—he makes it quite clear that Stanley represents a much more secure future than Blanche does.

For herself, Blanche sees marriage to Mitch as her means of escaping destitution. Men's exploitation of Blanche's sexuality has left her with a poor reputation. This reputation makes Blanche an unattractive marriage prospect, but, because she is destitute, Blanche sees marriage as her only possibility for survival. When Mitch rejects Blanche because of Stanley's gossip about her reputation, Blanche immediately thinks of another man—the millionaire Shep Huntleigh—who might rescue her. Because Blanche cannot see around her dependence on men, she has no realistic conception of how to rescue herself. Blanche does not realize that her dependence on men will lead to her downfall rather than her salvation. By relying on men, Blanche puts her fate in the hands of others.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Light

Throughout the play, Blanche avoids appearing in direct, bright light, especially in front of her suitor, Mitch. She also refuses to reveal her age, and it is clear that she avoids light in order to prevent him from seeing the reality of her fading beauty. In general, light also symbolizes the reality of Blanche's past. She is haunted by the ghosts of what she has lost—her first love, her purpose in life, her dignity, and the genteel society (real or imagined) of her ancestors.

Blanche covers the exposed light bulb in the Kowalski apartment with a Chinese paper lantern, and she refuses to go on dates with Mitch during the daytime or to well-lit locations. Mitch points out Blanche's avoidance of light in Scene Nine, when he confronts her with the stories Stanley has told him of her past. Mitch then forces Blanche to stand under the direct light. When he tells her that he doesn't mind her age, just her deceitfulness, Blanche responds by saying that she doesn't mean any harm. She believes that magic, rather than reality, represents life as it ought to be. Blanche's inability to tolerate light means that her grasp on reality is also nearing its end.

In Scene Six, Blanche tells Mitch that being in love with her husband, Allan Grey was like having the world revealed in bright, vivid light. Since Allan's suicide, Blanche says, the bright light has been missing. Through all of Blanche's inconsequential sexual affairs with other men, she has experienced only dim light. Bright light, therefore, represents Blanche's youthful sexual innocence, while poor light represents her sexual maturity and disillusionment.

Bathing

Throughout *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche bathes herself. Her sexual experiences have made her a hysterical woman, but these baths, as she says, calm her nerves. In light of her efforts to forget and shed her illicit past in the new community of New Orleans, these baths represent her efforts to cleanse herself of her odious history. Yet, just as she cannot erase the past, her bathing is never done. Stanley also turns to water to undo a misdeed when he showers after beating Stella. The shower serves to soothe his violent temper; afterward, he leaves the bathroom feeling remorseful and calls out longingly for his wife.

Drunkenness

Both Stanley and Blanche drink excessively at various points during the play. Stanley's drinking is social: he drinks with his friends at the bar, during their poker games, and to celebrate the birth of his child. Blanche's drinking, on the other hand, is anti-social, and she tries to keep it a secret. She drinks on the sly in order to withdraw from harsh reality. A state of drunken stupor enables her to take a flight of imagination, such as concocting a getaway with Shep Huntleigh. For both characters, drinking leads to destructive behavior: Stanley commits domestic violence, and Blanche deludes herself. Yet Stanley is able to rebound from his drunken escapades, whereas alcohol augments Blanche's gradual departure from sanity.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Shadows and Cries

As Blanche and Stanley begin to quarrel in Scene Ten, various oddly shaped shadows begin to appear on the wall behind her. Discordant noises and jungle cries also occur as Blanche begins to descend into madness. All of these effects combine to dramatize Blanche's final breakdown and departure from reality in the face of Stanley's physical threat. When she loses her sanity in her final struggle against Stanley, Blanche retreats entirely into her own world. Whereas she originally colors her perception of reality according to her wishes, at this point in the play she ignores reality altogether.

The Varsouviana Polka

The Varsouviana is the polka tune to which Blanche and her young husband, Allen Grey, were dancing when she last saw him alive. Earlier that day, she had walked in on him in bed with an older male friend. The three of them then went out dancing together, pretending that nothing had happened. In the middle of the Varsouviana, Blanche turned to Allen and told him that he "disgusted" her. He ran away and shot himself in the head.

The polka music plays at various points in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, when Blanche is feeling remorse for Allen's death. The first time we hear it is in Scene One, when Stanley meets Blanche and asks her about her husband.

Its second appearance occurs when Blanche tells Mitch the story of Allen Grey. From this point on, the polka plays increasingly often, and it always drives Blanche to distraction. She tells Mitch that it ends only after she hears the sound of a gunshot in her head.

The polka and the moment it evokes represent Blanche's loss of innocence. The suicide of the young husband Blanche loved dearly was the event that triggered her mental decline. Since then, Blanche hears the Varsouviana whenever she panics and loses her grip on reality.

"It's Only a Paper Moon"

In Scene Seven, Blanche sings this popular ballad while she bathes. The song's lyrics describe the way love turns the world into a "phony" fantasy. The speaker in the song says that if both lovers believe in their imagined reality, then it's no longer "make-believe." These lyrics sum up Blanche's approach to life. She believes that her fibbing is only her means of enjoying a better way of life and is therefore essentially harmless.

As Blanche sits in the tub singing "It's Only a Paper Moon," Stanley tells Stella the details of Blanche's sexually corrupt past. Williams ironically juxtaposes Blanche's fantastical understanding of herself with Stanley's description of Blanche's real nature. In reality, Blanche is a sham who feigns propriety and sexual modesty. Once Mitch learns the truth about Blanche, he can no longer believe in Blanche's tricks and lies.

Meat

In Scene One, Stanley throws a package of meat at his adoring Stella for her to catch. The action sends Eunice and the Negro woman into peals of laughter. Presumably, they've picked up on the sexual innuendo behind Stanley's gesture. In hurling the meat at Stella, Stanley states the sexual proprietorship he holds over her. Stella's delight in catching Stanley's meat signifies her sexual infatuation with him.

.....

Dialogue

.....The conversations are pruned of irrelevancy. Blanche's educated speech and literary allusions contrast with Stanley's down-to-earth language and crude—but often effective and amusing—imagery. The dialogue is rich in tropes, including the commonplace clichés of Stanley and the literary allusions and quotations of Blanche.

Further Themes

The reluctance or inability of people to accept the truth. Blanche lives in a cocoon of unreality to protect herself against her weaknesses and shortcomings, including her inability to repress sexual desire. To preserve her ego, she lies about her promiscuous behaviour in Laurel; she shuns bright light, lest it reveal her physical imperfections; and she refuses to acknowledge

her problem with alcohol. Stanley effectively penetrates her cocoon verbally with his crude insults and physically with his sexual *coup de main* near the end of the play. Stanley has his own problem: He lacks the insight to see what he really is—a coarse, domineering macho man ruled by primal instincts. Unlike Blanche, though, he is happy in his ignorance. For her part, Stella accepts the truth—partly. She acknowledges that Stanley is crude and that her apartment is cramped and shabby. But, in the end, she refuses to accept the truth about her sister's past and about Stanley's violation of Blanche. "I couldn't believe [Blanche's] story [about the rape] and go on living with Stanley," Stella says.

