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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Glass Menagerie

by Tennessee Williams

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The Glass Menagerie

NOTES

It should be noted that the first five questions in the guide are not based on the play but on Williams' production notes that usually appear before or after the play in most print versions. We recommend that these notes be read before the play is viewed or read.

Tennessee Williams' first successful and most popular play, *The Glass Menagerie*, was first produced in 1944. Tom, the play's protagonist and narrator, tells us of events that took place in his family's life some five or six years earlier. As the play opens, we are reminded that the Earth has muddled through the Depression; there is turmoil in Europe, and the world is on the brink of World War II. While these world events have some significance for the play, this play has little to do with world events. In fact, unlike *Death of a Salesman* or *Our Town*, this play has little universality, and the characters are not very representative of the general population. As critics have pointed out, Laura is too unique to be a universal figure. Yet, there is something about this play that has, for more than fifty years, grabbed the attention and involved the emotions of countless audiences. As you study this play, see if you can identify what there is about it that touches people.

Note: All references come from the New Directions paperback edition of *The Glass Menagerie*, published 1999.

The Glass Menagerie

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify the common aim of straight realistic and expressionistic drama and differentiate between the two on the basis of staging.
2. identify and discuss the rationale for the unconventional techniques of staging that Williams employs in this play.
3. trace the development of the following motifs in this play:
 - A. deception
 - B. illusions
 - C. lights and shadows
 - D. escape
 - E. fragility
4. identify and state the significance of the following symbols:
 - A. the glass menagerie
 - B. the unicorn
 - C. the gentleman caller
 - D. the fire escape
5. identify which of the three major characters is the protagonist and present an argument in support of that selection.
6. present an argument for the position that Tom, in addition to being an individual, is also representative of all the young men of that period in history.
7. demonstrate that all four characters, to varying degrees, live in a world that fluctuates between illusion and reality.
8. identify and discuss those elements that make this play an emotionally moving experience for most viewers and account for the play's universal appeal.
9. define and cite examples of the following literary terms:
 - symbol
 - allusion
 - irony
 - simile
 - foreshadowing
 - pun

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR ESSAY

1. The words “illusion” and “reality” are often juxtaposed. Can we, or should we, have just one or the other in our lives? Present a rationale for your thinking.
2. Sometimes, reality becomes a dismal affair for Amanda, Tom, and Laura. At those times, how does each try to escape reality? Identify the particular aspect of reality each hopes to escape.
3. What are some realities today that people wish to escape, and what are some of the common means of escape? What are some popular illusions?
4. What elements of staging are unconventional in this play?
5. How is expressionistic drama similar to and different from straight realistic drama?
6. The deception motif runs through this play. Provide examples in which one character purposely deceives one or more of the other characters.
7. Tom is an interesting character because he has such ambivalent feelings. Identify the two directions in which Tom is pulled, the decision he makes, and the effect that decision has on him.
8. Identify what each of the following symbols represents: the unicorn, the fire escape, and the gentleman caller.
9. In a paragraph, state why the title of the play is very appropriate.
10. Consider the character of Amanda over the course of the play. What impression of Amanda do you suppose Williams wanted the audience to have at the conclusion?

11. Although this could be described as a pessimistic play, there is also something one must admire about the characters in this play. What is pessimistic about the play's ending, and what is admirable about the characters Tom and Amanda?
12. Why is it inevitable that Amanda's dream of getting Jim and Laura together would end badly?
13. In what two distinct ways is the glass unicorn a perfect symbol for Laura?
14. In the last scene, why does Laura not get upset when Jim breaks the unicorn while they are dancing?
15. Define and find examples of the following literary terms:
 - symbol
 - allusion
 - irony
 - simile
 - foreshadowing
 - pun

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TEST

Multiple Choice

1. At the outset, Tom characterizes this play as
 - A. a damn good play.
 - B. a memory play.
 - C. a play about good and evil.
 - D. a play about a family that fell apart.
 - E. a play of bitter regrets.
2. This play is not a straight realistic play because
 - A. it transforms objects to better represent reality.
 - B. Tom is both a narrator of the play and a character within the play.
 - C. the staging of the play is unconventional.
 - D. Both B and C
 - E. A, B, and C
3. The father's picture has a prominent part in the play because
 - A. he died a war hero.
 - B. the children have no personal memory of him.
 - C. he represents someone who did escape.
 - D. in deserting the family, he was responsible for creating the conditions that give rise to the dramatic action.
 - E. Both C and D
4. Which of the following is a symbol in this play:
 - A. the glass collection.
 - B. the fire escape.
 - C. the gentleman caller.
 - D. Both A and C
 - E. A, B, and C
5. The unicorn symbolizes Laura's
 - A. freakishness and fragility.
 - B. color and mood.
 - C. strength and persistence.
 - D. beauty and style.
 - E. Both A and B

