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Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

A Streetcar Named Desire

by Tennessee Williams

edited by Douglas Grudzina

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A Streetcar Named Desire

Objectives

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

1. analyze the significance of the play within the context of the development of twentieth-century American drama.

2. trace the development of the major and secondary themes of the play:
   - The Old South cannot survive the industrialized, modern world.
   - Desire leads to sorrow, loneliness, and death.
   - Life is inherently lonely.
   - Fantasy and reality are incompatible with one another.
   - **Human beings** are animals.

3. identify the common motifs used throughout the play.

4. analyze the use of music, costumes, scenery, and lighting.

5. identify the characteristics and components of a tragedy, including:
   a. exposition
   b. conflict
   c. rising action
   d. crisis
   e. climax
   f. falling action
   g. denouement
   h. catastrophe

6. analyze the significance of the title of the play and its relationship to the central themes of the work.

7. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

8. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

9. offer a close reading of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.

Introductory Lecture

THE PLAY

When *A Streetcar Named Desire* opened on Broadway on Dec. 3, 1947, critics lauded the Tennessee Williams play as a landmark work. Though tame by today's standards, the drama, with its overt representations of sexuality and an off-stage rape, shocked and thrilled audiences who were only beginning to experience the change in social mores that followed World War II. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1948 and secured Williams's reputation as one of the premier playwrights of the twentieth century.

The one-act drama revolves around the conflict between protagonist Blanche DuBois, a fragile, aging Southern beauty hobbled by her past and her drinking, and her brother-in-law, the virile and aggressive working-class Stanley Kowalski. Blanche prefers magic to realism. ("I don't tell the truth. I tell what ought to be true.") Stanley takes what he wants, abuses his wife, and likes women who lay their cards on the table. While Blanche is ephemeral and evasive, Stanley is a blunt instrument, who, in Williams's words, exhibits "animal joy in his being," as a "richly feathered male bird among hens." The pregnant Stella Kowalski, Blanche's sister, and Harold Mitchell, Blanche's would-be suitor, are caught between these two colliding forces.

Blanche has come (uninvited) to stay with her sister in New Orleans after losing both her teaching job and the family plantation in Mississippi (Belle Rêve or "Beautiful Dream"). Alone in the two-room apartment, she heads straight for the whiskey bottle. When Stella returns, Blanche delivers the bad news about the family fortune, managing in the process to lay a healthy dose of blame on her sister. Blanche rants: "I, I, *I* took the blows on my face and my body! All of those deaths . . . Death is expensive . . . Sit there thinking I let the place go! I let the place go? Where were *you*? In bed with your—Polack!"

The "Polack" recognizes at once that Blanche has not only been dipping into his liquor supply, but that she also aims to take his wife away from him. The two are immediately at odds, each seeking to destroy the other.

As the conflicts mount, Blanche, revealing a past that is both heroic and sordid, begins to unravel. Stanley, like the "Survivor of the Stone Age, Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle," pursues his prey. He exposes Blanche's dirty secrets, destroying her chance for a measure of security and happiness with Mitch. Finally, as their conflict reaches a crisis (amid the sound of "inhuman jungle voices" and beating drums), Stanley moves in for the kill—an off-stage rape that pushes the fragile Southern belle over the edge and into full-blown madness.

In the final scene, as she is carted off to the insane asylum, Blanche delivers her signature line and what has become one of the most often repeated and parodied lines of twentieth century American drama: "Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

The irony of Blanche's poignant parting remark underscores the loneliness and futility of not only her circumstances but also of the human condition. Abandoned and then betrayed by her family, Blanche has turned for solace to strangers, each time with disastrous consequences. Her tragic ending, the playwright seems to be saying, is the inescapable ending of anyone who fully gives himself or herself over to desire.

Elia Kazan directed the Broadway production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as the 1951 film version. The drama introduced audiences to the raw power of a 23-year-old actor named Marlon Brando. Brando, who was the third choice for the part after John Garfield and Burt Lancaster, has become forever identified with the brutish Stanley and his bellowed, "Stell-*lahhhhh*!"

In later years, Williams confirmed that when he wrote the play, he intended for Blanche to be the more sympathetic character, a relic of the South's past, destroyed by the barbaric Stanley. Indeed, there are a few details provided to Blanche to help her win audience sympathy, most especially whatever we can believe about the difficulties she had caring for her dying relatives and struggling with family finances until she suffered the loss of her home. Perhaps the way the memory of her late husband and her role in his suicide haunts her is also intended to gain audience sympathy. Whether Blanche's supposed memory of having worn Shep Huntleigh's fraternity pin and her deceptions and delusions about her reunion render her sympathetic or pitiable is a matter of interpretation and debate.

Certainly the facts that Blanche is the only character present in every scene in the play and the only character for whom Williams has developed any detailed backstory suggest that she is the centerpiece of the play, the complex character around whom the less-developed personae hover. By comparison, there is something stereotypical, almost caricaturish, about Stanley; and Mitch is merely a two-dimensional cliché.

Even Stella is weakly developed in comparison. All the audience knows of her past is that, when there was trouble at Belle Rêve, she left to find work and establish her independence. She met the working-class Stanley when he was an impressive officer in uniform (presumably World War II), and now she is married, pregnant, and apparently content with her life.

A Streetcar Named Desire ran on Broadway for two years before Kazan's film brought the work to a national audience. Williams wrote the screenplay for the movie and voluntarily rewrote some of the dialogue and scenes, particularly to omit direct references to homosexuality. The ending of the movie was also changed—Stella rejects Stanley after Blanche is carted off to the asylum—to make the film more palatable to mainstream audiences. Additional scenes that producers feared might result in censorship were also cut after filming. Recent DVD releases include those restored scenes.

GENRE AND PLOT STRUCTURE

A Streetcar Named Desire is a one-act play with eleven scenes. The work is a tragedy, a serious drama in which the problems and flaws of the central characters lead to an unhappy or catastrophic ending. The original Greek word *tragoidia* roughly means "the song of the goat," from *tragos* (goat) and *oide* (ode or song), so named perhaps because performers dressed as satyrs in goatskins. The structure of the classic dramatic tragedy, as defined by the ancient Greek philosopher and critic, Aristotle, adheres to three unities: unity of time, unity of place, and unity of action. In other words, the story is set in a single location, within a discreet time period, and is built around a series of actions that pertain to a single, central plot. In a classic tragedy, the story is told in a straightforward, chronological fashion, as the rising action builds toward a crisis and then the climax. The falling action is often brief, resulting in a swift *denouement* (outcome or final solution.) In the case of a tragedy, the unhappy resolution is known as the *catastrophe*.

In many ways, *Streetcar* fits the standard parameters of a **classical** tragedy.

- The single-interior setting, the Kowalski apartment, where all the on-stage action occurs, provides the **unity of place**. When Williams desires to change locations, his directions clearly describe a set in which lighting changes and the use of transparent walls allow for smooth transitions without set changes.

- The story develops chronologically over the course of a few months, creating the **unity of time**. Facts about Blanche's past are revealed through dialogue, rather than flashbacks, and serve to develop and explain the forward-moving plot.

- There is only one plot (**unity of action**)—the conflict between Blanche and Stanley. Stella and Mitch serve to complicate and enhance that single plot and do not have sub-plots of their own. Likewise, the minor characters, Eunice and Steve Hubbell, have no storyline of their own; their domestic squabbles echo the front-and-center fights between Stanley and Stella.

In a classic tragedy, the tragic hero meets with an unhappy end—usually his or her utter destruction, brought about by a combination of outside forces and his or her own fatal flaws. In *Streetcar*, Blanche is this tragic hero. Her past is a mixed bag. She has apparently sacrificed some part of her own happiness in order to tend to her dying relatives in Laurel, Mississippi, and witnessed the loss of the family home—a loss that she was powerless to stop. At the same time, she herself callously and thoughtlessly destroyed a sensitive soul and has spent her life since that defining event engaging in morally questionable behavior with assorted men, including a student.

As the play unfolds, she desires to be Stella's rescuer, but ultimately is unable to accomplish anything. The most action she takes toward extricating her sister and herself from Stanley and his abuse is to pretend to telephone and write to a man who is little more than a figment of her imagination.

Likewise, her attempt to secure her own happiness is essentially neurotic, deceitful, and manipulative. When Stanley learns the truth and uses it against her, she is undone by her **own** weaknesses (social pretension, alcoholism, mendacity, and a fixation with the past). Stanley is the antagonist who pursues her, exposes her weaknesses and secrets, and ultimately destroys her.

As a one-act play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* differs somewhat in structure from more traditional two- or three-act plays. In a typical three-act play, each act ends on a significant point in the plot. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, most critics agree that these "plot points" are found in Scene Three and Scene Eight. Collectively, the plot points build toward the climax in Scene Ten. Each scene can be studied as a contained unit, as the action rises toward the plot points and ultimately the climax. Most of the scenes also end on a note of tension or suspense, usually reinforced by the musical score. (The blue piano music ends seven of the eleven scenes, while the Varsouviana polka closes two.)

While, on the surface, the plot structure of *A Streetcar Named Desire* may appear not to follow the most conventions of its genre, it does follow a fairly typical story arc.

The dramatic premise—the essence of the plot—is, of course, the conflict between Blanche, the Southern belle, and Stanley, the working-class, master of his castle.

The dramatic situation—the circumstances surrounding the action—involve the incompatible characters of Blanche, Stella, and Stanley being thrust together in the tiny apartment on Elysian Fields Avenue.

The inciting incident—the event that sets the plot in motion—is Blanche's unexpected arrival with the news that the family plantation has been lost.

Plot point 1—an event that forces the protagonist to change direction or meet a new challenge—occurs during the poker game of Scene Three. This is when Stanley's abuse of Stella sets Blanche squarely against him and forces Stella to choose sides. It also casts Blanche's situation in sharp relief: she cannot stay long on Elysian Fields Avenue.

Obstacles—events, character traits, or circumstances that prevent the main character from achieving his or her goal—include the fact that Blanche has no money. Most of the obstacles she encounters, however, are emotional and of her own making.

The first culmination—the point when success seems within reach of the main character, just before he or she suffers a major reversal—occurs in Scene Six. Blanche is on the verge of establishing a relationship with Mitch that could lead to marriage. In Scene Seven, it is revealed that Stanley has destroyed Blanche's chance at love by telling Mitch about her sordid past.

Plot point 2—typically, the second major pivot or turning point, which generally occurs at the protagonist's darkest hour—sometimes, however, leaving a suggestion that the protagonist may yet be able to prevail—occurs in Scene Eight when Stanley "gives" Blanche a one-way bus ticket to her home. This suggests that she might still leave the situation without either being destroyed or destroying Stanley and Stella.

The climax (second culmination)—the zenith of the action or the point at which the conflict reaches its peak—occurs in Scene Ten with the final destruction of Blanche's delusions about herself, her past, and her future. The offstage rape physically represents the final shattering of Blanche's fragile state. This is also the moment when the audience knows that Blanche has "lost," and Stanley has "won."

The denouement—the wrapping up of loose ends or the calm after the storm of the climax that precedes the ending—occurs at the beginning of Scene Eleven, as Stella tells Eunice about their plans for Blanche and her rejection of Blanche's allegation of rape. Nothing in what is said or occurs in this scene has an impact on the outcome of the play. That was determined in the climax.

The catastrophe—the denouement or ending of the action, usually arousing a sense of fear and pity in a tragedy—occurs at the end of Scene Eleven when an utterly destroyed Blanche is taken from the apartment to an insane asylum where she will undoubtedly spend the rest of her life.

THE DRAMATIC PRODUCTION

As with any drama, Williams uses costumes, music, and scenery to communicate his intentions and meanings in both subtle and direct ways.

COSTUMES

Blanche first appears on stage dressed in a ruffled white suit, hat, and gloves, as though attired for a summer garden party. She looks—and is—out of place in the ramshackle neighborhood of small frame houses. Her incongruous appearance underscores the conflict between Southern gentility (good manners, pretensions, lost plantations, etc.) and the rough masculinity of urban society (bare-chested men, loud poker players, coarse language).

Stanley seizes upon Blanche's wardrobe as evidence that she spent money intended for Belle Rêve on herself: "Look at these feathers and furs that she comes here to preen herself in! What's this here? A solid-gold dress, I believe. And this one! What is these here? Fox pieces… Where are your fox pieces, Stella? Bushy snow-white ones, no less!"

The finery emphasizes Blanche's pretensions and her tenuous hold on reality. As her situation becomes more desperate and her mental condition begins to deteriorate, her costumes become increasingly frayed and farcical. By Scene Ten, she "has decked herself out in a somewhat soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown and a pair of scuffed silver slippers with brilliants set in their heels." On her head is a rhinestone tiara. Stanley ridicules her get-up as a "worn-out Mardi Gras outfit, rented for fifty-cents from some rag-picker."

The men wear strong, loud colors, silk bowling shirts in bold, primary colors. Stanley, upon first meeting Blanche, takes off his tight, white T-shirt—with blatant disrespect—to show off his powerful chest. Stanley's red pajamas are left lying across the bedroom doorway after a night of sex with Stella. And significantly, Stanley is wearing these same pajamas (his wedding night attire, his flag of conquest to wave when his son is born) when he rapes Blanche.

Stella and the other women wear softer, muted pastels. Blanche tells Stella, "I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft—soft people have got to shimmer and glow—they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a paper lantern over the light."