The final destruction of the Old South, symbolized by Blanche and Belle Reve (the family property seized by creditors). This theme—not unlike that in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*—begins to unfold in the opening scene of the play. Two women, one white and one black, sit as equals on the steps of an apartment building while Blanche arrives on scene displaying in the attitude and finery of a southern belle of yesteryear. She is an alien, a strange creature from another time, another place.

The despoliation of the sensitive and feminine by the feral and masculine. Blanche and her first husband, a homosexual, cannot survive in the world of Stanley and his kind. Stanley is a robust weed who grows in Blanche's carefully cultivated garden of lilies.

Unbridled sexual desire leads to isolating darkness and eventually death. Williams establishes this theme at the beginning of the play, when Blanche takes a streetcar named Desire (sex), transfers to one named Cemeteries (Death), and gets off at a street named Elysian Fields (the Afterlife). He maintains the theme during the play with references to Blanche's first husband, a homosexual who committed suicide after she caught him with another man and with Blanche's literal and figurative retreat into the shadows after having many sordid affairs. She shuns bright lights; she dates Mitch only in the evening.

All that glitters is not gold. This Shakespearean motif manifests itself in Blanche's inability to grasp how Stanley and Stella can succeed at marriage without the finer things of life.

Climax

.....The climax of a play or another literary work, such as a short story or a novel, can be defined as (1) the turning point at which the conflict begins to resolve itself for better or worse, or as (2) the final and most exciting event in a series of events. The climax of *A Streetcar Named Desire* occurs, according to both definitions, when Stanley rapes Blanche. This brutal act marks the completion of her mental deterioration, pushing her over the edge from sanity to madness.

Symbols

Streetcar named Desire: Blanche's desire. Although Blanche arrives in New Orleans as a somewhat broken woman, she keeps alive her desire to be with a man and to lead a life as an elegant, respectable woman.

Streetcar named Cemeteries: Old, disgraced Blanche, the one that Blanche left behind—dead, so to speak—in her hometown of Laurel, Miss., to begin anew in New Orleans. This streetcar can also suggest that life is over for the new Blanche as well, for she is damaged property edging toward madness.

Street named Elysian Fields: The new life Blanche is seeking. In Greek mythology, the Elysian Fields (also called *Elysium* and the *Elysian Plain*) made up a paradise reserved for worthy mortals after they died. Because Blanche's old self "died" in Laurel, Miss., she traveled to New Orleans to seek her Elysium.

Belle Reve: Name of Blanche's family home in Mississippi. It represents the "beautiful dream" (the meaning of *Belle Rêve* in French) that Blanche seeks but never experiences.

Blanche's white suit: False purity and innocence with which Blanche masks her carnal desire and cloaks her past.

Blanche's frequent bathing: Her attempt to wash away her past life.

Alcohol: Another way Blanche washes away bad memories.

Bright light: Penetrating gaze of truth that sees the real Blanche with all her imperfections. When she greets Stella the first time in the apartment, she says, "And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!" Blanche avoids bright lights throughout the play.

Blanche: *Blanche* means *white* in French, and—in keeping with her name—she wears a white dress and gloves in the opening scene of the play to hide her real self in the purity that white suggests.

Stella: *Stella* means *star* or *like a star* in Latin, although she lives in a shabby apartment building in a lower-class section of New Orleans. It could be argued that she is the star of her husband's life and the star that led Blanche to New Orleans.

Stanley: Old English name meaning *stone field*. Thus, it is possible he represents a cemetery for Blanche. *Stanislaus* was the name of a king of Poland. Clearly, Stanley is the king of his household.

The small Kowalski apartment: The size and plainness of the life to which Blanche, who formerly lived in a splendid mansion, must adjust.

Allen Grey: Gray area of Blanche's life, between the bright light that she avoids and the darkness she seeks. She loved Allen Grey, but he betrayed her. In New Orleans, she remembers the good and the bad of her relationship with him.

Paper: Imagery centering on paper represents impermanence, unreality, or artificiality. For example, the paper legal documents Blanche brings with her to New Orleans attest to the loss of the family homestead, Belle Reve. The youth collecting for the local paper, *The Evening Star*, represents the ephemeral nature of sexual gratification. Apparently, he reminds Blanche of Allen Grey. On a whim, she suddenly kisses the youth but then dismisses him, mindful of the disgrace she brought upon herself with her liaison with a student. The song Blanche sings while bathing, "Paper Moon," symbolizes the

fantasy world of love.

Irony and Contrast

Elysian Fields: The Street Elysian Fields is not what its name suggests, a paradise, but a shabby thoroughfare in a working-class district of New Orleans. By contrast, a street in Paris with the same name (but in French, *Champs-élysées*) is a magnificent boulevard. Blanche's attempt to see the world through the eyes of a Parisian is part of the reason for her descent into unreality and insanity.

White and Black: Blanche is wearing white clothing and gloves, as well as pearl earrings, when she arrives in New Orleans to suggest that she has a pristine character. However, she prefers darkness and shadows to mask her physical perfections and, symbolically, her sinful behaviour.

Old and New, Fantasy and Reality: Blanche comes from an old fairyland world to live in the real world of a modern metropolis.

Big and Small: In her old world, Blanche lived in a large house; in her new world, she lives in a tiny apartment. The size of the apartment suggests the diminution of Blanche's fortunes and her sanity.

Speech: Blanche quotes poetry and speaks the elegant patois of aristocrats. Stanley speaks the sandpaper language of reality and brutality: coarse, crude, unvarnished.





A Streetcar Named Desire
Williams' Major Stage Directions in Scene One

(This activity is in preparation for coursework question 4 and tests A02 / A04)

Stage directions: Group 1

[Two men come round the corner, STANLEY KOWALSKI and MITCH. They are about twenty-eight or thirty years old, roughly dressed in blue denim work clothes. STANLEY carries his bowling jacket and a red-stained package from a butcher's.]

[STELLA comes out on the first-floor landing, a gentle young woman, about twenty-five, and of a background obviously quite different from her husband's.]

[He heaves the package at her. She cries out in protest but manages to catch it: then she laughs breathlessly. Her husband and his companion have already started back around the corner.]

Stage directions: Group 2

[She continues to laugh. BLANCHE comes around the corner, carrying a valise. She looks at a slip of paper, then at the building, then again at the slip of paper and again at the building. Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. She is about five years older than STELLA. Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth.]