6. The mood is conveyed in this play through the use of
- A. music.
 - B. lighting.
 - C. dialogue.
 - D. Both B and C
 - E. A, B, and C
7. Which of the following is not true of Amanda?
- A. She is a member of the D.A.R.
 - B. She drinks too much.
 - C. She sells magazine subscriptions.
 - D. She lives in a past that included gracious Southern living.
 - E. She wants to secure her daughter's future.
8. Which character is described as "an emissary from the world of reality"?
- A. Jim
 - B. Tom
 - C. the father
 - D. Amanda
 - E. the man from the electric company
9. Jim called Laura "Blue Roses" in high school because
- A. she was so different from everyone else.
 - B. that was the name of her favorite song.
 - C. she told him she had been absent from school because of pleurosis, and he misunderstood what she had said.
 - D. that was the name of the character she played in a school play.
 - E. of a straw hat with blue roses on it that she used to wear.
10. Laura dropped out of business school because
- A. the family could not afford the tuition.
 - B. one of the men at the school bothered her.
 - C. she had an argument with the teacher.
 - D. she got sick and was too embarrassed to face everyone after that.
 - E. she decided that she did not want a career in business.
11. Laura's handicap is
- A. a limp.
 - B. her shyness.
 - C. her lack of confidence.
 - D. her brother.
 - E. A, B, and C

12. Laura practices deception when
- A. she pretends to be going to business college.
 - B. she says she has been practicing the typing chart.
 - C. Both A and B
 - D. she gets upset over what her mother says.
 - E. Both A and D
13. Tom finally leaves the house for good
- A. after he is fired from his job.
 - B. after an argument with Amanda.
 - C. when he realizes Laura no longer needs him.
 - D. in order to spite Amanda.
 - E. Both B and D
14. An obvious bit of symbolism in the play occurs when
- A. Tom snags his coat in the door as he hastily exits.
 - B. Amanda pulls the father's picture from the wall and throws it into the trash.
 - C. Laura slips as she leaves the house.
 - D. Both A and C
 - E. A, B, and C
15. Tom contrasts himself to
- A. an old tired mule.
 - B. a magician.
 - C. an eagle with a broken wing.
 - D. Both B and C
 - E. A, B, and C
16. While the band plays "All the World is Waiting for the Sunrise," Tom says, "All the world is waiting for..."
- A. a savior.
 - B. a friend.
 - C. bombardments.
 - D. the peace.
 - E. death.
17. To pay for his merchant seaman union dues, Tom
- A. borrows the money from Jim.
 - B. tricks Amanda into giving it to him.
 - C. steals money from the shoe company.
 - D. uses the money put aside to pay the electric bill.
 - E. sells his typewriter.

18. Which of the following is not true about Jim?
- A. he calls Tom "Shakespeare."
 - B. he is taking night courses.
 - C. he has dreams of becoming an executive.
 - D. he is already involved with a woman.
 - E. he treats Laura cruelly.
19. In the last scene, Tom tells us that
- A. freedom is not all it is cracked up to be.
 - B. he is dying.
 - C. the memory of Laura haunts him wherever he has gone.
 - D. he has finally forgiven his mother.
 - E. life is both sad and beautiful, good and evil.
20. When Jim breaks the horn off the unicorn,
- A. Laura cries, "Please don't let it be!"
 - B. Laura says, "Maybe it's a blessing in disguise."
 - C. Amanda cries, "Finally!"
 - D. Tom says, "I'll buy you another."
 - E. Both A and D

Essays (Answer any two)

1. In a paragraph, state the ways in which the unicorn is a symbol for Laura. Be sure to mention the relevance of the breaking of the unicorn's horn.
2. In an essay, examine why each one of these characters finds the need to escape from reality. In your topic sentence, make mention of the symbolic role of the fire escape.
3. Identify the elements in this play that make this an enduring piece of American theater.
4. Identify and discuss those elements of staging that mark this as an expressionistic play.