SETTING, SCENERY, AND SET DESIGN

The play is set in the Faubourg Marigny district of New Orleans. Williams, who lived for a time in New Orleans, describes the Marigny as poor but with a "raffish charm." The neighborhood's Creole cottages appear on stage as "mostly white frame, weathered grey, with rickety outside stairs and galleries and quaintly ornamented gables."

While Williams uses actual street names and streetcar lines in his dialogue, there is an indisputably symbolic value to the setting of the play. The Kowalskis live on Elysian Fields Avenue. The Elysian Fields are, of course, where the heroes of Greek mythology found their final rest and spent their afterlives. The street name is ironic since the Kowalskis' home is far from "heavenly," but it is the place to which Blanche hopes to escape from the ruins of her life in Laurel, Mississippi.

The symbolic irony is intensified, however, and the primary theme of the play introduced, when the confused Blanche tells Eunice in Scene One, "They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!" "Desire" leads to "Cemeteries" (death), which takes one to the "Elysian Fields." In Scene Four, during Blanche and Stella's argument, the sisters use the name of the streetcar line both literally and metaphorically:

> Blanche: What you are talking about is brutal desire…the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter…
>
> Stella: Haven't you ever ridden on that street-car?
>
> Blanche: It brought me here—

Given the context of their argument, both Blanche and Stella have arrived "here" by riding on the literal and the metaphoric streetcar named desire.

Here, of course, is the two-room Kowalski apartment. According to the stage directions, the apartment itself is squalid and sparsely furnished, with a bed and vanity in one room and a convertible sofa and a kitchen table in the other. In addition to the physical conditions of the apartment, however, Williams uses lighting and music to evoke the sensuality of New Orleans and signal key shifts in the plot and character development.

Lighting—particularly dimmed lights—and shadows are used throughout the play to create mood. Blanche arrives at night and throughout the play eschews the bright light, placing a paper lantern over the naked ceiling bulb, going out for dates with Mitch only after sundown. The external light shifts with the time of day—gentle for morning, bright for afternoon—creating the sense of the passage of time. The poker game is harshly lit by a hanging lamp with a "vivid green shade." The kitchen-turned-gambling-den, "now suggests the sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance" of Van Gogh's famous painting of a billiard-parlor at night.

In Scene Ten, as Blanche tries vainly to escape Stanley with her pretense of a soon-arriving suitor, shadows and "lurid reflections move sinuously as flames along the wall spaces," representing both her increasing turmoil and the advancing threat.

Williams's directions also indicate how lighting, and the use of scrim transparencies, indicate setting changes that allow him to show action outside of the apartment as well as inside—at times simultaneously.

The opening scene of the play and at least one instance when Blanche and Mitch are returning from a date take place on the street outside of the building. The interior of the apartment is hidden behind a screen, and the audience sees the exterior of the building. When Blanche and Eunice first enter the apartment, the lights change so that the apartment becomes visible for the first time, and the exterior details fade into darkness.

Similarly, in Scene Ten, immediately before the rape, the back walls of the apartment become transparent so that the audience can see the seedy goings-on on the street as well as the violence within the apartment.

Thus, Williams uses lighting and shadow, not only to establish mood, but also to indicate shifts of location while maintaining a continuous flow of action.

MUSIC

Williams uses thematic music to very specific ends in *Streetcar*. The Varsouviana polka begins to play whenever Blanche is reminded of her first husband the night of her discovery, and his suicide haunts her and becomes a vital element in her psychological deterioration and ultimate destruction. As her distress grows, the increasing intensity of the polka music clearly portends the hastening approach of her mental collapse. The blues piano, which Williams describes as "a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers," is the sound of New Orleans and "expresses the spirit of life" that occurs on Elysian Fields Avenue. The "Blue Piano" is used both to create ambience and to punctuate scenes with its mournful notes. Seven of the eleven scenes end with Blue Piano music. The "hot trumpet and drums," an intensified version of the Blue Piano, blare out Stanley's conquest of Blanche at the end of Scene 10. (A "hot" trumpet is one played with a mute.)

THEMES

Two major themes underpin the plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

- *The Old South cannot survive in an industrialized modern world.*

  Blanche and Stanley, even more than specific personae, are largely symbols or archetypes. Blanche, who clings to some highly-fantasized version of her past with her deceptions and pretensions of gentility, is Williams's personification of the Old South—a place of faded grace and deep flaws, ruined by the "epic fornications" of its ancestors and its own refusal to let go of that ruinous history. The brutal and sometimes violent Stanley represents an insatiable industrialized urban society that must crush its rivals to survive.

  The onstage conflict between Blanche and Stanley personifies this central theme, as Stanley gradually strips away Blanche's pretenses before destroying her.

- *Desire leads to sorrow, loneliness and death.*

  With her opening lines, Blanche articulates the notion that desire inevitably leads to death.

  Asked if she is lost, Blanche responds, "They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at Elysian Fields!"

  As the audience will gradually learn, Blanche has followed her desires, with their seductions, losses, and addictions, to her own destruction. Physically, she finds herself in a grim little apartment on Elysian Fields Avenue. Emotionally and spiritually, she is as bankrupt as the lost Belle Rêve plantation.

  Stella, who makes love to Stanley after he hits her, and chooses not to believe her sister's accustation of rape in order to be able to stay with her husband, is also trapped by her desires, and the play ends on the ambiguous note of whether Stella's choice will lead to her happiness or her own destruction.

Lesser themes explored in the play include:

- *Fantasy and reality are incompatible*. Blanche lives in a world of her own creation in which she is still beautiful and pure, where her past indiscretions either never happened or can be ignored. When Mitch accuses her of lying to him, she insists, "Never inside, I didn't lie in my heart…." Ultimately, however, reality will overcome the fantasy. Blanche cannot escape the Varsouviana playing constantly in her mind. Her past follows her to New Orleans, and both Mitch and Stanley confront her with the truth of who and what she is. This confrontation between the truth and "what *ought* to be the truth" ends in Blanche's emotional and psychological destruction.

- *Human beings are animals*. The men of *Streetcar* are louts, coarse, brutish creatures who pursue their desires, as Blanche says, like apes, "in front of the cave, all grunting like him and swilling and gnawing and hulking." Stanley, the most brutish of all prevails. He is the successful hunter who brings home the bloody meat and ruthlessly destroys the threat to his home.

  By the same token, however, the women are no less animals. Stella's primary attraction to Stanley is sexual, from the moment she lewdly suggests to Blanche that what distinguishes him from other men "is not on his forehead and … is not genius." Even after Stanley beats her, and she retreats to Eunice's apartment, she returns to him "with low, animal moans." The next morning, she lingers in bed, her face serene, her hand resting on her rounding belly. Blanche, too, for all her pretensions, finds her comfort in physical pleasures—long, hot baths, alcohol, and sex. She will not let Mitch see her in the daylight because she is afraid that, beyond her fading beauty, she has nothing with which to attract him. It is significant that the moment of her destruction is not the revelation of her deceptions but a physical assault.

MOTIFS

- *Light*. Blanche avoids the light, just as she avoids scrutiny of her past. Her "delicate beauty must avoid a strong light," and so, just as she hangs a paper lantern over the naked bulb, she tries to obscure her sordid past. Mitch complains that he has never had a "good look" at Blanche. Light, here, comes to represent revelation and truth.

- *The moth*. The playwright compares Blanche to a moth with her uncertain manner and white clothes. She flutters and flits in her gauzy white dresses, like a moth. She is nocturnal, like the moth. Her desires draw her, like the moth to the flame, into destructive traps. ("The moth to the flame" is, after all, the cliché used to describe ultimatly fatal, yet irresistible, attraction.)

- *Bathing*. Blanche's frequent baths represent her efforts to cleanse herself of her past and to wash off a distasteful present. She soaks in the hot tub to ease her nerves, an ironic metaphor for the hot water she finds herself in. The baths are also practical devices that remove Blanche from center stage and give the other characters the opportunity to discuss her. In Scene One, Blanche tells Stella that she cannot be scrutinized until she has bathed. Scene Two begins with Blanche in the bathroom, preparing for a night on the town. Blanche warbles from the bath, "If you only believe in me," from "A Paper Moon," ironically as Stanley is telling Stella of her sordid past. Even the final scene opens with Blanche in the bath, preparing for what she thinks will be a vacation but is instead a one-way trip to the insane asylum.

- *Drinking*. Blanche and Stanley are both hard drinkers. She tipples from his bottle in the first scene and then denies it, symbolically encroaching upon his territory while also revealing her dependence on alcohol. Blanche drinks to escape; Stanley drinks to celebrate his masculinity. Too much alcohol and Blanche becomes pathetic; too much booze and Stanley turns mean and violent. In this, as in all other aspects, the protagonist and antagonist are polar opposites.

- *The poker game*. The games in Scenes Three and Eleven serve as bookends on the action. The first game defines the masculinity of Stanley and his pals and introduces Mitch to Blanche. In Scene Four, Blanche decries the poker players as "this party of apes," a slur Stanley overhears. In the final scene, as Blanche is being led away by the kindly doctor, the men resume their poker game at the Kowalski apartment, witnesses to Stanley's triumph and Blanche's humiliating collapse. The final line of the play—"The game is seven-card stud"—punctuates Stanley's masculine conquest. The "stud" wins.

SYMBOLISM AND IMAGERY

Symbolism employs concrete objects, characters, colors, and music to represent abstract concepts. Imagery uses descriptions and figures of speech to paint a picture. Both literary techniques are used to convey meaning.

- *Sexual symbols*

  Williams is well known for his repeated use of phallic and sexual symbols in his work. In the opening scene, the raw meat tossed by Stanley to a laughing Stella symbolizes his "stone-age" masculinity. Her laughing catch symbolizes her willing acceptance. To guarantee that his audience will not miss the innuendo in this act, Williams has Eunice and the Negro woman emphasize it with their laughter. In Scene Four, Blanche continues the raw meat motif, when criticizing Stanley, she says, "Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is—Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you—you here—waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you!"

  Critics also see phallic symbols in the white columns of Belle Rêve. (Stanley boasts of pulling Stella down from those self-same columns.) The final line of the play, "This game is seven-card stud," is an overt comment on the domination of the stud, or sexual male.

- *Animal imagery*

  Stanley has "animal joy in his being, implicit in all his movements." He is "a richly feathered male bird among hens." Blanche disparages him as an ape, as a beast and as a sub-human creature. "He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits. He eats like one, moves like one." Together, Stanley and his poker pals are "a party of apes," grunting, snatching, growling. Even the semi-sensitive Mitch dances like a bear. When Stanley menaces Blanche, moving in for the rape, the audience hears "inhuman jungle voices." As he rips the broken bottle out of her hand, he calls her a tiger.

  The women, too, are closely associated with animals. When Blanche first enters Stella's apartment, the offstage screech of a cat accompanies her furtive drink of whiskey. When Stanley is ransacking Blanche's trunk and examining her clothing, he comments on the "feathers and furs that she come here to preen herself in!" After losing her home, she retreats to The Flamingo hotel. When Stella returns to Stanley the night after the poker game, they "come together with low, animal moans"; and when Blanche is taken away at the end of the play, Stella "sobs with inhuman abandon."

- *White*

  Williams did not choose the name Blanche for his protagonist at random. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *blanche* or *blanch* (derived from the Latin *blancus*) means "white," especially as a verb "to make white."

  White, ironically, is associated with purity. While Blanche herself is far from "pure," she would like to believe—and to convince Mitch—that she is. She tells Mitch that her name in French means "white wood," and she compares herself to a blossom-covered orchard in springtime.

  Literally, however, the verb *to blanche* means to "*make* white" by heat or by chemical bleaching—thus the sense of taking something dark and giving it the appearance of whiteness. *To blanche* also means to make pale from an emotion like fear. The OED also includes a usage of *blanche* as an intentional suppression of the truth. Thus, Blanche DuBois represents the stained soul with the lurid past, trying to reclaim at least the appearance of wholesomeness and purity.

  When a Coke fizzes up and spills on her white skirt, the stain symbolizes the fact that she will not be able to hide the truth of her past for too long. By the same token, Blanche's frequent baths emphasize her futile attempts to blanche, or whiten, herself and her past.

THE TITLE

The title has both a literal and a metaphoric meaning. Blanche arrives at the Kowalski apartment via the streetcar line "Desire," but it is what Blanche calls "brutal desire" that propels all of the characters toward the ultimate tragic conclusion.

In a *New York Times* essay, "On *A Streetcar Named Desire*," published in 1947, four days before the play opened, Williams recalls that he set out to write a play about a poker game, which he wanted to title "The Poker Night." That work evolved into *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but perhaps in tribute to the original idea, Williams titled Scene Three—the only scene to be titled—"The Poker Night." Williams experimented with other titles on earlier versions of the play, including "The Moth" and "Blanche's Chair on the Moon," as National Public Radio's Debbie Elliott reported in a 2002 "Present at the Creation" episode about *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

A Streetcar Named Desire, like most of Tennessee Williams's work, contains bits and pieces of the writer, references to his past and character traits drawn from family members. As much as any playwright of the twentieth century, Williams mined his tumultuous youth and dysfunctional family for inspiration, even as he recreated a world that was both gentler and more vicious than his own.