Stage directions: Group 3

[BLANCHE sits in a chair very stiffly with her shoulders slightly hunched and her legs pressed close together and her hands tightly clutching her purse as if she were quite cold. After a while the blind look goes out of her eyes and she begins to look slowly around. A cat screeches. She catches her breath with a startled gesture. Suddenly she notices something in a half-opened closet. She springs up and crosses to it, and removes a whisky bottle. She pours a half tumbler of whisky and tosses it down. She carefully replaces the bottle and washes out the tumbler at the sink. Then she resumes her seat in front of the table.]

Stage directions: Group 4

[For a moment they stare at each other. Then BLANCHE springs up and runs to her with a wild cry.]

[She begins to speak with feverish vivacity as if she feared for either of them to stop and think. They catch each other in a spasmodic embrace.]

[She rushes to the closet and removes the bottle; she is shaking all over and panting for breath as she tries to laugh. The bottle nearly slips from her grasp.]

Stage directions: Group 5

[More laughter and shouts of parting come from the men. STANLEY throws the screen door of the kitchen open and comes in. He is of medium height, about five feet eight or nine, and strongly, compactly built. Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the centre of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying centre are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humour, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them.]



STAGE DIRECTIONS

- ◉ Although most stage directions are designed to help guide actors' performances, Williams' gives them a much deeper significance within *Streetcar* (especially as it was in vogue to read plays during the 1940's).
- ◉ This allows both audiences and readers to experience a greater understanding of the character's psychic condition, through the language and descriptions Williams' includes alongside his character's dialogue.

In your groups, prepare a presentation to feedback to the rest of the class on your given stage direction(s)

Aim to address the following;

- ◉ What do the **stage directions** reveal about the characters and their situation?
- ◉ How might they suggest **tragic elements** within the play?

A Streetcar Named Desire

Scene 1

Consider:

- Stage directions (descriptive detail),
- Dialogue (what the exchanges between characters reveal),
- Any action, as you answer the following:
- 1. What significant features about Blanche emerge in this scene?
Explain how they emerge and provide evidence from the text.
 2. What significant features about Stella emerge in this scene?
Explain how they emerge and provide evidence from the text.
 3. What significant features about Stanley emerge in this scene?
Explain how they emerge and provide evidence from the text.

Make sure you comment on details concerning appearance, behaviour and impressions of age.

Blanche and Stella

Look at the sections in Scene 1 where Blanche and Stella are together, in dialogue. What do you learn in these sections about the two sisters and their relationship? Comment on what is revealed about their characters, their lives and their relationships with each other.

Stanley and Blanche

Look at the sections in Scene 1 where Blanche and Stanley are together, in dialogue. What do you learn in these sections about each of them and their relationship? Comment on what is revealed about their characters and their relationships with each other.

What else do you notice about the closing section of this scene?

Scene 2

1. What do you learn about Stanley and Stella's relationship from their conversation, from the opening section of this scene, up until Blanche comes out of the bathroom?
2. How does Stanley respond when he has lost Belle Reve and why?





3. How has Stanley's attitude to Blanche changed at this point?
4. What do you note about Blanche's behaviour as the scene develops, (e.g. she comes out of the bathroom in a red satin robe) in comparison to the previous scene?
5. Look at the comments beginning '*yes-yes-cards on the table*'. What is your response to what she has to say here? Why do you think she says this to Stanley?
6. Blanche and Stanley continue to talk, consider the final part of this scene, where Blanche says 'the poor thing was out there listening to us' to the end of the scene. What new light does this cast on Blanche, her past and on her current situation and behaviour?
7. What brought about the loss of the estate?
8. Comment on Blanche's reassurances to Stella about herself and Stanley – why does she talk like this?
9. What does Blanche's cry and laughter at the end of the scene reveal and reinforce to the audience at the end of the scene?

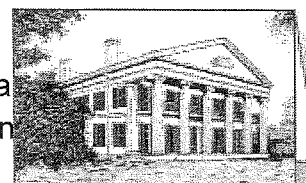
Scene 3

- 1) Look at the stage directions at the opening of the scene. What do you learn from these?
- 2) What impression of the men do you get from the opening dialogue?
- 3) What do you note that is dramatically significant in this section of the play?
- 4) Compare the way that Blanche reacts to Mitch (when she says 'Hello! The little boys' room is busy right now', to the point where Blanche turns on the radio again), with the way she behaved with Stanley in the previous scene. What do you learn from this comparison?
- 5) Why do you think that Mitch responds to Blanche's behaviour and advances much more positively than Stanley?

- 6) Compare descriptions of Mitch and Stanley in this scene, what do you notice (look at stage directions)?
- 7) What effect does Stanley's violence have on the drama? What does it add to your impressions of Stanley?
- 8) What do you think is at the heart of Stanley's relationship with Stella?
- 9) Comment on the stage directions describing Stanley's calling to Stella to come back. What do they suggest? How does Blanche react here?
- 10) What do you notice about Mitch's reaction to the violence at the very end of the scene?

Scene 4

1. Look at the stage directions at the opening of the scene. What do you learn from these?
2. What attitude does Blanche adopt towards Stella from the beginning of the scene until she tries to ring Shep Huntleigh?
3. How does Stella respond?
4. Why is Blanche trying to reach Shep Huntleigh and what does her plan reveal about Blanche?
5. Look at Stella and Blanche's dialogue during the final section of this scene. What is revealed here?
6. What is the significance of the stage directions towards the end of this scene?
7. The scene ends with Stanley overhearing Blanche's plain speech about him. What does she have to say and what is your response to this?
8. What is the dramatic effect of the ending of this scene?





Exploring the dramatic presentation of character
Scenes 5, 6, 7 & 8

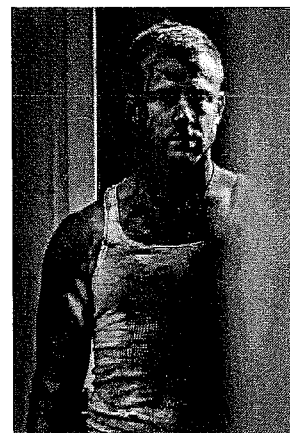
The exam is likely to ask you to “explore the dramatic presentation of a character.”

As we are studying these key scenes, consider the presentation of the following characters:

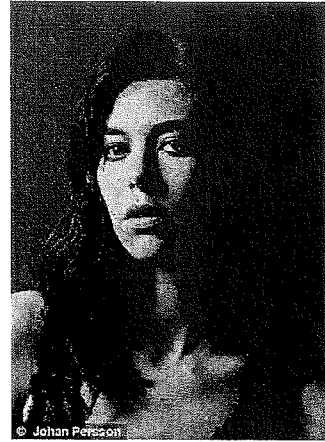
Blanche:



Stanley:



Stella:



Mitch:



Steve & Eunice:



Scene 9 – Focus on the character of Blanche

“The tragic qualities of Blanche are rendered less plausible because she is too selfish and disturbed to evoke sufficient empathy from the audience?” Discuss with close reference to Scene 9.