The Glass Menagerie

Answer Key

1. B	5. A	9. C	13. A	17. D
2. E	6. E	10. D	14. D	18. E
3. E	7. B	11. E	15. B	19. C
4. E	8. A	12. C	16. C	20. B

ESSAY ANSWERS

- The glass unicorn represents Laura in two obvious ways. Like the unicorn, Laura is a fragile being; she seems much too vulnerable both physically and emotionally. In addition, both Laura and the unicorn are unique. It is she who uses the term “freakish” to describe the one unicorn amongst the collection of glass horses, but the viewer cannot help noting that “freakish” also describes Laura. As Jim points out, Laura is “surprisingly different from anyone else...”

When Jim breaks the horn off the unicorn, the unicorn is no longer unique. It is not freakish because now it is just like all the other horses in the menagerie. The symbolism in the action seems obvious, but how the action should be symbolically interpreted is less so. Laura accepts the broken unicorn calmly and graciously. Because she is able to joke about it, this behavior may indicate that her experience with Jim had a profound effect on her. As a result, she will no longer be the “freak” she had been.
- A fire escape is an emergency exit to be used in the event of fire; for Tom, Amanda, and Laura, it is the entry point into the real world. For Tom, it is the exit he uses for his temporary and, in the end, final escape from the desperation of the cell-like apartment to the world of action and adventure. Tom is desperate because he longs for a life of action and adventure, but his job is a monotonous grind and his life is saddled with family responsibilities. To escape from his grim reality, Tom drinks and goes to the movies. He recognizes, though, that these are only temporary escapes, and he looks forward to the time he can be free of his burdens to travel and write.

Amanda’s grim reality is the vision she has of Laura’s future. She realizes that, not being cut out for the business world, Laura has no way to support herself. Amanda, who has the experience of the first-hand raising of two young children after her husband deserted her, also realizes that life is a grim affair. It is, in fact, so unlike the life she knew as a young woman that she escapes reality by reliving those early years. She wishes while standing on the fire escape.

For Laura, reality is being alone in a world full of people because she feels freakish. Initially, no doubt, it was her limp that made her feel like a freak; now, her shyness and lack of confidence further reinforce the feeling. Worse yet, she is constantly reminded of her situation by a well-meaning but nagging mother. To escape this reality, Laura loses herself in her glass collection or by listening to the old records left by her father.

3. The characters in this play and their predicaments strike a responsive chord in the hearts of most viewers. Like Tom, we are not sure where his responsibilities lie. He is a decent, sensitive man working at a monotonous job in order to support his mother and sister, both of whom he loves very much. To stay in this job is good for his family but signifies death for him. He feels he needs to travel and have experiences if he is to become the writer he wishes to be.

Amanda, while perhaps recognizing Tom's needs in some lucid moments, nags him. She wants and expects Tom to play the role of provider, at least until Laura can find someone to marry. While she appears to be silly and vacuous at times, Williams emphasizes her strength and dignity in the closing scene. Amanda, who has not done a bad job of raising two children by herself, will continue to do what she must for her daughter.

As Jim finds out, Laura can be a funny, gracious person once she relaxes. Hampered by a lack of confidence and shyness, however, it is hard for Laura to relax when she is out in the world. Readers can understand the mother's apprehension for the fate of this fragile, freakish girl.

Because the viewers can understand the dreams and sympathize with the plight of all these characters, they, too, feel the ineffable sadness that Tom communicates as the curtain comes down on this play.

4. As Williams indicates in his production notes, an expressionistic play approaches truth by not aping reality but by transforming reality into an illusion. Paradoxically, real objects are made more real (communicate more truth) when they are made less real (imaginary or symbolic function is emphasized). Williams, in this play, broke away from straight realistic staging in four areas.

First, one of his major characters is inside the play as a character, but Tom is also outside the play as a narrator, who is able to comment on the action of the play. Obviously, this technique could not be used in a play which tried to mimic reality.

His second departure from realistic staging is the use of the screen. For some directors, this apparently is too great a departure, and they exclude it from their productions. While Williams felt it emphasized what is happening on stage, some directors feel that it is more of a distraction than an aid.

Williams' third bit of non-realistic staging is removing some of the props. For example, we see the dinner being eaten with imaginary knives and forks rather than real ones.

Finally, Williams is able to convey some of his meaning through his use of lighting. Rather than having a brilliantly lit stage, the action of the play takes place under dim lights. This is, one must remember, a memory play. In addition, spotlights are used to isolate or emphasize a character or characters.

How necessary all these unconventional techniques are is open to question. Undoubtedly, the use of Tom as both character and narrator and the lighting are instrumental in creating the mood Williams desired.

The Glass Menagerie

STUDY GUIDE

TEACHER'S COPY

Questions on Production Notes

1. What does Williams say is the only valid aim of expressionism?

In expression, unconventional techniques (such as non-realistic staging and odd lighting) are used to get a closer approach to the truth.