He was born Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1911, in Columbus, Mississippi, to Cornelius Coffin Williams, a traveling shoe salesman, and Edwina Estelle Dakin, a true Southern belle by all accounts. With his father on the road most of his early life, the young Tom—the second of three children—lived with his mother and siblings at the home of his grandfather, an Episcopal minister. This life of refinement in the Deep South came to an unhappy end when Cornelius Williams stopped traveling, went to work in a shoe factory, and moved the family to St. Louis, Missouri. Biographers generally characterize the years following the move as poor and unhappy. Williams's father was overbearing, his mother pretentious and controlling. His beloved older sister, Rose, was lovely and intelligent but mentally fragile. Dakin, whom Tennessee Williams called "my improbable little brother," would ultimately be the steady one and remain actively involved in his brother's tumultuous life and career until his own death at age 89 in 2008.

In St. Louis, Williams's father forced the young Tom to work in the shoe factory, a job he loathed and one that drove him almost to a nervous collapse. At the shoe factory, Williams worked with a young, apparently heterosexual man named Stanley Kowalski. Donald Spoto, one of Williams's biographers, theorizes that Williams was attracted to Kowalski but maintains that he found no evidence the two were lovers.

After a checkered academic career, Williams graduated from the University of Iowa in 1938 (at the age of 27). About the time of his college graduation, Williams changed his name to Tennessee. Some critics have speculated that he wanted to distance himself from his earlier works, which he considered inferior, while other biographers have surmised that he chose the name because Tennessee was the home of his father's family.

Throughout his early years, Williams wrote poetry and plays and won small awards. His breakthrough came with the 1944 Broadway production of *The Glass Menagerie,* his most autobiographical work. (Acknowledging that the controlling mother Amanda Wingfield was so thoroughly based upon his own mother, Williams gave half of the profits from *The Glass Menagerie* to "Miss Edwina," as Dakin told *The Mississippi Quarterly* in a 1995 interview.) *The Glass Menagerie* earned Williams the Drama Critics' Circle Prize and the Sidney Howard Memorial from the Playwrights Company and brought him overnight fame and wealth.

Four days before *A Streetcar Named Desire* debuted on Broadway, *The New York Times* published an essay by Williams in which he mused about his sudden stardom and all the changes that had come with it, some not for the better. In the essay, Williams wrote of his emotional rise and fall, describing what modern psychiatrists would label a classic depression in which he lost interest in almost everything and "felt too lifeless inside" to ever create another masterwork.

"Security is a kind of death, I think, and it can come to you in a storm of royalty checks beside a kidney-shaped pool in Beverly Hills or anywhere at all that is removed from the conditions that made you an artist, if that's what you are or were or intended to be," Williams wrote.

Williams would wrestle with his dark side and the trappings of fame for the rest of his life. Like many of his characters, he drank and used drugs to excess and teetered precariously at times on the edge of mental collapse. (Dakin drew the everlasting wrath of his older brother when in 1969 he committed Tennessee to a mental hospital in St. Louis, **most** likely saving his life.)

Williams was openly homosexual at a time when most gay men and women lived closeted lives to avoid public censure. Several of his plays include **both** oblique and overt references to homosexuality. In *Streetcar*, Blanche's young husband kills himself after she catches him in a tryst with an older man and **tells** him, "I saw! I know! You disgust me…"

In Blanche's pretentious Southern belle, critics and biographers see suggestions of Williams's own mother. However, in the 2002 NPR interview with Debbie Elliott, Dakin insisted, "Blanche is Tennessee." Comparing his brother to his infamous protagonist, Dakin said, "If Tennessee would tell you something, it wouldn't be necessarily true… And so, everything in Blanche was really like Tennessee."

Williams was one of the most prolific playwrights of the twentieth century, publishing more than three dozen plays, movie scripts, and books, including short fiction and a memoir. His work won numerous awards, including two Pulitzer Prizes for *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Fifteen of his plays were made into movies. Among the most successful and enduring of his dramas, in addition to the aforementioned, were *The Rose Tattoo*, *Camino Real*, *Summer Smoke*, *Orpheus Descending*, *Sweet Bird of Youth,* and *Night of the Iguana.*

He choked to death on a medicine bottle cap, alone in a hotel room, after a night of drinking and drugs, in February 1983, at the age of 71.

Practice Free-Response Items

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 1

Dramatists frequently use the titles of their plays to foreshadow plot events, develop character, or suggest theme. In a well-organized essay, analyze the title, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, from both the literal and figurative perspectives. Consider the various possible interpretations of the phrase and the ways in which the title expresses a major theme of the work.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 2

A tragic hero or heroine is a protagonist who is capable of great deeds but is destined to fail—usually due to a combination of circumstances beyond the character's control or his or her own fatal flaws. In a well-developed essay, analyze Blanche DuBois as a tragic hero. Cite specific examples from the play, as you identify the strengths and weaknesses of the character. Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 3

Unlike a novel or short story, a play is a collaborative work, relying on director, designers, and actors to represent the playwright's intentions on the stage. The *reader* of a play is, therefore, dependent upon whatever directions the playwright has provided in the printed script. Write a well-supported essay in which you analyze the contribution of Williams's descriptions of set and costumes to your overall understanding of the characters and their situations.

Do not merely describe the characters or summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 4

Carefully read the introductory stage directions at the beginning of Scene One. Then write a well-organized essay in which you examine how Williams's description of the setting establisheS the audience's expectations for the type of play it is going to be.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 5

Carefully read the passage from Scene Four that begins with Blanche's entrance and ends with her asking Stella, "Are you deliberately shaking that thing in my face?" Then write a well-supported essay in which you analyze the techniques Williams uses to establish the two sisters' opposing views. Do not merely summarize the plot or describe the two views.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 6

Carefully read the passage from Scene Ten that begins with Blanche telling Stanley, "Don't come in here," and ends at the conclusion of the scene. Then write a well-organized and -supported essay in which you evaluate the effectiveness of Williams's use of offstage sounds and projected images to heighten the intensity of the onstage action. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1-10

Carefully read Scene One from Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* in its entirety before selecting the best answers to the following questions.

1. The name of the street on which Stella and Stanley Kowalski live, Elysian Fields Avenue, is ironic because
   A. the Cemeteries street car line terminates on this street.
   B. the Kowalskis' apartment is not an idyllic place.
   C. the street is in a poorer section of the city.
   D. Elysian Fields alludes to Greek mythology.
   E. someone's death is foreshadowed in the street name.

2. The Blue Piano is
   A. the neighborhood bowling alley.
   B. a song that will be associated with Stella.
   C. a streetcar line in New Orleans.
   D. a general term for the music of New Orleans.
   E. the name of Stanley and Stella's apartment building.

3. When the playwright describes Blanche's outfit as "incongruous to this setting," he means that she is
   A. dirty and tired from traveling.
   B. wealthy and self-assured.
   C. practical and pragmatic.
   D. fragile and delicate.
   E. urbane and sophisticated.

4. What does the first exchange between Stanley and Stella establish about their relationship?
   A. Stanley is largely indifferent to Stella.
   B. Stella cannot stand up to Stanley.
   C. There is a strong animal attraction between them.
   D. Stanley and Stella are from vastly different social classes.
   E. They are each willing to sacrifice for the other.

5. This scene suggests all of the following about Blanche EXCEPT that she is
   A. a liar.
   B. an alcoholic.
   C. intimidated by Stanley.
   D. trying to escape her past.
   E. sexually promiscuous.

6. Blanche's tone when describing the loss of Belle Rêve can best be described as
   A. anguished.
   B. offensive.
   C. indifferent.
   D. hostile.
   E. defensive.

7. The play's inciting incident occurs when
   A. Stanley tosses the package of meat to Stella.
   B. Stella leaves to watch Stanley bowl.
   C. Blanche first arrives at the house.
   D. Stanley and Blanche first meet.
   E. Blanche lies about drinking whiskey.

8. Blanche's account of losing Belle Rêve is an example of
   A. rising action.
   B. dénouement.
   C. plot exposition.
   D. obstacle
   E. reversal.

9. Blanche and Stanley's first conversation suggests that
   A. Stanley knows Blanche to be a liar.
   B. Stanley is attracted to Blanche.
   C. Blanche is attracted to Stanley.
   D. Stanley will destroy Blanche.
   E. Blanche is destitute and homeless.

10. The fact that Williams ends the scene with the revelation of Blanche's late husband suggests that
    A. he will become an important character in the play.
    B. his death will be a recurring source of trouble for Blanche.
    C. the marriage and death are important details in Blanche's backstory.
    D. love and death are going to emerge as themes in the play.
    E. Stanley knows more about the marriage and death than he is admitting.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11- 20

Carefully read Scene Four from *A Streetcar Named Desire* in its entirety before selecting the best answers to the questions below.

11. The "narcotized" expression on Stella's face at the beginning of the scene suggests that she is
    A. tired.
    B. frightened.
    C. ecstatic.
    D. content.
    E. intoxicated.

12. The "gaudy pyjamas" left lying across the threshold to the Kowalski bathroom are probably intended to suggest
    A. Stanley's overt sexuality.
    B. the amorality of New Orleans.
    C. Stella's passion for Stanley.
    D. the contrast between Stella and Blanche.
    E. domestic abuse.

13. In their conversation, Blanche and Stella represent the voices of
    A. reason and passion.
    B. alarm and contentment.
    C. salvation and despair.
    D. anger and conciliation.
    E. brutality and appeasement.

14. The purpose of Shep Huntleigh's presence in the play is most likely to
    A. suggest the means for Blanche and Stella to escape.
    B. lend credibility to Blanche's pretensions of gentility.
    C. advance the conflict between Blanche and Stanley.
    D. emphasize Blanche's troubled emotional state.
    E. provide a contrast between Stella's past and present.

15. Stanley's overhearing the conversation between Blanche and Stella is an example of
    A. rising action.
    B. situational irony.
    C. farce.
    D. catharsis.
    E. apostrophe.

16. This scene establishes all of the following EXCEPT
    A. Blanche tends to misinterpret reality.
    B. Stanley and Stella's relationship is based largely on sexual passion.
    C. Blanche believes herself to be socially superior to her surroundings.
    D. Stella is stronger and more capable than her sister.
    E. Stella is trapped in an abusive marriage.

17. Stella's embrace of Stanley is significant because it
    A. proves Stella's subservience.
    B. establishes Stella's loyalty.
    C. foreshadows Stanley's defeat of Blanche.
    D. convinces Blanche of Stella's happiness.
    E. illustrates Stanley's desire for Stella.

18. Williams uses the offstage sound of the train as a device to
    A. rouse Stella from her complacency.
    B. distract Stella from Blanche's tirade.
    C. interrupt the sisters' train of thought.
    D. require Stella and Blanche to speak more loudly.
    E. allow Stanley to enter and exit unseen.

19. This scene advances the plot in all of the following ways EXCEPT
    A. Stanley has motive to dislike Blanche.
    B. Blanche is alone and friendless.
    C. Blanche is exposed as pretentious and delusional.
    D. Blanche is closer to escaping the situation.
    E. Stella is firmly allied with Stanley.

20. The mood of this scene progresses from
    A. blissful to menacing.
    B. serene to alarming.
    C. indolent to caustic.
    D. contrite to secretive.
    E. worrisome to expectant.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21 - 25

Carefully read Scene Nine from *A Streetcar Named Desire* in its entirety before selecting the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

21. The fact that the music playing "in [Blanche's] mind" stops as soon as she hears Mitch's voice might suggest that
    A. she hopes for Mitch to save her from her current situation.
    B. Mitch reminds her of Allan.
    C. she fears Mitch is going to leave her the way Allan did.
    D. she had feared never seeing Mitch again.
    E. Mitch is an awkward dancer.

22. Blanche's attitude when she initially greets Mitch can best be described as
    A. forgiving.
    B. desperate.
    C. angry.
    D. flirtatious.
    E. inconsistent.

23. Mitch's response to Blanche's offer of a drink reveals that he
    A. has already had too much to drink.
    B. suspects Blanche has already been drinking.
    C. knows Blanche to be a liar.
    D. does not want to drink Blanche's liquor.
    E. has not come merely to socialize with Blanche.

24. The issue of light and darkness in this scene comes to represent
    A. illusion versus reality.
    B. magic versus realism.
    C. truth versus deception.
    D. understanding versus ignorance.
    E. gentility versus commonness.

25. Williams's reason for having Mitch say he verified the rumors about Blanche is to
    A. suggest that Mitch believed them.
    B. provide a motive for him to leave her.
    C. cause the audience to reevaluate them.
    D. establish that the rumors are true.
    E. discredit him as a sympathetic character.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 26 - 30

Carefully read Scene Ten from *A Streetcar Named Desire* in its entirety before selecting the best answers to the questions below.

26. The truth about the Shep Huntleigh story is first revealed when
    A. Blanche forgets she mentioned the telegram.
    B. Stanley catches her in the lie about Mitch and the roses.
    C. Blanche mistakenly says Shep is from Miami.
    D. Stanley admits that he's known she'd been lying.
    E. Blanche insists that Shep wants only companionship.

27. Blanche's costume of dirty white evening gown, scuffed slippers, and tiara symbolize
    A. her pathetic and failed pretensions at gentility.
    B. the New Orleans Mardi Gras style.
    C. her abject poverty.
    D. her increasing madness.
    E. the destruction of her positive qualities.

28. Structurally, the off-stage rape of Blanche by Stanley marks
    A. the climax of the play.
    B. the third tier of the rising action of the play.
    C. the denouement of the play.
    D. the catastrophe of the play.
    E. the crisis of the play.