Task In pairs collect key quotes that you could use to help you answer this question and form your own opinions. Put these quotes in two columns and ensure that you explain their relevance as you start to develop both sides of the argument (A02 / A03.)

Evidence to support Blanche as a sympathetic character

Evidence to support the view Blanche is “too disturbed” to evoke the audience’s sympathy.

A Streetcar Named Desire - Scenes 10 and 11

Look at the stage directions at the start of scene 10. Blanche's appearance at the start of the play was 'incongruous'. What does she look like now?

What impression do you get of Stanley's mood and the reasons for it at the start of this scene?

Look carefully at pages 107 – 108, to where Blanche says 'Let there be no hard feelings...' How does she bring about his change in mood?

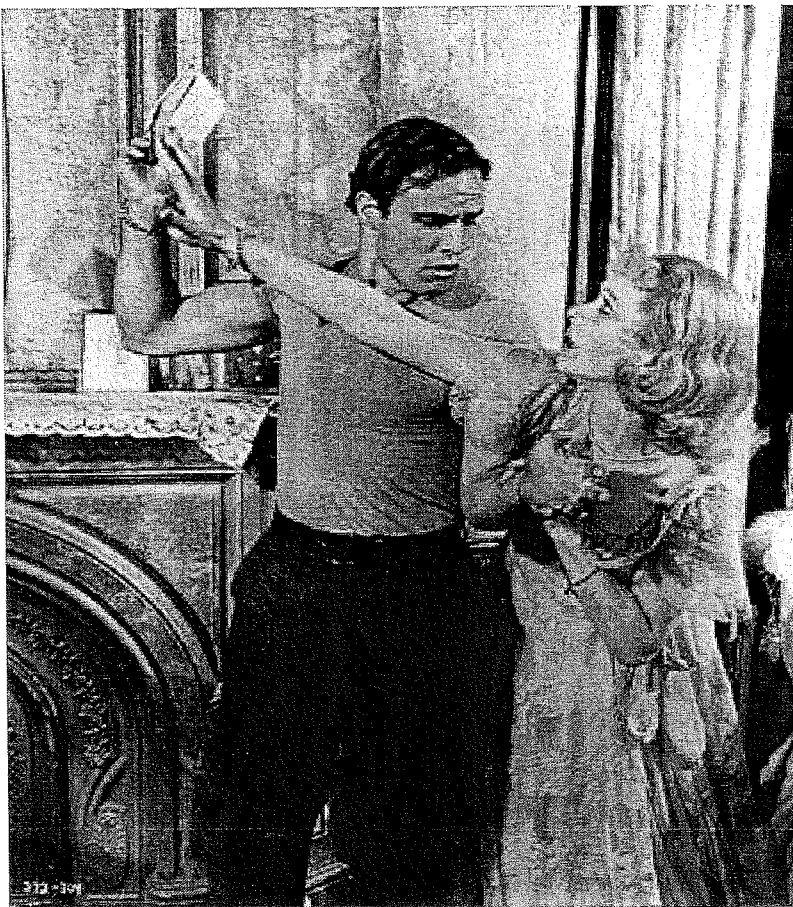
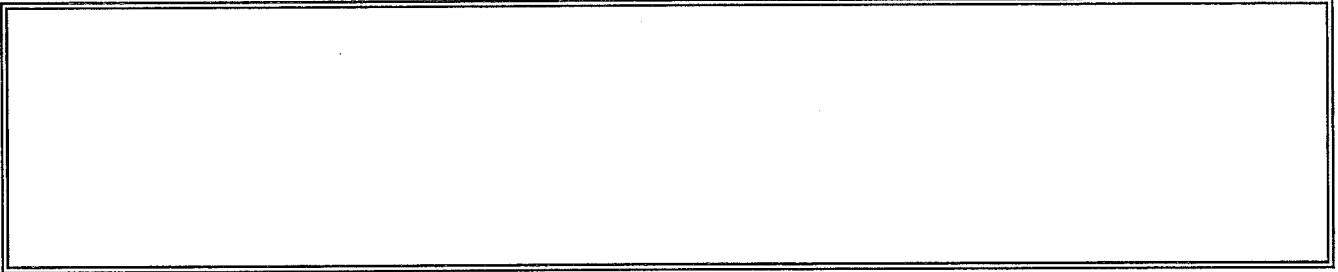
How does Williams develop the dramatic tension from page 108 to the end of the scene? Think about:

Blanche's actions:

Stanley's actions:

The stage directions:

The play has been described as “eleven one-act plays” in which each scene could stand alone (exposition → crisis → resolution). Although the scenes could be seen as separate, there is always a sense of the play moving inevitably towards a conclusion. The play builds towards this scene in particular. What is your explanation for Stanley’s final words in the scene – ‘We’ve had this date from the beginning.’



Scene 11

How much of Blanche's behaviour at the beginning of the scene is characteristic and how much does it reveal the extent of her breakdown?

What part do the following characters play in this scene?

Stella

Stanley

Mitch

Find quotations from the play (both direct speech and stage directions) that link with the following themes.

	Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3	Scene 4
Fantasy / illusion				
Violence				
Primitive / primal				
Desire				
Loneliness				

Find quotations from the play (both direct speech and stage directions) that link with the following themes.

	Scene 5	Scene 6	Scene 7	Scene 8
Fantasy / illusion				
Violence				
Primitive / primal				
Desire				
Loneliness				

Find quotations from the play (both direct speech and stage directions) that link with the following themes.

	Scene 9	Scene 10	Scene 11
Fantasy / illusion			
Cruelty / Violence			
Primitive / primal			
Desire			
Loneliness			

The Women In The Play

Blanche, Stella and Eunice are the three main female characters in the play. They represent three contrasting positions on the social spectrum. Williams presents each woman differently to show the shift from the old/traditional to the new/modern America and associated ways of thinking.

Find evidence from the play to illustrate the features and qualities of each character. Keep a note of scene/page references for the incidents/quotations you choose.