2. Give some of the examples he uses to illustrate the difference between a realistic play and an expressionistic play.

Realistic plays present real refrigerators and real ice cubes. He likens a straight realistic play to a photograph. In an expressionistic play, however, objects may be only suggested or mimed. The poet-playwright transforms objects to represent the reality he or she is presenting in a different way.

3. For what purpose did Williams create the screen device?

He used it to highlight the most important points in a scene and give the play an evident unity. It also, he believes, gives the play a definite emotional appeal.

4. What type of music is played throughout the play, and what mood does it try to establish?

Circus music is used to support "the surface vivacity of life with the underlying strain of immutable and inexpressible sorrow." The music serves as a reminder of the first condition of this play, nostalgia, and focuses on Laura and her image, "the lovely fragility of glass."

5. How is lighting employed in this play?

Lighting is not realistic. Because this is a memory play, the stage is dimly lit, with shafts of light focused on selected areas or characters.

Scene One

1. At the opening, the fire escape and the father's pictures are two objects that figure prominently in the set. Literally, what is the purpose of a fire escape? Symbolically, what may the fire escape represent?

A fire escape is an emergency exit from a burning building. Symbolically, it could represent an escape from the desperation that exists in the family lives within the apartment.

2. What is prominent about the father's picture?

It is a blown-up photograph of a young, handsome soldier with a gallant smile. It is a smile that says, "I will be smiling forever."

3. As the play's narrator, Tom says he is the opposite of a magician. In what way?

The magician gives the audience an illusion that has the appearance of truth. Tom gives truth in the pleasant disguise of an illusion.

4. How is the word "illusion" defined?

An illusion is an appearance or impression that has no real basis; it is a false perception. For example, one can create the illusion of depth in a two-dimensional picture.

5. Tom, as the narrator, is going to create an illusion for us that is going to give us the truth. The truth about whom? What kind of truth will he present?

He intends to show truth about his family: his mother, Amanda; his sister, Laura; himself; and the gentleman caller.

6. In what way is this not going to be a straight realistic play?

Because it is a memory play, Tom tells us that he intends to take liberties with the lighting and staging. For example, he is going to be both a character inside the play and a narrator, who can also stand outside the play and comment on the action.

7. This play is being narrated in flashback. In what period of time does the action take place? How long after this is he telling us the story?

The action takes place in the 1930's. Tom is telling us about it five to ten years later.

8. When Tom, as narrator, tells us the gentleman caller is "an emissary from a world of reality," what is he telling us about his family's world?

He relates that they do not live in the real world, but they possibly live with illusions.

9. Describe Amanda as we have seen her so far.

She is pushy and bossy; she lives in a past that involved Southern gracious living and formal calls at home by gentlemen. While she undoubtedly exaggerates, there is no reason to believe she is lying.

10. Why does Tom get upset with her?

Tom is angry because she is authoritarian and keeps telling the same old story.

11. To Amanda, what do the seventeen gentlemen callers represent?

They stand for the popularity of her youth and a gracious lifestyle she no longer has.

12. The legend on the screen translates into English as, “Where are the snows of yesteryear?” What does this have to do with Amanda?

The snows of yesteryear are melted and gone, just as the past has for everyone, including Amanda.

Scene 2

1. What is the D.A.R., and how does it serve to establish some of Amanda’s credibility?

The D.A.R. is the Daughters of the American Revolution, and her membership in this white, upper-middle class organization does indicate that her background could be what she suggests it to be, at least in terms of her family and upbringing.

2. As this scene opens, why does Amanda accuse Laura of deception?

Laura had stopped going to business school, but she left the house each day as if she were going.

3. Although she may strike readers as pushy, Amanda does have a genuine concern regarding her daughter. What is this concern?

She is afraid that Laura is going to have to find a way to support herself, and a career in business would have been the way to go. Since she is not suited for business, though, her only other option is to get married.

4. What are Laura’s handicaps?

She has a limp, but she speaks of herself as a cripple; she is also very shy and lacks confidence.

5. When Amanda gives a suggestion to Laura at the end of this act, is Amanda deluding herself or is she giving the daughter practical advice?

How much of a limp Laura actually exhibits may vary from director to director. Even if it is a severe limp, Amanda's advice is practical for someone in Laura's position. Remember that the setting of this play is the Depression, and the alternatives for those who could not support themselves were few and or unpleasant.