29. Stanley's rape of Blanche most clearly illustrates what literary philosophy?
    A. existentialism
    B. humanism
    C. romanticism
    D. realism
    E. naturalism

30. The action of this scene finally establishes the red pajamas as a symbol of
    A. Stanley's animal energy.
    B. the brute desire that leads to destruction.
    C. the passion of sexual conquest.
    D. Stanley's seductive power over women.
    E. the smoldering conflict between Stanley and Blanche.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

Answers with Explanations

1. Given the mythological significance of the name Elysian Fields, it is not *ironic* that the Cemeteries line (suggesting death) terminates on Elysian Fields Avenue, the Elysian Fields being a location of the Afterlife. Thus, (A) is eliminated. (C) is true, at least of this section of the street, but poverty is not the ultimate source of the contrast between the mythical Elysian Fields and the home of Stanley and Stella Kowalski. (D) is also true, but there is certainly nothing ironic about this fact. (E) is eliminated by the facts that there is nothing necessarily ironic about foreshadowing, and it is too early in the play to know whether this detail is an element of something to come later. **The irony is clearly that the Kowalski apartment is not heavenly or idyllic, as the name Elysian Fields Avenue would suggest. Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**

2. While we are told that Stanley and Mitch are going to the bowling alley, we are not told the bowling alley's name (A). Likewise, if Stanley and Stella's building has a name (E), we are not told what it is. (B) is tempting, but the stage directions clearly specify that the music of the Blue Piano is associated with New Orleans, not any particular character. (C) is factually incorrect, the streetcar lines being Desire and Cemeteries. **The playwright says the Blue Piano music "expresses the life that goes on here," which makes it the music of New Orleans (D).**

3. A dirty and tired traveler (A) would certainly not be incongruous with the working-class, squalid setting of the scene. Given the dressy nature of her outfit, Blanche might be mistaken for wealthy in this poor neighborhood, but actions as described in the stage directions and her early dialogue do not suggest that she is self-assured (B). The frilly and fluffy outfit is hardly "practical" (C); in fact, Williams says that she looks more as if she were arriving at a garden party than at a home in a working-class neighborhood. Likewise, the clear facts that she looks out of place and acts in an "uncertain manner" negate (E). **The description of her outfit as "fluffy," however, and the playwright's comparison of Blanche to a moth support (D) as the best answer.**

4. While possibly crude, Stanley's manner toward Stella, the affection with which he calls her and then allows her to come watch him bowl exclude (A). (B) is excluded by the absolute first lines Stella speaks in the play when she chastises Stanley for "hollering at" her. (D) is clearly specified by the stage directions, but nothing in their conversation, as written, gives a clue to a background other than working-class. And, while Stanley and Stella are congenial and companionable, there is nothing to suggest mutual sacrifice (unless one places undue emphasis on the tossed package of meat) (E). **However, Stanley's call and Stella's response, as well as the Negro woman's reaction to the tossed meat all establish (C) as the best answer.**

5. Blanche lies about being younger than Stella and about knowing that there is liquor in the house (and having already drunk some). Thus, (A) is eliminated. The business with Blanche's searching for the bottle, drinking, and then lying about it—while insisting to Stella that she is *not* a "drunkard"—suggest that she *is* an alcoholic, thus eliminating (B). The manner in which she retreats into the bedroom and shrinks into the shadows when Stanley first enters eliminates (C). And the many references to Belle Rêve and her defensive and evasive attitude when discussing its loss and her job combine to eliminate (D). There are, however, no references to the exact nature of the past from which Blanche is running, and there has not yet been any mention of her late husband or any of the other men she has known. **(E) is the correct answer.**

6. (A) might tempt some students, but, beyond Blanche's anguish are her accusations that Stella abandoned her and the family, and Blanche's insistence that she will not take the blame for something that could not be avoided. In her tirade, she certainly hurts Stella, but she does not offend Stella (B). The high emotion with which she both laments the loss of Belle Rêve and blames Stella for her "abandonment" eliminates (C), and (D) is eliminated by the fact that her anger at Stella is tempered by her own anguish and feelings of guilt. **The best answer is (E). She blames Stella for her role in the loss, but, even more, she refuses to accept blame that Stella has not actually tried to impose.**

7. The inciting incident is the incident that begins to suggest the conflict and sets the action of the play in motion. Prior to the inciting incident, the actions and dialogue all simply provide exposition, establishing the *status quo* that will be challenged by the inciting incident. Stanley's tossing the meat (A) and (B) give the reader insight into his character and his and Stella's relationship, nothing more. (D) is tempting, as the exact conflict is certainly made clearer in their meeting, but Blanche is *not* a part of the status quo at the beginning of the play, and **her arrival (C)—even before she meets Stanley—begins the change in the status quo that will never be regained even at the end of the play.** Similarly, her lying about her drinking helps to establish her character and advances a conflict that has already been suggested, but, **as Blanche is not a part of the "normal routine" of the beginning of the play, every conflict and plot line involving her *begins* with her arrival.**

8. As the loss of Belle Rêve occurred at some point prior to the opening of the play and is, at least in part, Blanche's motivation for coming to New Orleans it is clearly a part of Blanche's backstory rather than an element in the plot developing during the time of the play. Thus, (A), (B), (D), and (E) are eliminated. **(C) is the best answer.**

9. Until he notices the quantity of whiskey that is missing from his bottle, Stanley is marginally friendly to the woman who is his wife's sister. There is nothing to suggest that his removal of his shirt—with his wife in the next room—indicates that he is attracted to Blanche (B), nor she to him (C). Students who know the end of the play, know (D) to be true, and the end of the scene—the question about Blanche's husband—clearly suggests that this issue will be a cause for tension between them, but there is not yet any evidence that Stanley will destroy Blanche. The audience already knows that Blanche is destitute and homeless (E); it is not revealed in this scene. **However, when Stanley notices that a large quantity of his liquor is missing, and Blanche claims not to be a drinker, he immediately knows that she is a liar. Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**

10. Clearly (A) is eliminated by the fact that the husband is dead. As Williams has already established his unity of time, and there will be no flashbacks, it follows that the husband cannot be a character in this play. (C) is true, but does not explain Williams's strategic placing of this revelation. (D) is also tempting, but is too vague and general to be a compelling choice. (E) might also tempt some, but would be more suggested by his asking about her marriage, not by Williams's placement of the revelation. Coming at the end of the scene, the revelation establishes an important element of Blanche's inner conflict, possibly part of the reason she finds herself in her current situation, and probably a considerable contribution to her conflict with Stanley that will drive much of the plot. **Thus, (B) is the best answer.**

11. The words used to describe Stella's pose and attitude are "serene" and "tranquility." The hand resting on her belly emphasizes her recent pregnancy. It is Blanche, when she enters from having been awake all night, who is tired (A) and frightened (B). (C) might be tempting, but ecstasy involves more energy than is apparent in Stella's countenance. There is no evidence that Stella is intoxicated (E). **Thus, (D) is the correct answer. Having fought with Stanley—and made up (as evidenced by the silk pajamas tossed on the floor)—Stella is utterly content with her life and situation.**

12. Given the context in which the pajamas are mentioned—the tranquil morning, Stella's serene state, still in bed, emphasizing her pregnancy to the audience—and the placement of the pajamas on the set—strewn across the threshold to the bathroom—it is clear that the pajamas are meant to suggest a satisfying sexual liaison between Stanley and Stella. (B) is, therefore, too broad an interpretation to satisfy, as the symbol is clearly personal. (C) is eliminated by the fact that the pajamas are more likely a reminder of Stanley's presence than Stella's. Likewise, (D) is eliminated because Blanche has no bearing on this opening scene, no relationship (yet) to the pajamas. (E) is eliminated given the context of Stella's serenity and tranquility. **Only (A) remains as a potential choice. The pajamas are a reminder of Stanley's presence, and they are placed to suggest his taking them off, either on his way into the bathroom or on his way out.**

13. Blanche cannot be said to represent reason (A), as she is near hysterics at the beginning of the scene, and it is during this scene that she begins to develop the delusion that Shep Huntleigh will rescue her. (C) is eliminated because, if anything, Stella is Blanche's salvation, giving her sister a place to live after the loss of the family home and Blanche's job. While Blanche might be described as angry (D), desperate is probably more accurate, and Stella cannot be said to be conciliatory. On the contrary, she refuses to go along with her sister's wishes. Finally, Blanche is hysterical and frightened, but she is not brutal (E); nor does Stella do or say anything to appease her. The scene opens, however, visually emphasizing Stella's contentment. Blanche enters, alarmed that her sister returned to the brutish Stanley and anxious to extricate the both of them from the situation. Despite her sister's protests, Stella insists that there is nothing from which she wishes to escape. She is content. **Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**

14. Since Blanche's brief account of meeting Shep Huntleigh in Miami includes that he was getting into a car and he is married, (A) is highly unlikely. (B) is similarly eliminated because Shep's current wealth (assuming that is true) does not prove that Blanche was a belle and a debutante in the past—or that Shep was really ever her beau. It is more likely that a relationship between Blanche and Shep would *lessen* the tension (C) between Blanche and Stanley, as it would prove Blanche not to be a liar and provide her with a way out of Stanley's house and life. (E) would be tempting if the contrast were between Blanche's past and present. **(D), however, is the best answer. As the audience cannot be certain that Blanche remembers or describes her past relationship with Shep Huntleigh accurately and truthfully, and since Blanche's encounter with the *married* man was brief and in passing, the fact that she would consider writing to him and asking for any kind of assistance indicates the beginning of her self-delusion and her desire to delude others as well.**

15. (B) might be tempting, but there is no real expectation to counter with Stanley's unseen entrance. (C) would be plausible in a comic scene or play, but the subject matter is too serious. (D) would also be plausible if the audience saw a change in Stanley after his reentrance, but there is no such change. If anything, he is more determined in his dislike of her. (E) is based on a misunderstanding of apostrophe, a direct address to an intangible concept. However, **as the overheard conversation fuels Stanley's dislike of Blanche and motivates what will finally be her destruction, this incident is clearly an example of rising action (A).**

16. Blanche's account of meeting Shep Huntleigh in Miami and her earnest belief that she can turn to him for financial assistance eliminate (A). (B) is eliminated by the imagery at the beginning of the scene, and Stella's own admission about why she does not want to leave Stanley ("…there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem unimportant"). (C) is eliminated by Blanche's attempt to remind Stella of their upbringing, and her claim to "tremble" for Stella because Stella is happy. (D) is evident throughout the scene when she counters Blanche's attacks on Stanley and her lifestyle and acknowledges that she was not blinded by Stanley's military uniform and tricked into believing she was marrying a different kind of man. **Only (E) is not supported. Every time Blanche talks about leaving, Stella counters that she is not in anything she wants to get out of, and she even tries to explain the source of her contentment with her life.**

17. Stella's sudden and powerful embrace is completely voluntary and even startles Stanley, thus eliminating (A). (B) would be tempting were Stella's loyalty to Stanley ever in question, but it has not been. Her devotion to Stanley and her intent to stay with him have been clear throughout the scene. Blanche is never convinced of Stella's happiness (D), and Stella's embrace at her husband's entrance seems more an act of defiance to Blanche than anything else. It is Stella who surprises Stanley with the embrace, thus eliminating (E). **Only (C) remains as a possible answer. This scene has largely been about Blanche attempting to sway Stella into her camp against Stanley. This closing embrace establishes that Stella is allied fully with Stanley.**

18. The sound of the train is clearly a device unconnected with any theme or motif in the scene. It has no noticeable effect on Stella or Blanche or their conversation except the direction that says they pause in their conversation for the train to pass. The only purpose served by, not one but two, trains passing at this moment is to allow Stanley to enter and leave the apartment unseen and unheard by Blanche and Stella. **Thus, (E) is the correct answer.**

19. Having overheard the sisters' conversation, Stanley now knows for certain that Blanche believes him to be a common brute and would like to see her sister leave him. Thus, he now has a tangible reason for disliking her (A). Stella's ultimate alliance with Stanley at the end of the scene, represented by her strong embrace, eliminates both (B) and (E). Blanche's pretension is exposed in her final speech and in her remonstrances to Stella to remember their upbringing. Her delusions are exposed in her earnest belief that Shep Huntleigh is going to help them. Thus, (C) is eliminated. With her only "hope" of escape being a married man she encountered briefly in Miami and Stella clearly allied with Stanley, Blanche is no closer to escape than she was in Scene One. **Thus, (D) is the correct answer.**

20. (B) is tempting, but the closing note—Stanley's tone of voice having overheard the sisters' conversation—is not alarming. Likewise, students who might want to see the image at the beginning of the scene as indolent, cannot rightly interpret Stanley's forced and fake friendliness as "caustic" (C). While the scene does end with Stanley's secret entrance and reentrance, there is no contrition at the beginning of the scene (D). Similarly, the end of the scene is suspenseful, but not necessarily "expectant," and Blanche's demeanor at the beginning of the scene is more than merely "worrisome" (E). The scene opens, however, with Stella basking in her maternal and marital bliss, and ends with her husband's obviously relishing the fact that he now has ammunition with which to destroy Blanche. **Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**

21. Students who know the entire play will know that Mitch is almost the antithesis of the sensitive, poetic Allan. Others should note that, while we are told that the music is in Blanche's head, and she is drinking to forget, there is no reason for a comparison between Allan and Mitch to conclude (B). While she is afraid that Mitch is going to leave, the gunshot that ends the music the second time clearly suggests Allan's death. Also the end of the music would be a positive thing for Blanche, so its ending with Mitch's arrival would not indicate fear (C) and (D). (E) is true, but the context of this scene does not support the suggestion that Blanche is thinking about dancing while drinking and haunted by the song. **As the song is playing in her mind, however, and we are told that she is drinking to escape both "it" and "the sense of disaster closing in on her," the fact that the haunting music ends when Mitch enters suggests that *he* will stop the disaster from closing in as well. Thus, (A) is the best answer.**

22. (B) This answer requires a careful analysis and reading of the question. The correct response (B) requires the reader to analyze Blanche's behavior when Mitch first arrives, without regard to her later response to him. **Blanche greets Mitch eagerly after she hurriedly tries to make herself presentable. At the beginning of the scene, she is drinking alone and miserable; her eagerness to see Mitch betrays her desperation, making (B) the best answer.** Although she says she forgives Mitch (A), she ultimately kicks him out, which negates the forgiveness. Her happiness at Mitch's arrival is less about understanding and more about assuaging her own loneliness and desperation. (She does not really care why he stood her up, only that he has come now.) And while she grows angry at his accusations, and she is manipulative by nature (C), and while she is generally flirtatious (D), her *initial greeting* reveals her desperation and loneliness (B). Blanche behaves true to form in greeting Mitch when he first comes to the apartment, and so her initial greeting does not seem irrational or inconsistent (E), as she wants him to be there. It is only later when she starts talking about music in her head that she seems irrational.