	Blanche	Stella	Eunice
Social background		Old, aristocratic, French colonial e.g. Blanche to Stella: 'You came to New Orleans... abandoned Belle Reve' (Sc 1)	
Situation: Start of the play	Destitute – lost job as teacher, family home, reputation.		
End of the play	In an even worse situation? Taken away by a doctor and nurse.		
Language and actions		Standard English, polite e.g. – Submissive and placid e.g. –	

Imagery and symbolism	Ironic use of white imagery e.g. – Light & shade symbolise truth & illusion e.g. –		
Relationships		Loyal and protective of Stanley e.g. – Abused by him e.g.-	
Function			New, independent, working-class American e.g. – Supports Stella e.g. –



What follows now are a selection of model essays on this play that explore key themes in the play, engaging with the material in an eloquent manner (A01) and clearly exploring both key contexts and a range of interpretations. (A03 / A04) Implicit in all these essays is also understanding of the ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts (A02)

While we are reading, underline key themes and ideas that are explored in these exemplars.

“The tragic qualities of Blanche are rendered less plausible because she is too selfish and disturbed to evoke sufficient empathy from the audience.” Discuss, with close reference to scene nine.

New Orleans ; 1947 provides Tennessee Williams with a rich background to infuse the emotive events that take place in Elysian Fields with symbolism and realism. The Blues music and multi-cultural relations of New Orleans typify the Deep South and is a perfect forum to showcase the infamous Blanche DuBois.

Throughout “A Streetcar Named Desire,” Blanche evokes a spectrum of emotions but her selfishness and erratic personality is always paramount; this in my mind often makes it difficult for the audience to feel sympathy with her.

Initially, Blanche’s lack of honesty about her past and drinking habits undoubtedly has a negative effect on the audience’s sympathy. She continues to lie about her excessive drinking - see scene 9, she “rushes about frantically, hiding the bottle in the closet”. Her drinking in this scene is an escape from the haunting Varsouviana Polka “there now, the shot...it always stops after that”. A counter argument emerges here; implying Blanche’s alcoholism is fuelled by shame and grief caused by her role in the tragic death of her young husband. Consequently, it is clear, that the question is a contentious one, leading to a fruitful arena of debate.

Cate Blanchett, who is currently starring as Blanche in the Brooklyn Academy Of Music stated that “Blanche could be seen as a pathological liar but in the end I think she’s not telling the truth but what ought to be the truth.” I think this is highly applicable; Blanche implies to Mitch that she is pure and morally sound, qualities which typify the traditional Southern world she originates from, “I have old fashioned ideals!”

However, Blanche finds it hard to maintain these illusions and Scene 9 proves a key battleground. At this point, Blanche and Mitch’s relationship has been metaphorically killed by Stanley (“You’re goddam right I told him!”). When Mitch turns up at the Kowalski’s flat after standing Blanche up at her birthday tea, the colour symbolism is revealing; Blanche is wearing a “scarlet, satin robe” and Mitch “blue denim shirt and pants”, the contradicting colours foreshadow anger and sadness between the two, the dramatic impact of their meeting is emphasised. Also, the texture of Blanche’s silk robe shows her snobbery and aspirations towards wealth that distances her from Mitch even more, “he dared to come here in his work-clothes!” This snobbery is not an endearing quality.

The distinguished American critic, Mary McCarthy (1948) would agree, she also referred to Blanche’s snobbery. She described Blanche “as a refined pushover” who “doesn’t deserve sympathy.” Blanche’s treatment of the other characters in Elysian Fields reinforces this. She labels her sister’s home a “horrible” place and rejects Eunice’s friendly overtures, “I’d like to be left alone.” Stanley Kowalski is labelled “common” and “ape-like;” derogatory similes and adjectives are used as she attempts to elevate her status in comparison to the working class. She even goes the extent of looking down on Mitch when he is “unshaven;” ironic considering she had casual, sexual acts with strangers in Laurel, (“I slipped outside to answer their calls.”) This further gives her personality a hypocritical edge.

However, despite this surface aspect of Blanche’s character, there is another dimension to her. Here the play’s expressionistic framework comes into prominence. Symbolism plays a huge part throughout every scene of the play and gives deeper

meaning and understanding of Blanche's character. Firstly, her journey from Laurel to Elysian Fields shows Blanche's past up until that point. Her eviction from Belle Reve followed by her pursuit of sexual relationships with strangers led to her social death in Laurel and her being forced to leave the town. She rides the streetcar named "Desire" then the streetcar named "Cemeteries." This shows how her Aristotelian fatal flaw of sexual desire is instrumental to her metaphorical death and complete reversal of fortune (peripeteia). She ends her journey at Elysian Fields which in Greek Mythology represents the 'land of the dead' establishing a strong vein of dramatic foreshadowing. The symbolism embedded in the play implies Blanche's death is inevitable and out of her control; and this does encourage the audience's sympathy.

Within Scene Nine in particular, the symbolism of light is particularly prominent. ("I've never had a real good look at you, Blanche...let's turn the light on here") states Mitch. This reflects Blanche's self exposure; the light for Blanche represents her fear of age and rejection. It also tragically symbolises Blanche's lack of self knowledge, her true self hidden by illusions of grandeur. "Had you forgotten your invitation to Supper?" Here she is delineated as a tragic victim; she is oblivious to her real surroundings and how she is perceived by everyone else.

The modern expressionism of the play allows Blanche's thoughts, both delusional and realistic to be analysed and expressed creating a dreamlike atmosphere, enabling Williams to show her emotions and insanity build up to a climax when Stanley rapes her in Scene Ten. (*Lurid reflections appear on the walls around Blanche.*) The rape parallels Blanche's loss of sanity (*The inhuman jungle voices rise up.*) Blanche is delineated as victim here and Stanley's actions force her to an all time low after being rejected because she isn't "clean enough". Williams uses the rape to enable the audience to sympathise with Blanche's fragile character. Blanche's fear of rejection triggers an interesting line of enquiry; Williams experienced gross rejection from his family due to his sexuality, which caused him to encounter prejudice from his society. Like Blanche, he abused alcohol and experienced marginalisation from society. Blanche's rejection by Mitch and Stanley's attack at the end of the play are clearly designed to generate sympathy for this fragile character.

However, there are still moments of ambivalence, where the audience's sympathy is divided. She tells Mitch the merchant Kiefaber of Laurel, "whistled at me" – testifying to her enduring vanity. She also alludes to her predatory dealings with men "I stayed at a hotel called The Tarantula Arms." She does admit to having had "many intimacies with strangers" which invariably does trigger the audience's sympathy for this lonely woman. This process is accelerated when she states "intimacies with strangers was all I was able to fill my empty heart with." I think it would be very difficult for the audience not to experience sympathy for Blanche at this point, despite her obvious shortcomings. She also alludes to her inability to exist without a man "I needed somebody" which essentially crystallises the heart of the problem. She also refers to her inability to face up to reality, see the metaphor here when she says Mitch is "a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in." This desire to escape is further explored by the unseen character Shep Huntleigh ("the millionaire from Dallas.") As Blanche's grasp on reality lessens, Williams juxtaposes her speech with the haunting cry of the Blind Mexican woman, "*Flores para los muertos.*" This further provides a strong vein of dramatic foreshadowing. Blanche, though, as the last scene shows, still lives in hope of being rescued.