6. In this scene, both Laura and Amanda can be accused of practicing deception. What are the deceptions of each?

Laura is fooling with her glass collection, but when she hears her mother approaching, she pushes the glass collection away and pretends to have been working on the typing chart. She also deceives Amanda about going to business college.

Amanda's deception is the role-playing she engages in when confronting Laura. No doubt, she is disappointed, but she over-dramatizes her reaction.

Scene 3

1. Each of these three people feels trapped, giving rise to feelings of desperation. Indicate why each feels trapped and what is done by each to gain a temporary escape.

Tom feels trapped by feelings of love, responsibility, and economic necessity. He wants adventure, romance, and excitement in his life; instead, he works at a job he cannot stand in order to support his sister and mother. To escape, Tom goes to the movies and also gets drunk.

Amanda is desperate because she is worried about Laura's future. Her own life, which could not have been an easy one since her husband's departure, is bleak. She escapes by turning to an illusion of younger and better days.

Laura, while not appearing desperate, is trapped by her lack of self-confidence. She appears to be unable to function as other girls her age do. She does not work, go to school, or date. To escape, she becomes lost in her glass menagerie.

2. Amanda censors Tom's reading by saying she will not have filth in the house. Tom counters by saying that he pays the rent, so it is his house. Who is right? What is the book Amanda alludes to?

Students may answer this question several ways. Some say that because Tom is an adult and pays the rent, which gives him authority. However, others may argue that Amanda is still his mother and that she should have the right to censor what her son reads. Amanda says it is, "[t]hat hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence," an obvious allusion to D. H. Lawrence's work, either Sons and Lovers or Lady Chatterly's Lover.

3. Amanda says Tom cannot jeopardize his job, because it is their only support. Is supporting his mother and sister Tom's responsibility?

Morally, supporting the family was Tom's father's responsibility. Tom points out that if he were selfish he could leave the way his father did. It seems to be shaping into an either/or situation: stay and meet his responsibilities to his family or leave and fulfill a responsibility to himself. Perhaps, because he wants to be a writer, he does not envision much of a possibility of doing both.

4. As Tom storms out of the apartment, he snags his coat. What is the obvious symbolism in that action?

He wants to leave, but he is held back.

5. What disaster occurs when Tom finally pulls his coat free? What is Laura's response? What is Amanda's response?

He throws the coat, and it crashes into Laura's glass collection. She appears devastated, but Amanda does not even notice what has happened.

6. Tom seems to have a romantic disposition but is forced to live in a grimly realistic life. In a tragic-comic passage, he lists the things he does in his "real night life." To what extent does Tom want to live that kind of life?

While Tom does not want to be a gangster or gambler, he does want excitement and adventure in his life.

7. What impression do you get from Tom's speech?

Answers may vary. Example: Tom wants to assert himself, but the exaggerated examples he offers (opium dens, green whiskers, dynamiters, etc.) are simply pathetic and ludicrous. When, instead of leaving, he kneels down and helps Laura, it is obvious that he cannot leave.

Scene 4

1. Again, Tom draws a comparison between himself and a magician. What is his coffin from which he wants to escape? Explain the irony in his speech.

He needs to leave the apartment with all its responsibilities. The magician is easily able to extricate himself from a coffin (how Tom sees the apartment), but Tom is unable to escape from the confines of his life.

2. Why is the grinning photograph of the father in the spotlight at this point?

It is an answer to Tom's question, "Who in hell ever got himself out of a coffin?" The audience sees exactly who escaped.

3. Like Tom, Laura has a mishap as she leaves the house; she slips and falls. What symbolism could be attached to this failed exit?

The inability to leave is likely to represent any attempt Laura makes to enter into the outside world.

4. Ushered in by sounds of “Ave Maria” (“Hail Mary”), Amanda explains herself to Tom. In what way does she say she must be respected?

She raised two children by herself and appears to be genuinely concerned about their best interests; however, she does not seem, to the reader, to understand how to show her concern and love. Consequently, she treats them as young children, makes them feel guilty for wanting lives of their own, and denigrates them when it suits her purposes. As she tells Tom, these are tough times, and they only have each other.

5. In what way does Tom remind Amanda of her husband?

Like his father, Tom has an interest in drinking, a love of adventure, and a desire to be on the move.

6. How might the letter Amanda saw foreshadow Tom’s departure?

The letter is from the Merchant Marines.

7. What is the one thing Amanda begs of Tom?

He should stay until Laura finds a husband. She wants Tom to help in that effort by overcoming his “selfishness.”

Scene 5

1. The band is playing “All the world is waiting for the sunrise”; but Tom, the narrator, tells us, “All the world was waiting for bombardments.” What is the world scene, and what possible significance could it have for this play?