23. The stage directions inform us that Mitch has had a few drinks on his way to confront Blanche, but nothing in his demeanor or dialogues suggests that he has had too much to drink (A). (B) is probably true, but he does not say or do anything to suggest this suspicion. (D) is the opposite of the truth. Mitch does not want to drink Stanley's liquor, and when Blanche claims not to know what the whiskey is, he concludes that the liquor cannot be hers. (E) is also true, but nothing in the dialogue or stage directions suggests that the confrontation would preclude having a drink. **(C), however, is the correct answer. Blanche claims that she owns her own liquor—that she has not been drinking Stanley's all summer—but then she claims not to know what Southern Comfort is. Clearly, he has caught her in a lie, and he will not accept the drink.**

24. (A) and (C) are tempting, as both describe the motif in literal terms, but the characters' dialogue demands a slightly more figurative interpretation. (D) approaches a common understanding of the light/dark symbolism, but is not the application in use in this scene. (E) is also tempting, but Blanche does not believe herself to be common, so it is not her commonness that she fears will be revealed. **As Blanche says to Mitch when he accuses her of lying, "I don't want realism. I want magic" (B). Her "illusion versus reality" is more a conflict between, as she says, "…the truth [and] what *ought* to be the truth." Thus, (B) is the best answer.**

25. (A) is untrue because Mitch says he did *not* believe the stories and that was why he sought additional information. (B) is tempting, but Mitch has returned. He does not leave for good until Blanche expands on what he knows about her past, and she asks him to marry her. Confirming the rumors does not invite the audience to reevaluate them (C); in fact, now the audience can put them out of mind and accept whatever happens to Blanche. (E) makes no syntactic sense. The verification of the stories would *increase* audience sympathy for Mitch, not discredit him. **The correct answer is (D). There have been so many lies in this play, and none of Blanche's claims has been verified by a second source—not even her claim to have run into Shep Huntleigh in Miami. In order for the audience to accept Blanche's imminent destruction, Williams must show her to be the crude and unsympathetic character Stanley believes her to be.**

26. (A) is tempting, but Blanche's forgetting about the telegram and having to cover herself occurs after the lie about Mitch returning with the roses. (C) Stanley assumes Shep is from Miami, and Blanche corrects him. (D) and (E) are both tempting, but the main lie that exposes all of the smaller ones is that Mitch returned with roses and wanted to reconcile with Blanche. Stanley knows that Mitch did not return—and that none of the other of Blanche's claims is true either. **Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**

27. Blanche is poor (C), but the gown represents her efforts to hide the poverty and her past, not the poverty itself. Stanley calls it a Mardi Gras outfit (B), but the salient fact is that Stanley says the gown is as shabby and false as her pretensions. The costume is not meant to be taken literally as an expression of Blanche's fashion sense (D), but rather as a physical manifestation of her situation and mental state. Blanche says that she has cast her pearls before swine (E) by sharing her charms with the unappreciative likes of Mitch and Stanley, but her remark does not explain the significance of the costume. **The costume is the physical expression of Blanche's failed pretense (A), as Stanley's remark underscores: "Take a look at yourself in that worn-out Mardi Gras outfit, rented for fifty cents from some rag-picker! And with that crazy crown on! What queen do you think you are?. . . . I've been on to you from the start." Thus, (A) is the best answer.**

28. The climax is the moment at which the rising action can rise no further. The protagonist must either win or lose. The conflict between Stanley and Blanche, her pretensions, her amazement at Stella for the nature of her marriage—all the while hiding her own sexual promiscuity—have come to this point in which Stanley will overpower her both physically and psychologically. There is no escape for her, no Mitch or Shep Huntleigh. As Stanley says, "We've had this date with each other from the beginning." **Thus, (A) is the correct answer.** After this rape, there can be no more rising action (B). The resolution and the catastrophe (C) and (D), however, are not yet known. Will Blanche be destroyed? Will Stella stay with Stanley? The entire scene contains the crisis (E), which is culminated in the rape.

29. (A) is tempting, as there is no suggestion of "meaning" to the characters' lives beyond the physical, and all attempts at achieving something emotional or spiritual have been futile. It is not, however, the best answer. (B) is eliminated by the fact that the scene of Blanche's rape does not "elevate" the human to the rank of a near deity. If anything, it shows man to be an animal, a brute, governed by raw, carnal desire. (C) is likewise laughable in that the rape does not show Stanley to exemplify the noble in the common, the soul of the poet in the body of the laborer. (D) is tempting, but the rape and the scene leading up to it are not mere clinical observations of human behavior, but there are suggestions of emotional and psychological elements to the characters' actions. **Thus, (E) is the best answer.**

30. The color red, of course, is almost an archetypal symbol for passion. Stanley stresses the inevitability of the action in this scene, and he brags that he wore these pajamas on his wedding night and will wave the shirt like a victory banner when he receives word that his son has been born. (A) is tempting but is ultimately too vague to satisfy. (C) is eliminated by the fact that this conquest of Blanche is not only sexual, but emotional and psychological as well. (D) is eliminated by the fact that Stanley is being far from seductive. (E) is also tempting, but in this scene, whatever has been smoldering has finally burst into flames, and Stanley dons his red pajamas, not to woo Blanche, but to take her. **(B), then, is the best answer. Stanley suggests that he and Blanche have desired one another since the very beginning, and after this act, one of them (Blanche) will be destroyed.**

A Streetcar Named Desire

SCENE ONE

1. Explain the irony of the street name Elysian Fields Avenue.

   The name is ironic because in Greek mythology, the Elysian Fields were a place of idyllic repose for fallen heroes and those chosen as beloved by the Gods. Neither Elysian Fields Avenue nor the Kowalski apartment is idyllic. For Blanche, the apartment on Elysian Fields Avenue will prove to be a hellish place.

2. How does the opening of the play evoke tone and mood?

   The words Williams uses to describe the scenery suggest calm, tranquility, even perhaps beauty. The play opens at the "first dark"—or twilight—of an early May evening. The sky is "a peculiarly tender blue, almost turquoise," which suggests romance. Williams says the audience can almost feel the warmth of the river and smell the coffee and bananas. The "quaint" beauty of the frame houses and the "raffish charm" of the entire neighborhood open the play on a quietly positive note.

3. How does the "Blue Piano" contribute to the tone and mood of the play?

   The "Blue Piano" is the sound of New Orleans and as Williams writes, "expresses the spirit of life which goes on here." On one level, the music contributes to the authenticity and feel of the play. More important, throughout the play, the playwright will use the Blue Piano music to punctuate scenes and emphasize the degradation and sorrow of the characters.

4. What does the first line spoken in the play do to the mood Williams has established by his description of the setting?

   Stanley's entrance—his bellowing for Stella and the way he tosses the package of meat up to her—completely destroys the romantic serenity of the opening.

5. How does Williams establish the dynamic between Stella and Stanley when these two characters first appear together on stage?

   Stanley is dressed in rough work clothes, carrying a red-stained package that the audience learns is raw meat. He bellows Stella's name. Stella appears on the first-floor landing and is described as a gentle young woman of an obviously different background.

   This introduction tells the audience immediately that Stanley is rough and masculine. The playwright repeatedly refers to Stanley as animal-like.

6. What does Stanley and Stella's positioning on the stage during their first exchange suggest? Why is this ironic?

There is clearly an allusion to Romeo and Juliet in the positioning of the couple—she on the landing, he calling to her from the ground below. However, Stanley, who hurls a package of bloody meat to his wife, is hardly the sensitive, poetry-reciting Romeo.

7. What role do Eunice and the Colored Woman play in this opening scene?

They are like a Greek Chorus, witnessing and commenting on the action so that the audience does not miss anything significant. In this case, they help the audience to realize the sexual innuendo in the act of Stanley's tossing the package of meat up to Stella.

8. What does Williams establish about Blanche even before she utters her first line? How are these attributes established?

Probably the first thing the audience notices is that, physically, Blanche does not belong in this lower-working-class setting. The stage directions specifically indicate that her appearance is "incongruous" with the setting—her dress too fine and gentile—her hat and gloves obviously out of place.

Second, we notice that she is apparently lost. The business of looking at the slip of paper, at the building, and then at the slip of paper indicates that she is not certain she is at the right place. Her facial expression reveals shock. This cannot be the place to which she has been traveling.

9. Explain the double significance of Blanche's first line.

On the one hand, the line means literally what it says. Blanche was told to take one streetcar, transfer to a second one, and then get off at this street.

On the other hand, however, the names of the streetcar lines and the destination begin to suggest the theme of the play: Desire leads to Death (cemeteries), and the destination of Death is Heaven (Elysian Fields).

10. What important exposition does Blanche reveal? What is suggested by the characters' names?

Stella is Blanche's sister. Before she was married, she was Stella DuBois. Now, her last name is Kowalski. Given that we are in New Orleans, the French last name suggests Old World aristocracy. The Polish last name suggests a newcomer, a foreigner, a peasant.

11. What technique does Williams use to provide essential exposition to the audience while also establishing Blanche's mood?

Williams inverts the typical question-and-answer dialogue by having Eunice make statements about what she has heard about Blanche and Stella's background and having Blanche offer single-word responses.

12. What important trait in Blanche is revealed after Eunice leaves? How does Williams reinforce this trait after Stella arrives?

    Blanche is a secret drinker—she sees the whiskey, takes a drink and then hides the evidence by washing the glass and putting it away. The secret drinking is emphasized later when Blanche pretends to be looking for a bottle of liquor. It is possible she is an alcoholic.

13. How has Williams already begun to establish the motif of light and darkness? Why might this motif be significant?

    In his initial stage directions introducing Blanche, Williams said that her beauty would not stand up to bright light. Apparently she may appear beautiful at first glance, but not under close scrutiny. Then she demands that Stella not look at her until she has bathed, and she also demands that the light be turned off because she does not want to be seen under such harsh light.

    Two things are suggested here. First, Blanche is physically aging, losing her youthful beauty while still able to maintain some façade. Along the same lines, it is apparent that Blanche has secrets and is afraid of being studied too closely.

14. How does the playwright expand upon the motifs of light and darkness in the first meeting of Stella and Blanche?

    Blanche orders Stella (the star) to turn off the overhead light, saying that she cannot be seen in the bright glare until she has bathed and cleaned up. In truth, she is never able to tolerate the bright light—either figuratively or literally.

15. What does Stella's name mean?

    "Stella" means "star."

16. Briefly list the important points of exposition that are revealed in Blanche and Stella's conversation.

    - *Blanche and Stella grew up on a plantation in Mississippi called "Belle Rêve."*
    - *Ten years prior to the opening of the play, their father died and Stella moved to New Orleans to support herself.*
    - *Stanley Kowalski was a military officer when he and Stella met.*
    - *Blanche has lost the family plantation. A succession of illnesses, deaths, and funerals has depleted any "fortune" there may have been, and Blanche could not maintain the plantation on her salary.*

17. Briefly list important information that is *suggested* in this scene. How is each suggested?

    - *At some point, Stella must have left New Orleans (perhaps left Stanley?) because Blanche protests, "I thought you would never come back to this horrible place!"*
    - *At the time of Blanche and Stella's father's death, the family must have been facing financial problems. This would supply the motive for Stella's leaving to support herself, and would also explain Blanche's apparent desperation at how hard it has been for her.*
    - *Although she denies it, Stella probably fell in love first with Stanley's stature and bearing as a military officer. Their relationship is also clearly physically passionate. From our introduction to Stella and Stanley, we are told that there is something delicate about Stella and of a "different background" from Stanley's. Blanche is appalled by the apartment, and their references to Belle Rêve clearly suggest that Stella married "beneath her."*
    - *Blanche has been fired—or been asked to resign. She approaches the topic of why she has been able to visit Stella before the end of the school year both evasively and defensively.*
    - *Blanche resents Stella and believes Stella to have abandoned her and the rest of the family. When Stella asks for information about how the plantation was "lost," Blanche responds defensively and essentially accuses Stella of not being available to help—"You just came home in time for the funerals…"*
    - *Blanche might actually be jealous of Stella's life and her marriage: "Where were* you! *In bed with your—Polack!"*

18. Given Williams's long description of Stanley, what is the audience's (who will not be reading the stage directions in the script) first real impression of him?