Blanche's last line in the play is "Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." This shows how she perceives the doctor to be her

rescuer in her delusional world. *Blanche extends her hand towards the DOCTOR.* This stage direction shows her dependence on men and her inability to perceive life without a male companion, which is the essence of her problem. The haunting changes in syntax between “intimacies with strangers” and “the kindness of strangers” illuminate Blanche’s desperation, the depths of her delusion and her dependence on others, bolstered by her own lack of strength. This in turn clearly evokes the audience’s sympathy.

Although Blanche possesses shallow and false qualities and lies about her drinking, it is potentially very difficult not to feel some sympathy with her. Felicia Hardison Londre (1997) stated that Blanche “cannot cope emotionally with the modern world” – I agree, Blanche cannot cope independently and is always seeking male rescue. Even though at times it is difficult to sympathise with Blanche, it is difficult not to be moved by her tragic dimensions. She does conform to a classic model of tragedy and her inability to resist sexual temptation is a key flaw. Consequently, she demonstrates *hamartia* (suffering due to fatal flaw) and *peripeteia* (reversal of fortune) and I believe these Aristotelian factors allow the audience to empathise with this once traditional Southern Belle and her gross misfortune, despite her obvious imperfections.

Words: 1456

How far is the Tragedy of Streetcar shown to be the lack of understanding between men and women? In your answer you should focus on scene 11 or scene 3.

The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* was written by Tennessee Williams in 1947. In my view, the play is as triumph of expressionism, as Williams utilises modern and groundbreaking theatrical techniques such as the use of lighting and symbolism to reveal the feelings and emotions of characters.

The play works within the context of the 1940s patriarchal society (see the first performance of *Streetcar* directed by Elias Kazan when, reportedly, the audience cheered when Blanche was raped by Stanley Kowalski.) From the start of the play the social differences between men and women are clearly highlighted. The exaggerated nature of Blanche's femininity ("Her nature...suggests a moth." which implies she's timid and defenceless) and Stanley's masculinity ("Richly feathered male bird." which shows Stanley's strength and implies dominance) highlights the differences between men and women. Stanley also uses a revealing metaphor to describe Stella, calling her "baby doll." This emphasises the fact that men and women occupied different worlds and recalls the description of Blanche's "delicate beauty." Clearly women were judged superficially and men held limited expectations of their capabilities.

A Streetcar Named Desire presents a sharp critique of post-war relations and divisions between genders which conforms to traditional Aristotelian theory of tragedy as it makes the play of moral and social relevance. However *Streetcar* embodies features of modern tragedy in that it happens to the 'common man' is a fitting "subject of tragedy," (Arthur Miller – 1949.) This registers a complete divergence from traditional Greek tragedy and its Renaissance successors, where the protagonists are kings and queens.

Blanche Dubois is an ageing Southern Belle. She is completely obsessed with her appearance and she constantly seeks attention; this is apparent in Scene 3 with the quotation "Don't get up I'm only passing through." Here she contravenes "male territory" during the Poker Game, this shows Blanche attempting to draw all the attention to herself and shows diminishing chivalry in the male characters ("nobody's going to get up") suggesting a decline in respect for women. It also highlights the different class backgrounds of Blanche and Stanley. Blanche is heavily dependent on men to 'save' her. This is heavily apparent in that even after Stanley has raped Blanche she still believes her only escape route is through men (Shep Huntleigh and then the doctor "I have always depended upon the kindness of strangers") Her vanity and her dependency on men causes her to constantly seek affirmation from them this is apparent in the line "Would you think it possible I was once considered to be attractive?" This desire for affirmation fuels her desire for sexual encounters. She believes that by having sex with men she will find love or at least escape loneliness this is clearly highlighted in the quote "Intimacies with

strangers was that seemed to fill my empty heart." this brings about feelings of pity from the audience which is a traditional feature of tragedy. Alternatively her sexual desires could show a more masculine aspect of Blanche's personality.

Our introduction to Stanley clearly sets him as a traditional male stereotype. Tennessee Williams uses the symbolism of Stanley throwing the meat at Stella to reflect male domination and it's also a sexual insinuation. Furthermore Stella's delight at catching the meat shows her sexual infatuation with Stanley. The meat portrays Stanley as the provider which makes clear to audience the gender roles within the play (Sean McEvoy {2009} even goes as far as to state that the package of meat is "a graphic description of blunt masculinity") the use of a "blood stain package" also has connotations of Stanley's violent nature. Stanley is a completely contrasting character to Blanche. He is a reflection of the New South. His Polish ancestry shows the multiculturalism of the New South.

His autocratic personality over not only over female characters but over everyone in the play is clearly highlighted in Scene 3 when he constantly barks imperatives at the other men "Shut up" or "Deal!" This aspect of Stanley personality is a symbol of the harsh and aggressive nature of the New South. It also highlights Stanley's stance as alpha male. The use of language by Tennessee Williams serves as a symbol within itself as it clearly signifies the difference between the two main protagonists this is apparent in the quotations "I guess I'm gonna strike you as the unrefined type? Huh?" Stanley's frequent use of monosyllabic, colloquial language and inverted syntax is completely contrasting to Blanche who often uses imagery and poetic lexis for example "And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again" the use of contrasting lexical fields clearly highlights the class difference between Blanche and Stanley; it portrays Stanley as a strongly working class character, which makes for easier audience identification. The use of the term "strike" is also symbolic of Stanley's aggressive temperament and is a term used in bowling which is a stereotypically working class American sport. It is also a sport Stanley holds dear, see his "*vivid green silk bowling shirt.*" This also reflects Stanley's vibrancy and energy, contrasting with Blanche's languor and often tentative qualities, "*Blanche comes out and slips fearfully down the steps.*"

The novel is set in an era post-1920's Liberation of women. However many women in the south still remained in traditional roles. The confused role of female 'liberation' is heavily apparent in Eunice she remarks "Men are callus things with no feelings." but then contradicts this by encouraging ("Never believe it") Stella to stay with a man who has raped her sister. This confusion hinders the understanding between men and women. This quotation also highlights how Stanley (the New South) offers a more stable future than Blanche (the Old South). It is argued by critics specifically Robert Bray in his Marxist reading that the merging of bloodlines and the transfer of papers ("It's wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should finally be this bunch of old papers in your big capable hands") highlights "the evolution of social system from the old agrarian south...to the post-war urban-industrial society."