The world is on the brink of World War II, and the life of every young person is to be changed greatly. The idea that plans could be made and life go on as usual is yet another illusion.

2. What literary term is used in Tom’s speech?

Tom uses three literary terms. First, he says that “adventure and change” were “[s]uspended in the mist over Berchesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain’s umbrella.” This is an allusion both to Hitler’s vacation retreat in the mountains and to Britain’s Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain. It is also a metaphor that compares young people’s waiting and the imminence of war. The next literary term is a simile: “hot swing music and liquor...hung in the gloom like a chandelier...”

3. What illusion about the gentleman caller is Amanda nurturing?

She believes, or wants to believe, that the gentleman caller will come, fall in love, and marry Laura.

4. What does Tom say to Amanda about Laura that makes Amanda’s dream for Laura seem even more unrealistic?

Tom says that men meet many women in life and do not propose. Later, he adds that Laura might be thought of as a little strange by other people because of her shyness and preoccupation with her glass collection. At this point, Amanda’s dream of marriage for Laura seems even more unrealistic.

5. Upon hearing the gentleman caller’s name, Amanda says they will have to have fish for dinner. Why?

She is assuming he is an Irish-Catholic, and at the time of the play, Catholics did not eat meat on Fridays. Because he is Irish, she is also concerned about how much he drinks.

6. What indicates that Jim is an ambitious person who plans on getting ahead?

He is taking night courses.

Note: The scene ends with Amanda and Laura standing in the moonlight, both having made Amanda’s wish. Throughout this play, lighting is significant. Notice the references to light and lighting in the next two scenes.

Scene 6

1. Why does Tom say Jim has not gone as far in life as one might have expected?

Jim had been the all-around achiever in high school, but his present job is only a cut above Tom’s.

2. How is Tom’s desire to be a writer further brought out?

Jim calls Tom “Shakespeare” because Tom writes poetry in the washroom.

3. List some references to light in the early part of the scene.

Answers may vary. Examples: Jim had the “look of white chinaware,...moved in a continual spotlight,[and]...sang in the annual light operas.”

4. In what form does the deception motif appear again in this scene?

Amanda tells Laura to wear the “Gay Deceivers” in order to appear to have a larger bust than she actually has. Later, Amanda will also try to further deceive Jim by telling him that Laura made the dinner and is very domestic.

5. What can you infer from Amanda’s comment that Laura now, her figure enhanced, is “the prettiest [she] will ever be”?

It implies that without the “Gay Deceivers,” she is inadequate, that only with them can she be pretty, and that she will never look better in reality than she does through deception.

6. What literary terms are used in Amanda’s comment, “It isn’t dark enough yet”?

Since the entire dinner is doomed to fail, it will be dark soon. The literary terms are irony and foreshadowing.

7. What has made Laura sick?

Jim is the boy she had a crush on in high school. It is impossible for her to sit and eat dinner with him. Her shyness and emotions make her ill.

8. Though it had been hinted at earlier, we finally hear the dream that Tom has been nurturing. What is it? What literary term is used when Tom speaks of “movies” and “moving”?

He dreams that a world of action and adventure is out there for him once he leaves St. Louis and is part of the Merchant Marines. Tom uses a play on the words, a pun.

9. Is this dream realistic, or is it another illusion?

Generally, we are who we are, no matter where we live. With the world on the brink of war, however, Tom may find the action and adventure he wants so badly.

10. How does Jim (“the emissary from the world of reality”) react when Tom tells him he used the money for the electric bill to pay his merchant marine union dues?

As the realist, Jim tells Tom he will regret it when they turn the lights off for non-payment. He adds, “You’re just talking, you drip.”

Scene 7

1. Some critics suggest that Jim, walking into the darkened living room with a candelabrum from the altar of the Church of Heavenly Rest, is a Christ figure. But Christ figures usually redeem or save someone or something else through their own suffering. In your opinion, is Jim a Christ figure?

He does not seem to suffer; an argument could be made that he is, perhaps, Laura's savior. He offers her comfort, assures her that her brace did not "clump," remembers her slightly from high school, and tries to build her confidence.

2. What are some of Jim's attributes and some of his faults?

He is a hard-working, decent person, who tries to help Laura overcome her shyness. Seen in a negative light, he could be thought of as an officious person offering advice where none was requested. He also seems to have very little regard for her shyness when he says, "Although my case was not so aggravated as yours seems to be."