    The audience will see Stanley as masculine and confident, perhaps even arrogant. He is completely self-assured.

19. What does Williams reveal by having Stanley hold the whiskey bottle to the light and comment, "Liquor goes fast in hot weather"?

    Williams establishes how quickly Stanley is able to assess Blanche for what she is.

20. How does the dialogue establish the dynamic between Stanley and Blanche?

    Stanley is the antagonist to Blanche's tragic heroine protagonist. He deliberately provokes Blanche, through word and action, as though he is testing her. He takes off his shirt—something a gentleman would never do in the presence of a lady—and he promptly tells her, upon learning that she was a teacher, that he was never good at English. He holds up his liquor bottle to note that someone (i.e. Blanche) has been drinking his stock, and he wants to know how long she plans to "shack up." This is hardly a courteous welcome.

    Blanche, meanwhile, wavers between intimidated and flirtatious. Her language is formally polite—"I thought I would if it's not inconvenient to you." But she also fishes for compliments by telling Stanley that she has not had time to freshen up herself. She does not admit to drinking Stanley's liquor and so reveals herself as a liar and probably a drunk. He is straightforward; she is evasive.

    From this first meeting, and the audience's knowledge of Blanche's precarious mental and emotional state, it is fairly clear that Stanley is a menace to Blanche.

SCENE TWO

1. What does the early exchange between Stanley and Stella reveal about Stanley?

   Stanley is suspicious. More importantly, however, he reveals himself as an unsophisticated braggart. Stella clearly establishes that Blanche's belongings are not high-quality and expensive. Her "diamonds" are rhinestones. Even the stage directions specify that the "pearls" and so on are costume pieces. Stanley's insistence that Blanche's trunk holds "thousands of dollars" worth of clothing shows that, despite his claims to have "acquaintances," he really does not know what he is talking about.

2. Why is Stanley apparently upset about Stella's going to a restaurant and then spending the evening with Blanche?

   First, Stanley probably suspects that Blanche will try to tempt Stella into a lifestyle that she and Stanley cannot afford. Second, as the eruption about the sale of the plantation reveals, Stanley resents the appearance of Blanche's wealth while Stella lives in relative poverty.

3. Why are Stanley and Blanche so instantly antagonistic toward one another?

   Stanley already knows Blanche to be a liar—the whiskey conversation from Scene One—and he suspects that she is lying to Stella and financially swindling them both. He also resents Blanche's air of gentility as it makes him remember that his wife is from a Southern aristocratic background. He is outclassed.

   Blanche has already suggested that she resents Stella's having established a life for herself beyond the decaying and now lost Belle Rêve. She also suspects that Stella married Stanley only because she was initially dazzled by his officer's uniform and medals and did not fully realize the type of life she would lead with him. She is also, quite obviously, attracted to Stanley's raw masculinity.

4. What does Williams accomplish in the exchange between Blanche and Stanley concerning the letters?

   The exchange about the letters accomplishes several important things. First, it is another reminder of Blanche's dead husband, her one love, and a painful secret. Second, it allows the audience to understand that Stanley is offended by Blanche's superior attitude: "What do you mean by saying you'll have to burn them [the letters, now that Stanley has touched them]?"

5. How does the full interaction between Stanley and Blanche foreshadow the development of their relationship?

   Blanche begins flirtatiously, deploying her usual weapon for disarming men, but Stanley is not susceptible. She tries to get him to help her with her buttons; he declines. She fishes for a compliment; but he blatantly refuses to take the bait. He grills her about her jewelry and furs; she deflects the questions lightly and flirtatiously. As Stanley becomes increasingly coarse and confrontational, Blanche changes her tact to more direct flattery with a hint of sarcasm. Intellectually, she holds the upper hand and she continues to flirt. Finally, however, knowing that her coquettishness is not working, she drops the façade, but maintains the sarcasm. She knows—and the audience knows—that Stanley is no intellectual match for her.

6. On what kind of note does the scene end?

   The scene ends on an essentially optimistic note. Blanche feels as if she handled the situation with Stanley well, and she seems to believe the antagonism between them has passed.

SCENE THREE

1. Why does Williams mention the Van Gogh painting in his description of the setting?

   Although an audience member would not read this description, Williams provides it to the designers who will light and costume this scene as a guide to the tone and mood he wants to establish.

2. What key words does Williams use to establish the mood of this scene?

   Williams describes the nighttime poker game with terms like "lurid." The colors are "raw," reminiscent of "childhood." The colors are "primary," not sophisticated or subtle, just as the men playing poker are "coarse," "direct," and "powerful." Even the watermelon and whiskey bottles are described as "vivid."

3. What details help to establish Mitch's personality and nature?

   Mitch is less interested in the game than the others—suggesting that he is less brutishly masculine. He worries about his sick mother and says that he needs to leave early—suggesting that he is more sensitive and tender than the other men. Unlike the other men, Mitch greets Blanche courteously and thanks Stella for sending custard to his mother. Blanche observes that Mitch seems "superior to the others."

4. Contrast Blanche and Stella; who is the stronger?

   Stella is clearly the stronger character. She is the one who was able to leave home and reestablish herself in New Orleans—finding a job to support herself and eventually getting married. She is not as emotionally frail as Blanche and is able to stand up to Stanley.

5. What does Stella mean when, defending her statement that Stanley is the only one who will "get anywhere," she says to Blanche, "It is not on his forehead and it is not genius"? What does this line reinforce about her character and her relationship with Stanley?

   Stella is making a crude joke. This reinforces the blatantly physical nature of her and Stanley's marriage and suggests that she is not the frail, swooning woman that Blanche believes her to be.

6. How does the first encounter between Mitch and Blanche foreshadow the development of their relationship?

   When Blanche observes the inscription of a line of poetry on his silver cigarette case, Mitch tells her that the case was a gift from his dead girlfriend. He is sentimental and prone to falling in love, without regard for the consequences. (He knew his girlfriend was dying.)

   Blanche is flirtatious (again) and continues to embellish and lie. She tells him that she is younger than Stella and that she rarely drinks.

7. What is the significance of the look exchanged between Stanley and Blanche when he turns off the radio?

   Blanche is sitting in the chair in the bedroom, dressed only in her bra and skirt. When Stanley sees her, he stares at her, and she stares back, unflinching. The moment is charged with the sexual energy that will build until it erupts in the climactic scene.

8. Contrast Mitch and Blanche. How does Williams use dramatic irony to foreshadow future developments?

   Mitch is gentle, sincere, and a little naïve. When he shows the inscription on his cigarette case to Blanche and tells her about the girl who died, he is sharing an intimate part of himself with her. She responds by lying. The audience knows she is lying, and thus, the audience knows that her observations about pain and sincerity are considerably less *than sincere. Mitch's apparent vulnerability to Blanche's manipulation and Blanche's willingness to lie, in addition to their conversation about pain and sorrow, suggest that something will occur to hurt either Mitch or Blanche or both of them; whatever relationship is in store for them will not be long and happy.*

9. What does Blanche say her name means? Why is this ironic?

   Blanche says her name means "white woods" (Blanche = white; BuBois = woods). She compares herself to "an orchard in spring." The association is ironic because we have already learned that Blanche is not "pure," as the color white would suggest; nor is she young, as her allusion to springtime would suggest.

10. What is the significance of the paper lantern? Why does Williams have Blanche introduce it when he does?

    The paper lantern contributes to the motif of light, darkness, truth, and illusion. Both stage directions and Blanche's dialogue have established that she does not like the light—that bright light reveals the falseness and fragility of her beauty. In this scene, she has just told Mitch several important lies—especially about her drinking and her age—and she symbolically produces the paper lantern with which to cover or mask the light of truth.

11. Explain the significance of Stanley's reaction to Stella's departure.

    Just as the stage direction suggests, Stanley's call for Stella is raw and animalistic, "like a baying hound."

12. What does Stella's return emphasize?

    The very fact that Stella returns, the blatant physicality of her and Stanley's behavior, and the mention of her pregnancy being apparent to the audience are all details that emphasize the raw, physical nature of Stella and Stanley's marriage. He takes her in his arms, sinks to his knees, face pressed against her, and then carried her—like a caveman—into their apartment. When they kiss, it is with "low, animal moans."

SCENE FOUR

1. What does Stella's demeanor and her reaction to Blanche's return suggest about the episode that ended Scene Three?

    Stella is calm, "serene," like an "Eastern idol." She does not seem to comprehend why Blanche is so distraught. Clearly, Stanley's violence and then the couple's passionate reconciliation is routine.

2. What clues does Williams provide to suggest that Stella is, perhaps, ambivalent about her present circumstances?

    For the most part, Stella is calm—serene—and addresses Blanche's questions directly. Some of her responses, however—"What other can I be?" and "What do you want me to do?"—suggest uncertainty and resignation. When she laughs at Blanche's comment about the Chinese philosophy, she laughs "uncertainly." Either she does not understand the reference, or she is revealing that she is not completely *at ease with her current life.*

3. Why does Williams continually have Blanche remark about Stanley's physical nature? What is probably being foreshadowed?

   Blanche is very aware of Stanley's masculinity and violent sexuality. Her unwillingness to stay in the apartment with him, "with just those curtains between [them]," suggests the probability of something physical—probably something violent—occurring between Stanley and Blanche.

4. Explain the subtle innuendo in this exchange:

   BLANCHE: What you are talking about is brutal desire—just Desire!—the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another…
   STELLA: Haven't you ever ridden on that street-car?
   BLANCHE: It brought me here. Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be…

   The women are speaking both literally and metaphorically, of both desire as an emotional drive and of the streetcar by the same name. When Stella asks Blanche if she has not ever ridden that car, she is asking Blanche whether she has ever felt the type of passion for someone that Stella feels for Stanley. Blanche's answer is appropriately suggestive. On the one hand, the literal Desire line of the streetcar brought her, penniless, to Stella and Stanley's apartment. On the other hand, knowing what we already know about her own flirtatiousness, her own recklessness, and the fact that she is running away from some deep something *all suggest that she is in her current situation—penniless and homeless—because she acted on some ill-advised brute desire.*

5. How does the dialogue between Blanche and Stella contribute to the portrayal of Blanche as a tragic heroine?

   Blanche appears strong, even courageous initially as she tries to persuade Stella to leave Stanley and escape his abuse. For all her pretensions and weaknesses, Blanche's instincts are good. She recognizes an abusive relationship and the damage that it is causing to her sister, and she urges action, thus showing that she has the potential for greatness. Her weaknesses, however, make her doomed to fail.

6. How does the conversation between Blanche and Stella, especially Blanche's monologue about Stanley, contribute to the rising action?

   The overheard conversation gives Stanley a strong motive for destroying Blanche. Whatever tension—conflict—may have been suggested before is now overt.

7. List some of the basic inconsistencies in Blanche's character. What do these inconsistencies contribute to the character? To the plot?

Blanche is penniless and homeless (and, for all we know, jobless), yet she clings to an image of a genteel lifestyle among the Southern aristocracy that she probably never really knew.

What she has revealed about her family's "epic fornications" and the decay of the family fortunes belies her claims in this scene that she and Stella were brought up as Southern belles.

She claims to be disgusted at Stanley's brutality and to need and treasure sensitivity, but she destroyed her sensitive young husband by her own insensitivity.

These inconsistencies make it difficult for the audience to wholly like or wholly dislike her. In many ways, she is a very human and sympathetic character. In others, the audience anticipates her coming destruction with relish.

The inconsistencies continue to move the plot toward what is beginning to look like its inevitable conclusion—Blanche will be destroyed, and probably by Stanley. The inconsistencies make up Blanche's internal conflict that motivate the speeches that will eventually motivate her destruction.

8. How does this overheard conversation increase the tension?

The audience knows something that the women do not—that Stanley has Blanche's number. An eavesdropper inherently creates tension, and in this case, the audience is left to wonder what Stanley will do with his knowledge. The conversation also ratchets up the stakes in the battle of wills between Stanley and Blanche and further propels them toward a final confrontation.

SCENE FIVE

1. What does the letter that Blanche is writing at the beginning of this scene reveal about her?

   The letter Blanche is writing shows that she is probably delusional. By her own account, Blanche's "reunion" with Shep Huntleigh was a chance meeting as he was getting into his car. He is married. Yet Blanche has somehow convinced herself that she and Shep are reunited friends and that he will be willing to help her financially.

2. How does this scene advance Blanche's character arc?

   The scene opens with Blanche crafting a letter to someone she claims was a former suitor, and who she claims will help her and Stella. Whether any of this is true, or whether Blanche is intentionally lying or delusional is almost irrelevant because, in the letter itself, Blanche is blatantly lying to Shep Huntleigh, and she is laughing at the deception. As the scene progresses, more evidence of deception is revealed, and Blanche's fear of exposure intensifies: We already know that Blanche lies and drinks. We learn that there is reason to suspect that she is little more than a cheap-hotel prostitute (the man Stanley met, Shaw, and the Flamingo Hotel). More important, Blanche is willing to lie to and manipulate a good man like Mitch, potentially destroying him, for her own selfish purposes. What began as little more than "little white lies" is now becoming something almost loathsome.

3. How are the astrological signs of Stanley and Blanche both ironic and symbolic?

   Stanley was born in December under the sign of Capricorn. Capricorn is the "horned goat," which could be a vulgar pun. Blanche's sign—Virgo, the virgin—is ironic because we already have strong evidence to suggest that Blanche is far from pure and virginal. In fact, she admits to Stella that she wants Mitch to believe that she is, thus acknowledging that she is not.