The poker night in Scene 3 is possibly the biggest symbol of the divisions between men and women. The women are completely excluded from the poker night this is apparent in the line "Why don't you women go up and sit with Eunice?" this makes it very clear that women are very unwanted on what is viewed as male territory this attitude towards women is also present in the quotation "Poker should not be played in a house with women." The battle over territory between Blanche and Stanley (which is symbolic of the battles between men and women) can be said to be most clear in Scene 3 over the radio. Stanley clearly sees Blanche as an intruder who (according to Felicia Hardison - 1997) has "lured his wife and his best friend into her orbit" The radio, which has been changed to Blanche's kind of music, is a huge symbol of this intrusion. Stanley's violent response is reflective of the aggressive nature of men. Stella and Blanche's presence at the poker night in Scene 3 can be said to spark conflict. Stanley's desire to re-gain control of the situation is apparent in the stage direction "gives a loud whack of her thigh." and can be said to be dramatic foreshadowing of events later on in the scene where it's indicated in the stage directions that Stanley strikes Stella.

Steve's joke in scene three is an allegory of the relations between men and women. Women are viewed as sexual objects for men to "gain on" which clearly highlights the role of women as victims in this society and reflects over-sexualised male culture. It also highlights male dominance and the use of sexual relationships as a means entertainment and amusement, which suggests that men are unable to have a serious meaningful relationship with a woman and it also, links back to the previous metaphor of Stanley as a "richly feathered male bird".

The use of alcohol plays a key role in reflecting the double standards between the different genders. This is apparent in how the main protagonist Blanche Dubois is forced to hide her alcoholism this is clearly highlighted in the quotation "I rarely touch it" she is very conscious of how society would view her if they were aware of her dependency where as Stanley is shown as completely unashamed of his liking for alcohol this is apparent in that on his first meeting with Blanche the stage directions state "he crossed over to the closet and removed the whiskey bottle" he is completely unconcerned by Blanche's presence and heavily drinks regardless of being in 'polite' company.

The motif of sexual experiences is huge part of the novel. Blanche's sexual obsession is widely considered her fatal flaw where as Stanley's sexual experience is rarely discussed by the other character's and even in the stage direction it's mentioned but in a more neutral manner. There is no judgement on men who have colourful sexual history. Blanche's sexual reputation makes her an undesirable marriage prospect this is apparent in how Mitch is willing to have sex with Blanche but views her as "not clean enough" to marry.

Overall, it is clear that the world of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is one of inequality between men and women. Generally men are predators, Stanley states in Scene 10 "...let's have some rough house" this violent metaphor is a pre-cursor to the rape scene. In contrast, at the end of the play Blanche is totally helpless – but still she

seeks rescue from men. "I will die with my hand in the hand of some nice looking ship's doctor." Blanche is ruined by men, but she still seeks their affirmation and approval. To an extent she is trapped by the limited expectations of her age and by her desire for male affirmation, which crystallises the essence of the tragedy.

Tennessee Williams Once Wrote:

“The south once had a way of life that I’m just old enough to remember – a culture that had grace, elegance....and an inbred culture...not a society based on money, as in the North, I write out of regret for that”

How Does Williams Represent a Clash of Cultures in Scene 2 and to What Extent Do They Contribute To The Idea Of Tragedy?

Many philosophical lines of enquiry are pertinent to a close study of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) Tennessee Williams. Relativism is a philosophical term which views that the truth is not always the same, but varies according to different situations. One type of relativism is cultural relativism; which means that no culture is superior to any other when comparing systems of morality, law, politics or other structures within a society, and therefore is equally valid. Those who hold to cultural relativism hold that all religious, ethical, aesthetic, and political beliefs are completely relative to the individual within a cultural identity. The Greek historian, Herodotus, exemplifies this in his books *The Histories*. In *Book three*, Herodotus explains a situation whereby two different tribes have different customs on dealing with their dead. The Greek tribes cremated their dead, while an Indian tribe known as the Callatians ate the dead bodies of their parents. Herodotus describes a court summoning held by King Darius of Persia, who thought that a sophisticated understanding of the world must include an appreciation of differences between cultures and decided to teach this lesson by asking both tribes to consider taking up the other tribes’ customs. Both the Greek tribe and the Callatians were horrified by this request, and were, in essence, set in their powerful beliefs. The example drawn from Herodotus can be closely related to the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as it shows that different cultures have different moral codes. However, it could be considered that if two cultures are not right or wrong intrinsically, then a severe contrast in beliefs can become tragic in essence.

This notion is conditioned in the ideas of Hegelian tragedy by George Hegel (1770 – 1831) in his book *Aesthetic*. Whereby, it was proposed that the essence of tragedy moulds when two beliefs of values are in fatal conflict, and therefore tragic events form when one of the beliefs or values must give way for the other to become weak and broken down. This idea is seen in the play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where the cultures of the old south represented by Blanche Dubois come into conflict with the new American dream ideals brought by Stanley Kowalski. As both Stanley and Blanche are, as Hegel describes, two esteemed values that are in opposition. Hegelian tragedy defines this play as Stanley Kowalski’s ideals break down that of Blanche Dubois’s ideals, leaving Blanche the one who is weak and broken down.

From the beginning of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche is portrayed as being a condemned woman with distinguishable symbolism. She is introduced as an aged southern debutant, who tells her sister, Stella, that she has

lost the family plantation “Belle Reve” along with her families’ wealth. Contextually, Blanche Dubois represents the decline of southern aristocracy when these once influential families lost their historical importance when agricultural means became unable to compete with new industrial technology. The agrarian society of the south was in further decline as labour shortages due to military defence based industries, and they were faced with the ownership of large areas of agricultural land and no one to work on them, causing their fortunes to suffer. As society developed, and more woman, immigrants and black individuals were being incorporated into the central workforce and gradually gained more equality, the old southern tradition of an agrarian family aristocracy ruled by men came to an end. In Blanche’s case, she describes the loss of Belle Reve in a confrontation with Stanley in Scene Two, who believes that Blanche has swindled him out of Stella’s inheritance. She says that: “There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve as, piece by piece, our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications—to put it plainly! . . . The four-letter word deprived us of our plantation”

The quotation shows how Blanche associates the loss of Belle Reve to the libidinous culture of her forefathers over the generations. Blanche, throughout her life, has also adopted these cultural traditions of the Dubois ancestry into her own life: by outwardly expressing airs of modesty and finesse while secretly engaging in sexual pleasure. This is exemplified in the first mention of Blanche in Scene One, where she is described in the exposition as being “daintily dressed in a white suit and fluffy bodice” and is outlined as a pure and feminine woman. The whiteness of her clothes suggests a virginal aspect of her character, which contrasts with the information we receive about Blanche later on in the play, as we learn about her own sexual debauchery and her past marriage to a homosexual man. This shows how Blanche is a fantasist, who commonly practises a culturally bred hypocrisy from day to day, as she appears to be rich and indulgent in her description. However, the play reveals flaws in her character, these flaws are known in the ancient Greek dramatic context as hamartia, as her sexual past history is exploited by Stanley and weakens Blanche to the point of a mental breakdown. Such flaws are dramatically foreshadowed in the next line of the exposition, as William’s declares that “There is something about her uncertain manner ... that suggests a moth” which outlines the notion that Blanche is attracted to things that may well destroy her such as her past sexual lifestyle and alcoholism which she tries to hide pitifully.