3. Did Jim *not* notice Laura's limping because she had only a slight limp or because in those days Jim was so caught up in himself he rarely noticed anything? Is Jim's comment a polite lie?

Jim's comment is impossible to answer in any definitive way. The answer might depend on how pronounced the director makes Laura's limp.

4. In the course of the conversation with Jim, how does Laura change?

Laura goes from being terrified and shy to a relaxed young woman. She is able to make jokes about the glass animals, and even tries to dance with Jim.

5. What ironic comment does Jim make just before the dance.

He says, "I'm not made of glass."

6. How does Laura react when Jim breaks the horn off the unicorn? How does her reaction contrast sharply with the time that Tom broke some of the animals?

She takes this accident much more in stride. In fact, she says that losing its horn makes the unicorn like the other horses. Previously, she said the unicorn was her "favorite one"; now she claims she does not "have favorites much."

7. She says, "Maybe it's a blessing in disguise." In what way might this be true?

It makes the unicorn less freakish and more at home with the other horses. Possibly, in a symbolic way, Laura is becoming more like other people.

8. Is the implication that, at this point, Laura is less fragile and freakish than before?

Williams seems to have gone to some lengths to make the unicorn symbolize Laura, and there is no question that Laura has changed and recognizes the change.

9. Reaction to Jim's news about Betty is mirrored in Laura's face. What is her reaction, and why is it such a marked one?

This evening with Jim, with his attention, his compliments, and his kiss, has to be one of the most compelling, ardent, and desperate of Laura's dreams come true. She undoubtedly is thinking beyond this night, when he might call for a date, even when he might take her away from the apartment, but now there will be nothing past the kiss. She is devastated.

10. Is there any indication that Laura will survive or be buried by this sudden revelation?

Answers may vary. Examples: The fact that she gives Jim the broken unicorn may suggest that she will remain a stronger person. It may suggest that she gives him her most precious thing, love, symbolized by the unicorn. It also could indicate that she is broken, just as the glass figure is.

11. What is the irony in Amanda's rebukes to Tom?

Amanda fails to see that she, herself, also manufactures illusions. She calls Laura "crippled," despite her previous dislike for the word; she also complains about all the work she did preparing for Jim's arrival.

12. Why is it appropriate for the play and for his character that Tom remain until he is finally fired from his job?

Tom, even after the fight, cannot just leave. He has to be forced out, and losing his job does that.

13. What is the last picture we get of Amanda?

The stage directions state, "her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty."

14. What is the last picture we get of Tom?

He is doing what he wants to do, but there seems to be something missing for him. He tells us that he is haunted by Laura's memory.

15. What is the last picture we get of Laura?

As she blows out the candle, she is the last one seen on stage. The blowing out of the candle could be symbolically significant, but the fact that it is her action that closes the play seems the most significant.

The Glass Menagerie

STUDY GUIDE

STUDENT COPY

Questions on Production Notes

1. What does Williams say is the only valid aim of expressionism?
2. Give some of the examples he uses to illustrate the difference between a realistic play and an expressionistic play.
3. For what purpose did Williams create the screen device?
4. What type of music is played throughout the play, and what mood does it try to establish?
5. How is lighting employed in this play?

Scene One

1. At the opening, the fire escape and the father's pictures are two objects that figure prominently in the set. Literally, what is the purpose of a fire escape? Symbolically, what may the fire escape represent?
2. What is prominent about the father's picture?
3. As the play's narrator, Tom says he is the opposite of a magician. In what way?
4. How is the word "illusion" defined?
5. Tom, as the narrator, is going to create an illusion for us that is going to give us the truth. The truth about whom? What kind of truth will he present?
6. In what way is this not going to be a straight realistic play?
7. This play is being narrated in flashback. In what period of time does the action take place? How long after this is he telling us the story?

8. When Tom, as narrator, tells us the gentleman caller is “an emissary from a world of reality,” what is he telling us about his family’s world?
9. Describe Amanda as we have seen her so far.
10. Why does Tom get upset with her?
11. To Amanda, what do the seventeen gentlemen callers represent?
12. The legend on the screen translates into English as, “Where are the snows of yesteryear?” What does this have to do with Amanda?

Scene 2

1. What is the D.A.R., and how does it serve to establish some of Amanda's credibility?
2. As this scene opens, why does Amanda accuse Laura of deception?
3. Although she may strike readers as pushy, Amanda does have a genuine concern regarding her daughter. What is this concern?
4. What are Laura's handicaps?
5. When Amanda gives a suggestion to Laura at the end of this act, is Amanda deluding herself or is she giving the daughter practical advice?
6. In this scene, both Laura and Amanda can be accused of practicing deception. What are the deceptions of each?