4. How does Stanley's revelation that he is aware of Blanche's past contribute to the conflict between these two characters?

   Throughout the scene, it is obvious that Blanche fears Stanley—she cringes at his entrance and at every noise he makes. Stanley's insinuation about Shaw and the Flamingo Hotel clearly suggests that he knows *her to be a liar. He now has the means of destroying her if he chooses.*

5. What does Blanche's reaction to Stanley's accusation reveal about her character?

   Blanche denies to Stanley that she was ever at the Flamingo Hotel and pretends to be offended by the mere suggestion of such impropriety. But Blanche now knows that her reputation has followed her, and she tries to shape a new story with her sister. She first inquires whether people have gossiped about her and then she suggests that she might not have "been so good" in her attempts to hold onto Belle Rêve. But she stops short of confessing to the full truth and instead has another bracing drink. Confronted and frightened, she turns to her old standbys—deception and alcohol.

6. What might the juxtaposition of the episode with the Young Man and the arrival of Mitch foreshadow?

   Having tried to seduce the Young Man, Blanche says, "I've got to be good—and keep my hands off children," suggesting that this is not the first time Blanche has attempted an encounter with a youth. The arrival of Mitch, the proper suitor with the roses, clearly shows the extent of Blanche's ability to hide her true nature. Either her or Mitch's destruction—or both—is foreshadowed.

7. What does Blanche mean when she calls Mitch "My Rosenkavalier"?

   Der Rosenkavalier translates from German as "the Rose Knight" or "the Knight of the Rose." Blanche has already revealed that she intends to use Mitch as her salvation, her escape from her past and from Stanley and Stella's apartment, and Stanley's abuse. Mitch is her "knight in shining armor," even if she is a poor imitation of the "damsel in distress."

SCENE SIX

1. Based on the stage direction at the beginning of this scene, and in the context of the previous scenes, why does the atmosphere between Mitch and Blanche seem strained?

   The stage directions point out Blanche's "utter exhaustion," which she is barely able to hide. She knows that her past is beginning to catch up with her. Stanley knows the truth (even if the audience does not yet know the full truth), and she has shown herself as barely able to control her own urges and desires (as evidenced in the scene with the Young Man). Mitch has clearly recognized that something is wrong with Blanche and probably assumes that she is upset with him for some reason.

2. What does Blanche say to Mitch in French? What is the significance of the French?

   First she asks Mitch whether he would like to sleep with her. Then she says it is a "damn good thing" that he does not understand her. The French highlights Blanche's hypocrisy. On the one hand, her ability to speak French—and her speaking French to Mitch, who admits that he does not understand the language—suggests education and sophistication, just the impression she wants to make on him. However, she uses the language to mask her true nature.

3. Given the context, what is suggested by Mitch's asking Blanche her age?

   Mitch says he is asking because he was telling his mother about Blanche, but the question also comes immediately after Blanche has asked what Stanley may have told Mitch about her. The suggestion is that Stanley may very well have talked about Blanche and raised a few questions in Mitch's mind.

4. Explain the significance of Blanche's revelation about her dead husband.

For the first time in the play, Blanche allows herself to be both truthful and vulnerable with someone, which might suggest real affection for Mitch. For once, she abandons pretense and admits that she feels guilt and grief.

In this scene, another significant part of Blanche's history is revealed to the audience. She has suffered loss—the husband she claims to have loved, the elderly family she cared for, and the plantation, which was sold to pay funeral debts. The revelation, ironically, makes Blanche a more sympathetic character—because of her loss—but also less sympathetic—because of her role in her husband's suicide.

SCENE SEVEN

1. What is the significance of Blanche's frequent bathing? What might the baths symbolize?

The bath is clearly an escape for Blanche. On a literal level, given the three persons living in a two-room apartment with only draperies between the two rooms, the bath is probably the only place where Blanche feels as though she has any privacy. Symbolically, the bath is a cleansing, a futile attempt to wash away the secrets and sins of her past.

2. In what way does Stanley disclose what he has learned about Blanche?

Stanley is blunt and forceful, as he is in all things, in his disclosure of Blanche's past. He does not try to spare Stella, but rather is cruel and even gloating. He tells Stella that her sister has "been feeding us a pack of lies!" Satisfied with himself, he proclaims, "Sister Blanche is no lily! Ha-ha!

3. What is Stanley's motive for unmasking Blanche?

With one simple sentence, Stanley reveals his true motive. "That girl called me common!" He may tell Stella that he wants to prove the truth and protect Mitch, but his real motivation is to destroy the person he believes is a threat to his home and marriage, someone who considers herself superior and clearly is not.

4. Explain the irony of the song that Blanche is singing as she bathes.

While Stanley is telling Stella that her sister is a liar, Blanche is singing, "Say it's only a paper moon, Sailing over a cardboard sea.—But it wouldn't be make-believe, If you believed in me!"

The song could very well be Blanche's theme song. She has constructed a fantasy world for herself in the hope that others will believe her fiction. Unaware that she has been exposed, she's singing her song—happily—almost verifying the truth of what Stanley is telling Stella.

5. Why does Stanley believe that Blanche has come to New Orleans to stay for the summer?

   Stanley tells Stella that Blanche was fired from her teaching job after she was accused of seducing a seventeen-year-old boy. He insists that Blanche had no intention of returning to Laurel and is, instead, hiding from her past.

6. What does Stanley's "birthday present" for Blanche say about his essential nature?

   Stanley is giving Blanche a one-way bus ticket on her birthday—a mock gift that reveals Stanley's essential cruelty.

7. What staging and narrative techniques is Williams using in this scene to indicate that the plot is quickly approaching its climax?

   The counterpoint between Stanley's story and Blanche's offstage song is a new technique, and the irony of the lyrics to the song increases with every detail that Stanley produces. Stella is less able (or willing) to defend her sister or deny the truth—even to the point that she verifies at least part of Blanche's story about her late husband. Finally, the last time we saw Mitch, he more or less proposed marriage to Blanche, and now we know that Stanley has told him the truth. Blanche's situation has almost reached the crisis point at which it cannot get any worse without resolving itself one way or another.

8. What is ironic about the last line of this scene?

   After all of the lies she has told, the now-exposed Blanche criticizes her sister for lying to her about nothing being wrong.

SCENE EIGHT

1. What is the mood at the beginning of this scene and how does the set design contribute to that mood?

   The mood is one of growing tension. There is an empty seat at the birthday table, signifying the absent guest. Clearly Blanche knows that she has been stood up, and she probably suspects the reason. Stella is sad and quiet. Stanley is aggressive and crude. He refuses to participate in the conversation or laugh at Blanche's joke.

2. Why does Stanley "spear" the last pork chop and eat it with his fingers?

   One of Stanley's key motivations for his cruelty in this scene—and for even his initial dislike of Blanche—is that she called him "common" and has acted and spoken as if she were socially and culturally above him. In this scene, Stanley is exaggerating the coarseness, the commonness of his manners and upbringing.

3. How does Stanley justify his cruelty toward Blanche?

   He blames Blanche. He tells Stella that he has "been taking it off her," and argues that their marriage was happy before Blanche arrived. He resents Blanche's condescending attitude and her pretensions. He says, "And was not we happy together? Was not it all OK until she showed up here? Hoity-toity, describing me as an ape."

4. What detail establishes for the audience that there is not going to be any redemption for Blanche in this play?

   Even with Mitch gone and not taking Blanche's calls, even when Blanche knows that something has transpired between Stella and Stanley—that Stanley has told Stella something—Blanche acts as if she believes she can maintain her façade when she claims to be only twenty-seven years old.

5. In terms of narrative and dramatic structure, what does the bus ticket represent?

   Blanche's receiving the bus ticket is the beginning of her final crisis—Plot Point 2. If what Stanley has said is true, Blanche cannot go back to Laurel, but it is clear that she will no longer be allowed to stay with Stella and Stanley. Something *is going to happen; Blanche is going to have to make* some *decision and take* some *action.*

SCENE NINE

1. What does the music playing at the beginning of the scene signify?

   The Varsouviana polka, which is playing wildly in the background, is the song to which Blanche and her husband were dancing right before he killed himself. It has always played in the background whenever Blanche recalled the husband or that pivotal night. The increased "fever pitch" of the music signifies the impending disaster about to engulf Blanche.

2. What does Blanche's behavior toward Mitch say about her?

   Blanche continues in her own self-deception, even as she believes she can continue to deceive Mitch. By hiding the liquor bottle and attempting to fix her appearance, she seems still to believe that she and Mitch have a future, that he does not now know the truth about her, and that she can still be the woman she herself would like to believe she is.

3. Why does Blanche hear a revolver shot just before the Varsouviana stops playing in her mind?

   Allan, her late husband, shot himself after they danced the polka. The fact that she now comments on the gunshot and acknowledges the music clearly shows her mental deterioration.

4. What does Mitch's response to Blanche's finding the Southern Comfort suggest?

   The stage directions indicate that Mitch looks at Blanche "contemptuously," as if he knows she has not just conveniently found the whiskey. Also, when she acts as if she does not know what Southern Comfort is, Mitch knows he has caught her in a lie. Either she does *know what the whiskey is, or she lied about not offering to serve Stanley's liquor.*

5. Explore the culmination of the light and dark motif in this scene.

   As usual, Blanche prefers the dark. Mitch wants to turn on the light, and Blanche refuses. Their conversation, and Mitch's realization that he has never had a good look at her, that he has never seen her in daylight, culminate Blanche's attempts at deception about her youth, her beauty, her naivety as a "young girl." Light and dark as metaphors for truth and deception are also revealed here. Mitch knows he has been lied to, and he now wants to force Blanche to admit the truth.

6. What is the significance of Mitch's tearing the paper lantern off of the light?

   The paper lantern has always represented Blanche's self-deception, her desire to cast things in a darker light, in a different color. Ironically, Mitch is the one who helped her hang the lantern in Scene Three.

7. How does Blanche persist in her self-delusion, even as she is revealing the truth to Mitch?

   Even as she reveals the truth about her many liaisons, the seventeen-year-old student, and her being removed from her teaching job, she insists that the way she has presented herself to Mitch is the truth in her heart, *that she does not present things as they* are *but as they* ought to be.

8. What does the Mexican vendor's cry symbolize?

   The Mexican woman is selling tin (fake) flowers that traditionally are placed on graves. "Flores para los muertos" means flowers for the dead. Flowers for the dead symbolizes the death of Blanche's spirit, as well as the death of her chance of a new life with Mitch.

   The vendor's cry of "para los muertos" reminds Blanche of the deaths of her loved ones. As a device, the cry provides a convenient segue for Blanche to tell Mitch about her dying mother.

SCENE TEN

1. What is established by the stage directions at the beginning of this scene and Blanche's opening monologue?

   Blanche is apparently descending very rapidly into madness. The costume and monologue about the moonlight swim might be innocent reminiscence and role play, but Blanche's reaction to her own reflection indicates that there is a strong dissonance between the realities outside and inside her mind.

2. How does the music help to set the tone and heighten the tension in this scene?

   As Stanley returns to the apartment, honky-tonk music is playing in the background. It continues softly throughout the scene. Honky-tonk music is bawdy—coarse and sexual—like Stanley.

   When Stanley comes out of the bathroom in his red silk pajamas, the music shifts from honky-tonk to the sadder Blue Piano. The volume and intensity of the blue piano music rises to signal that something is about to happen. As Stanley menaces Blanche, the music grows to the "roar of an approaching locomotive," indicating Blanche's growing fear and panic. She is in the path of an approaching train (Stanley) and helpless to get out of the way.

   The volume of the blue piano drops and the "inhuman jungle voices" outside grow louder—symbolizing Stanley's animalistic spirit—as he approaches Blanche. The inhuman jungle voices also recall Scene Four, in which Blanche likens Stanley to an ape and a caveman "bearing raw meat home from the kill in the jungle." Finally, the trumpets and drums from the Four Deuces blare and pound to signal that Stanley's conquest of Blanche is complete. (The trumpets and drums are also heard at the end of Scene Four, in which Stella embraces Stanley after Blanche has urged her to leave him.)

3. Explore the way costuming contributes to the tone and conveys meaning in this scene.

   Blanche, dressed in a shabby white evening gown and scuffed silver slippers with a rhinestone tiara on her head, is the image of faded elegance. She looks, as Stanley cruelly notes, as false—and as ridiculous—as a Mardi Gras queen. Her pretense is pathetic and no longer in the least bit believable.

   Stanley puts on a pair of red silk pajamas—the gaudy, masculine clothes of a sexual conqueror. While he ridicules Blanche for dressing like a queen, his silk pajamas also are kingly and signify that he is the lord of his castle. The clothes, as he tells Blanche, are also the same pajamas that he wore on his wedding night. He will rape Blanche wearing the pajamas he wore to consummate his marriage to her sister.

4. In what ways is this scene the climax of the play?

   In this scene, Blanche is faced not only with the truth of the deceptions that she herself half believes, but also with the realization that she is absolutely known to be lying. Stanley not only suggests to her that he does not believe her, he faces her with certain proof. He knows Mitch did not bring her roses because he knows where Mitch is right now. He knows there was no wire from Shep Huntleigh because Blanche stumbles in the lie.

5. What is ironic about the fact that it is Stanley who brings the play to its climax? In what ways are Blanche and Stanley foils for one another?