However, in the words of Franz Boas (1911) “one’s culture may mediate and thus limit one’s perceptions in less obvious ways”. Therefore, in relation to *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche’s cultural notion is being out casted in the society that she lives in as her ideas are limiting her ability to accept that she is no longer an upper class citizen, and her character is destroyed by the new American heterogeneous society that has no respect for what Blanche represents: the old south.

The new American society is represented by Stanley Kowalski, who is the son of Polish immigrants and lives in the multi-cultural city of New Orleans in America. William’s chooses to romanticize the ruffian nature of the area in which Stanley resides by saying that it has a “raffish charm”, the statement can be seen as oxymoronic as it shows how characteristics of New Orleans, although steeped in

poverty, has far more positive qualities. As, originally, New Orleans was a Catholic settlement, which differs from other southern states who were protestant. Therefore, social distinctions of different cultures such as those between black and white individuals were ignored unlike Blanche's old south where they were highly separated in social class. However, due to the combination of these many different cultures, the notion of cultural relativism seems to be put into practice and successfully thriving in New Orleans. Williams allows his descriptions of New Orleans, therefore, to appear to be fighting against the idea of ethnocentrism; that the ideas and beliefs of one particular culture are used to judge other cultures, which is represented by Blanche's character.

However, Stanley upholds the new American tradition, and represents the masculine character of the late 1940's. This is exemplified in Scene Two, when Stanley refers to the Napoleonic Code when he begins to become suspicious about the loss of Belle Reve, the Dubois family plantation. Stanley claims that the law, which has drawn its roots from France, states that "whatever belongs to my [Stanley's] wife [Stella] is also mine and vice versa". Although Stanley appears to be showing an insightful knowledge of laws, in application it actually shows his greediness and his lack of knowledge in legal matters. As Belle Reve is in Laurel, Mississippi, which means that the Napoleonic code would not fall under the New Orleans jurisdictions in Louisiana. Stanley's ignorance shows that this is just a show of misogyny against Blanche, who he believes has conned him and Stella out his inheritance, again, showing the clash of cultures as well as personality between Stanley and Blanche. This territorial streak that Stanley shows is described earlier on in the play where he is described as an animalistic and sexually driven man, as he is described in an exposition that he has "Animal joy in his being" which is "implicit in all his movements and attitudes". Therefore showing Stanley to have an instinctively sexual and territorial nature. This point is depicted by Sean McEvoy (2009) who states that in Scene One when Stanley throws the package of meat at Stella it is "a graphic description of blunt masculinity" as well as, in my opinion, a strong sexual of image as the meat that is thrown at Stella may also be a phallic symbol representing Stella and Stanley's strong sexual relationship.

In relation back to tragedy, the two contrasting view points held by both Stanley and Blanche are clear throughout the play. Hegel claimed that a properly constructed tragedy involved a situation in which two rights or values are in fatal conflict. Thus it is not tragic when good defeats bad or when bad defeats good. From Hegel's point of view, the only tragic confrontation is one in which good is up against good and the contest is to the death. It is the moral one-sidedness of the tragic actor, not any negatively tragic fault in his morality or in the forces opposed to him, that proves his undoing, for both sides of the contradiction, if taken by themselves, are justified. This is why Blanche is weakened by Stanley, as her morals are tested by Stanley's contemporary misogyny and his own knowledge that women rely on men as Stella relies on him. This, in essence, breaks Blanche down because she herself relies on men due to her low self esteem and low amount of wealth; both of these forms of stability are denied to her when Stanley tells Mitch about her sexual history. A.C Bradley (1909) described such a contrast between two ethical forces as a

“tragic collision”, so the tragic collision between Stanley and Blanche causes the breakdown of the old southern culture as well as Blanche’s mental stability.

To conclude these points, through the destruction of Blanche and her struggles with the contradictory demands of society, Williams expressed a lament for the destruction of the old south, making clear his understanding that such change was inevitable. Therefore, allowing a free cultural relativism to exist in the symbolism of Stella’s new born child at the end of the play. The child comes from both opposing forces, but paves the way to the new American life for Stella and Stanley, but inevitably allowing the metaphorical death of Blanche. However, peculiarly, this was already acknowledged by Blanche in the play, as she claims in Scene Two “I guess he’s just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he’s what we need to mix with our blood now that we’ve lost Belle Reve.” This mundane dramatic foreshadowing shows Blanche’s earlier acceptance of the clash of cultures, and almost alludes to the opinion that Blanche, although losing her mental stability, considered this to be the most intellectual possibility.

A Streetcar Named Desire:

Look at the following questions. It shows clearly that the exam will be based on knowledge of the play, especially the presentation of theme & character. Contextual factors are also measured. Out of 48, measures A01,2,3 + 5.)

The following questions below can also be used as vital exam practise – they also encourage your knowledge of the whole play to develop and link to key contextual lines of enquiry. (A03)

1. “The tragic qualities of Blanche are rendered less plausible because she is too selfish and disturbed to evoke sufficient empathy from the audience.” In light of this comment, explore Williams’ dramatic presentation of Blanche. In your answer, you must consider relevant contextual factors.
2. ‘The core of the tragedy in *Streetcar* is shown to be lack of understanding between men and women.’ In light of this comment, explore Williams’ dramatic presentation of this lack of understanding between the sexes in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In your answer, you must consider relevant contextual factors.
3. ‘Stanley represents the destructive power of the new materialistic South.’ In light of this comment, explore Williams’ dramatic presentation of Stanley. In your answer, you must consider relevant contextual factors.
4. ‘Blanche is trapped in a fantasy world.’ In light of this comment, explore Williams’ dramatic presentation of the clash between fantasy and reality in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In your answer, you must consider relevant contextual factors
5. ‘Stella is a selfish character and this proves harmful to Blanche. In light of this comment, explore Williams’ dramatic presentation of Stella. In your answer, you must consider relevant contextual factors.
6. ‘Elysian Fields represents a brutal soulless world, which Blanche struggles to *adapt* to.’ In light of this comment, explore Williams’ dramatic presentation of brutality in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In your answer, you must consider relevant contextual factors.