Scene 3

1. Each of these three people feels trapped, giving rise to feelings of desperation. Indicate why each feels trapped and what is done by each to gain a temporary escape.
2. Amanda censors Tom's reading by saying she will not have filth in the house. Tom counters by saying that he pays the rent, so it is his house. Who is right? What is the book Amanda alludes to?
3. Amanda says Tom cannot jeopardize his job, because it is their only support. Is supporting his mother and sister Tom's responsibility?
4. As Tom storms out of the apartment, he snags his coat. What is the obvious symbolism in that action?
5. What disaster occurs when Tom finally pulls his coat free? What is Laura's response? What is Amanda's response?
6. Tom seems to have a romantic disposition but is forced to live in a grimly realistic life. In a tragic-comic passage, he lists the things he does in his "real night life." To what extent does Tom want to live that kind of life?
7. What impression do you get from Tom's speech?

Scene 4

1. Again, Tom draws a comparison between himself and a magician. What is his coffin from which he wants to escape? Explain the irony in his speech.
2. Why is the grinning photograph of the father in the spotlight at this point?
3. Like Tom, Laura has a mishap as she leaves the house; she slips and falls. What symbolism could be attached to this failed exit?
4. Ushered in by sounds of “Ave Maria” (“Hail Mary”), Amanda explains herself to Tom. In what way does she say she must be respected?
5. In what way does Tom remind Amanda of her husband?
6. How might the letter Amanda saw foreshadow Tom’s departure?
7. What is the one thing Amanda begs of Tom?

Scene 5

1. The band is playing “All the world is waiting for the sunrise”; but Tom, the narrator, tells us, “All the world was waiting for bombardments.” What is the world scene, and what possible significance could it have for this play?
2. What literary term is used in Tom’s speech?
3. What illusion about the gentleman caller is Amanda nurturing?
4. What does Tom say to Amanda about Laura that makes Amanda’s dream for Laura seem even more unrealistic?
5. Upon hearing the gentleman caller’s name, Amanda says they will have to have fish for dinner. Why?
6. What indicates that Jim is an ambitious person who plans on getting ahead?

Note: The scene ends with Amanda and Laura standing in the moonlight, both having made Amanda’s wish. Throughout this play, lighting is significant. Notice the references to light and lighting in the next two scenes.

Scene 6

1. Why does Tom say Jim has not gone as far in life as one might have expected?
2. How is Tom's desire to be a writer further brought out?
3. List some references to light in the early part of the scene.
4. In what form does the deception motif appear again in this scene?
5. What can you infer from Amanda's comment that Laura now, her figure enhanced, is "the prettiest [she] will ever be"?
6. What literary terms are used in Amanda's comment, "It isn't dark enough yet"?
7. What has made Laura sick?

8. Though it had been hinted at earlier, we finally hear the dream that Tom has been nurturing. What is it? What literary term is used when Tom speaks of “movies” and “moving”?
9. Is this dream realistic, or is it another illusion?
10. How does Jim (“the emissary from the world of reality”) react when Tom tells him he used the money for the electric bill to pay his merchant marine union dues?

Scene 7

1. Some critics suggest that Jim, walking into the darkened living room with a candelabrum from the altar of the Church of Heavenly Rest, is a Christ figure. But Christ figures usually redeem or save someone or something else through their own suffering. In your opinion, is Jim a Christ figure?
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14. What is the last picture we get of Tom?

15. What is the last picture we get of Laura?

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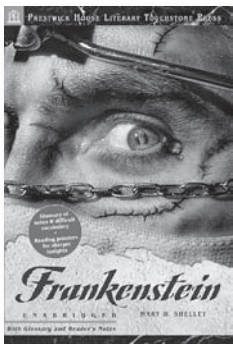
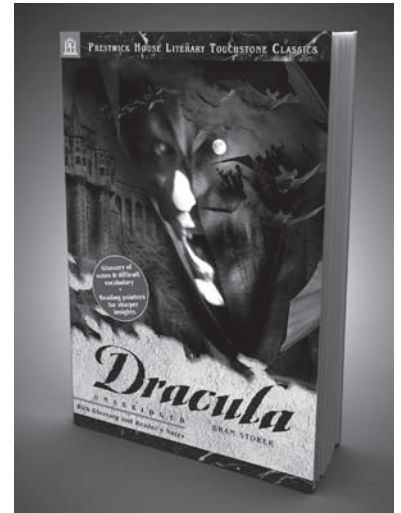
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