   Stanley has been the character that Blanche has always dismissed as coarse, vulgar, and common, but beyond her pretensions, Blanche is as vulgar and common as he is. They are foils for one another in that, at the core, they are both animal, physical beings. Stanley, however, is honest about who and what he is, while Blanche has always tried to hide behind a genteel façade.

6. What is the significance of the wordless images seen through the transparent back wall of the apartment?

   As the events inside the apartment build toward climax, the audience witnesses the baseness of human depravity in the broader world as well—drunkenness, prostitution, theft, even the friendly Negro Woman from the beginning of the play is willing to profit from amorality and crime.

7. When Stanley says to Blanche, "We've had this date with each other from the beginning," what does he mean?

   From the beginning, Stanley has recognized Blanche for what she truly is. Because he also has always known who and what he is, he has known that this final confrontation would be inevitable. From the moment that the vulgar pretender called him "common" and an ape, he knew that he was eventually going to destroy her and her pretensions.

8. Why is the ultimate, climactic event a rape?

   The climax is the moment in the play during which the action can rise no further, and the final outcome is determined. As the rising action of the play has always dealt with the gradual exposure of Blanche's deceptions, and her true animalistic nature (even while condemning Stanley's), it is logical that her ultimate destruction would include a physical assault as well as an emotional one.

SCENE ELEVEN

1. What purpose does the poker game serve?

   The game brings the story full circle. Whereas Stanley was losing during the first game, when Blanche met Mitch, he is now winning. He is victorious in every way.

   It was during a poker game that Mitch and Blanche first met, and this game puts Mitch back in the Kowalski apartment so that he is present to witness her destruction.

2. Why does the Varsouviana begin playing as Blanche enters from the bathroom?

   The Varsouviana has always been associated with Blanche's late husband and the night of his suicide. As Blanche enters, having been utterly defeated and destroyed by Stanley, the music echoes that this is the "deserved" end for a tragic hero. She callously destroyed the sensitive boy she claimed to love, and now she has been emotionally and physically destroyed.

3. What motivates Stella's decision to ally herself with Stanley instead of Blanche?

   From the very beginning, Stella has been more closely allied with Stanley than with Blanche. When Blanche, perhaps exaggerating the gentility of her and Stella's upbringing, expresses shock at Stella's current situation, Stella seems perfectly content. On the night that Stanley hits her, Stella repeatedly tells Blanche that she is not in a situation from which she wants to "escape." She has always been more open and honest about her sexuality and the nature of her and Stanley's relationship. And Stella was the one who, when the situation in Belle Rêve became impossible, had the strength to leave and support herself. While Blanche molded herself into a caricature of the genteel Southern belle, Stella evolved into a working-class woman. At the crisis point in the play, it makes sense for her character arc to ally herself with her working-class husband—even with his faults—than with her supposedly genteel sister.

4. What is the significance of Stella's telling Eunice, "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley"? What is being suggested for Stella's future?

   In this line, Stella is essentially admitting that she does *believe Blanche but is* choosing *not to. The implication is that Stella is just as capable of self-deception as her sister, and this might lead her to a future of denial of truths she refuses to face.*

5. Explore the ways in which the play's resolution fits the definition of a dramatic catastrophe.

   In so far as the denouement or outcome is tragic for the protagonist, Blanche, the conclusion of the play fits the definition of a dramatic catastrophe. (A dramatic catastrophe is the concluding action of a play, particularly a tragedy, and it contains the resolution of the plot.)

   By the final scene, Blanche has been completely destroyed. Her pretensions have been stripped away and her sanity destroyed. All the issues have been resolved. Stanley is victorious. Stella will stay with Stanley, as their final embrace illustrates. Mitch will not come to rescue Blanche; he watches as she is led away by the doctor. Life on Elysian Fields Avenue will go on as it did before Blanche arrived, as the poker players resume their game.

   Blanche, whose mental and emotional life have been defined by a moment of unkindness when she destroyed another sensitive human being, has herself been destroyed.

6. What does Blanche's famous line, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" echo?

   At the end of Scene Three, the end of Blanche's first night in New Orleans, after she has witnessed both Stanley and Stella's shocking fight and their even-more-shocking reconciliation, she sits with Mitch and thanks him for being "kind," telling him, "I need kindness now."

A Streetcar Named Desire

SCENE ONE

1. Explain the irony of the street name Elysian Fields Avenue.

2. How does the opening of the play evoke tone and mood?

3. How does the "Blue Piano" contribute to the tone and mood of the play?

4. What does the first line spoken in the play do to the mood Williams has established by his description of the setting?

5. How does Williams establish the dynamic between Stella and Stanley when these two characters first appear together on stage?

6. What does Stanley and Stella's positioning on the stage during their first exchange suggest? Why is this ironic?

7. What role do Eunice and the Colored Woman play in this opening scene?

8. What does Williams establish about Blanche even before she utters her first line? How are these attributes established?

9. Explain the double significance of Blanche's first line.

10. What important exposition does Blanche reveal? What is suggested by the characters' names?

11. What technique does Williams use to provide essential exposition to the audience while also establishing Blanche's mood?

12. What important trait in Blanche is revealed after Eunice leaves? How does Williams reinforce this trait after Stella arrives?

13. How has Williams already begun to establish the motif of light and darkness? Why might this motif be significant?

14. How does the playwright expand upon the motifs of light and darkness in the first meeting of Stella and Blanche?

15. What does Stella's name mean?

16. Briefly list the important points of exposition that are revealed in Blanche and Stella's conversation.

17. Briefly list important information that is *suggested* in this scene. How is each suggested?

18. Given Williams's long description of Stanley, what is the audience's (who will not be reading the stage directions in the script) first real impression of him?

19. What does Williams reveal by having Stanley hold the whiskey bottle to the light and comment, "Liquor goes fast in hot weather"?

20. How does the dialogue establish the dynamic between Stanley and Blanche?

SCENE TWO

1. What does the early exchange between Stanley and Stella reveal about Stanley?

2. Why is Stanley apparently upset about Stella's going to a restaurant and then spending the evening with Blanche?

3. Why are Stanley and Blanche so instantly antagonistic toward one another?

4. What does Williams accomplish in the exchange between Blanche and Stanley concerning the letters?

5. How does the full interaction between Stanley and Blanche foreshadow the development of their relationship?

6. On what kind of note does the scene end?

SCENE THREE

1. Why does Williams mention the Van Gogh painting in his description of the setting?

2. What key words does Williams use to establish the mood of this scene?

3. What details help to establish Mitch's personality and nature?

4. Contrast Blanche and Stella; who is the stronger?

5. What does Stella mean when, defending her statement that Stanley is the only one who will "get anywhere," she says to Blanche, "It is not on his forehead and it is not genius"? What does this line reinforce about her character and her relationship with Stanley?

6. How does the first encounter between Mitch and Blanche foreshadow the development of their relationship?

7. What is the significance of the look exchanged between Stanley and Blanche when he turns off the radio?

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8. Contrast Mitch and Blanche. How does Williams use dramatic irony to foreshadow future developments?

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9. What does Blanche say her name means? Why is this ironic?

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10. What is the significance of the paper lantern? Why does Williams have Blanche introduce it when he does?

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11. Explain the significance of Stanley's reaction to Stella's departure.

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12. What does Stella's return emphasize?

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SCENE FOUR

1. What does Stella's demeanor and her reaction to Blanche's return suggest about the episode that ended Scene Three?

2. What clues does Williams provide to suggest that Stella is, perhaps, ambivalent about her present circumstances?

3. Why does Williams continually have Blanche remark about Stanley's physical nature? What is probably being foreshadowed?

4. Explain the subtle innuendo in this exchange:

> BLANCHE: What you are talking about is brutal desire—just Desire!—the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another…
> STELLA: Haven't you ever ridden on that street-car?
> BLANCHE: It brought me here. Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be…

5. How does the dialogue between Blanche and Stella contribute to the portrayal of Blanche as a tragic heroine?

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6. How does the conversation between Blanche and Stella, especially Blanche's monologue about Stanley, contribute to the rising action?

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7. List some of the basic inconsistencies in Blanche's character. What do these inconsistencies contribute to the character? To the plot?

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8. How does this overheard conversation increase the tension?

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SCENE FIVE

1. What does the letter that Blanche is writing at the beginning of this scene reveal about her?

2. How does this scene advance Blanche's character arc?

3. How are the astrological signs of Stanley and Blanche both ironic and symbolic?

4. How does Stanley's revelation that he is aware of Blanche's past contribute to the conflict between these two characters?

5. What does Blanche's reaction to Stanley's accusation reveal about her character?

6. What might the juxtaposition of the episode with the Young Man and the arrival of Mitch foreshadow?

7. What does Blanche mean when she calls Mitch "My Rosenkavalier"?

SCENE SIX

1. Based on the stage direction at the beginning of this scene, and in the context of the previous scenes, why does the atmosphere between Mitch and Blanche seem strained?

2. What does Blanche say to Mitch in French? What is the significance of the French?

3. Given the context, what is suggested by Mitch's asking Blanche her age?

4. Explain the significance of Blanche's revelation about her dead husband.

SCENE SEVEN

1. What is the significance of Blanche's frequent bathing? What might the baths symbolize?

2. In what way does Stanley disclose what he has learned about Blanche?

3. What is Stanley's motive for unmasking Blanche?

4. Explain the irony of the song that Blanche is singing as she bathes.

5. Why does Stanley believe that Blanche has come to New Orleans to stay for the summer?

6. What does Stanley's "birthday present" for Blanche say about his essential nature?

7. What staging and narrative techniques is Williams using in this scene to indicate that the plot is quickly approaching its climax?

8. What is ironic about the last line of this scene?

SCENE EIGHT

1. What is the mood at the beginning of this scene and how does the set design contribute to that mood?

2. Why does Stanley "spear" the last pork chop and eat it with his fingers?

3. How does Stanley justify his cruelty toward Blanche?

4. What detail establishes for the audience that there is not going to be any redemption for Blanche in this play?

5. In terms of narrative and dramatic structure, what does the bus ticket represent?

SCENE NINE

1. What does the music playing at the beginning of the scene signify?

2. What does Blanche's behavior toward Mitch say about her?

3. Why does Blanche hear a revolver shot just before the Varsouviana stops playing in her mind?

4. What does Mitch's response to Blanche's finding the Southern Comfort suggest?

5. Explore the culmination of the light and dark motif in this scene.

6. What is the significance of Mitch's tearing the paper lantern off of the light?

7. How does Blanche persist in her self-delusion, even as she is revealing the truth to Mitch?

8. What does the Mexican vendor's cry symbolize?

SCENE TEN

1. What is established by the stage directions at the beginning of this scene and Blanche's opening monologue?

2. How does the music help to set the tone and heighten the tension in this scene?

3. Explore the way costuming contributes to the tone and conveys meaning in this scene.

4. In what ways is this scene the climax of the play?

5. What is ironic about the fact that it is Stanley who brings the play to its climax? In what ways are Blanche and Stanley foils for one another?

6. What is the significance of the wordless images seen through the transparent back wall of the apartment?

7. When Stanley says to Blanche, "We've had this date with each other from the beginning," what does he mean?

8. Why is the ultimate, climactic event a rape?

SCENE ELEVEN

1. What purpose does the poker game serve?

2. Why does the Varsouviana begin playing as Blanche enters from the bathroom?

3. What motivates Stella's decision to ally herself with Stanley instead of Blanche?

4. What is the significance of Stella's telling Eunice, "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley"? What is being suggested for Stella's future?

5. Explore the ways in which the play's resolution fits the definition of a dramatic catastrophe.

6. What does Blanche's famous line, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" echo?

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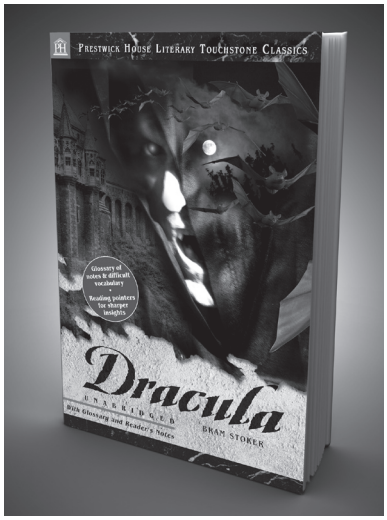

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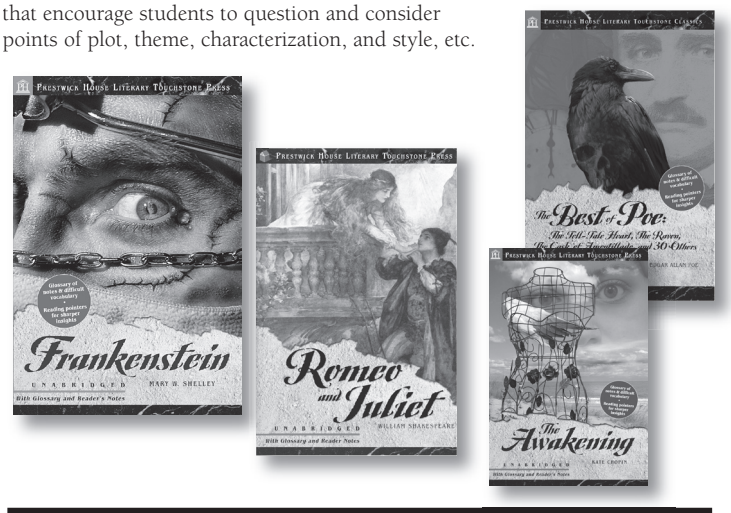

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