A TEACHER’S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET EDITION OF

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS’S

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

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TEACHING THE PLAY

Although *A Streetcar Named Desire* might seem to be a simple play about rather unsophisticated people, a careful study reveals considerable complexity both in individual characters and in relationships among those characters. Consequently, it is probably best suited for mature high school juniors and seniors. This complexity is revealed by a careful examination of what and why characters say and do what they do, how characters react to words and actions, and especially what Tennessee Williams says in his introduction and notes about the characters, sets, and music. The teaching activities are largely based on a belief that staging the play, including acting out the characters, creating the set, and playing the music, is the most effective way to involve students in thinking about and responding to the play.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Recognized as perhaps the greatest American playwright, Tennessee Williams was himself an individual whose life and personality reflected many of the problems he built into his characters. DaPonte in “Williams’ Feminine Characters,” for example, says of him, “Many of the personages he has created would seem to be projections of his own disoriented personality, frightened, timid, groping, highly sensitive, somewhat neurotic dreamers who, like their creator, are unable to adjust to the harsh realities of a world of crass materialism and brute strength. Or, if they have been forced to make an adjustment, this adjustment usually hardens and distorts them . . .” (54). Williams is probably best known for *A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Glass Menagerie,* and *The Night of the Iguana.* The first two received Pulitzer Prizes and each was given the Drama Critics Circle Award. He is, however, also the author of many other plays including the well respected *The Rose Tattoo, Suddenly Last Summer,* and *Sweet Bird of Youth.*

Although Williams’s reputation had already grown considerably with the production of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1944, with *A Streetcar Named Desire* he immediately gained world fame. John Chapman, a drama critic for *The New York Daily News,* commented following the opening night, “Tennessee Williams, a young playwright who is not ashamed of being a poet, has given us a superb drama in *A Streetcar Named Desire.* Last evening, under the sentient direction of Elia Kazan, it was given a brilliant performance at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. The company, headed by Jessica Tandy, Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter and Karl Maiden, is the answer to a playgoer’s prayer” (Chapman 29). He went on to tell his readers, “The new play is full-scale-throbbingly alive, compassionate, heart-wrenchingly human. It has the tragic overtones of grand opera, and is, indeed, the story of a New Orleans Camille—a wistful little trollop who shuns the reality of what she is and takes gallant and desperate refuge in a magical life she has invented for herself” (Chapman 29).

Philip Kolin makes a distinction between works of art that appeal to a general audience and those that appeal to what he calls “sophisticated literary critics” (Kolin 133) and says of Williams, “The one American playwright who is a conspicuous exception to the dichotomy between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture is Tennessee Williams. William’s South, with its sexual ambivalence, self-delusion, and irrational violence, has become part of our popular mythos, the ambience of countless B-movies and television melodramas” (Kolin 134). He goes on to say of *Streetcar,* “Surely, no play of the American theatre,
perhaps no play in English since the time of Shakespeare, has won such praise from both the critics and the populace” (Kolin 134).

ABOUT THE PLAY

Since that first night, the play has garnered the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1947 and reached a wide audience, partly through stage productions, but perhaps more from the cinema version in 1951, starring Marlon Brando as Stanley and Vivien Leigh as Blanche. It also has been produced on television, and the play has been staged widely. Thomas Adler and other critics believe that Williams created a new form of lyrical drama with this play. According to Adler, “Williams fully utilized the stylistic possibilities of the stage...to break away from the language-bound realistic drama of the nineteenth century... This new type of play would not only admit but insist that the language of drama involves more than just words; it would acknowledge the stage symbols and the scenic images that speak to the audience as powerfully as what issues from the mouths of the characters” (Adler 8). Other critics have found comedy in the play, that at first may seem to be a harsh picture of anger and misery, calling it brilliant tragicomedy. “With the tragic implications of so many events in Streetcar, one is tempted simply to label the play a tragedy, if an imperfect one. What rises again and again, however, to contradict such a position is a comic spirit that continuously puts the audience off balance. Rather than viewing these comic elements as imperfections in a purely tragic mode, then, or the tragic events as weak melodramatic elements in a comic mode, our appraisal should encompass both modes and allow Williams his tragicomic stance with all of its irreconcilabilities” (Roderick 93).

STAGING OF THE PLAY

Tennessee Williams gives very explicit directions as to how A Streetcar Named Desire is to be staged: “The exterior of a two-story corner building on a street in New Orleans which is named Elysian Fields and runs between the L & N tracks and the river. The section is poor but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a raffish charm. The houses are mostly white frame, weathered grey, with rickety outside stairs and galleries and quaintly ornamented gables. This building contains two flats, upstairs and down. Faded white stairs ascend to the entrances of both” (13).

Later he describes the unusual relationship between an outer wall of the house and street, “Depending on the location of the action, the audience sees either the inside or the street and outside of the house: A light goes on behind the blind, turning it light blue. Blanche slowly follows her into the downstairs flat. The surrounding areas dim out as the interior is lighted” (16).

It is important as one reads the play to realize that sometimes we can see the street and the outside of the house; and, sometimes, a wall of the house becomes transparent, and we see inside the house. “When the lights fade on the gauzy, shimmery exterior and rise on the inside two rooms of the apartment, the contrast from the beauty—even beauty in decay—is startling. Here the colors, though still dingy with age, are primary, greens and yellows, rather than muted—a fitting reflection...of the wilder side of the Quarter” (Adler 24). The touch of elegance on the outside can be seen both as a contrast to the lives within it and a reminder of the elegance of Belle Reve, the DuBois family plantation (Adler 24).

Music and light are also an important part of the setting. Williams includes them in his instructions concerning the set, “It is first dark of an evening early in May. The sky that shows around the dim white building is a peculiarly tender blue, almost a turquoise,
which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay. You can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with their faint redolences of bananas and coffee. A corresponding air is evoked by the music of Negro entertainers at a barroom around the corner. In this part of New Orleans, you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinfoy piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This “Blue Piano” expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here” (13).

“The spirited yet sometimes dissonant jazz music—the recurrent blues piano, trumpet, and drums—heard during the play [reflecting] . . . the wilder side of the Quarter” (Adler 24) starts as the play begins with the entrance of Stanley and Mitch, and never ends. Williams refers to it as the “perpetual ‘blue piano’” in the stage direction at the start of Scene Two (82). There is a clear connection between the music and the characters. “The nightclub music and the Varsoviana (a polka melody played when Blanche’s husband died that haunts her at stressful times throughout the play) convey the emotional states of the characters at each stage of the action” (Corrigan 59).

**CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY**

- **BLANCHE DUBOIS**
  A homeless woman in her thirties, Blanche arrives at her sister's house at the beginning of the play. Blanche had been a schoolteacher, married Allan, a man she later discovered to be homosexual. Her reactions to his sexual orientation cause him to commit suicide. Lonely and guilty, she becomes a prostitute, who loses her teaching position when her sexual relationship with a teenager is discovered. After the family plantation Belle Reve is lost, she turns to her sister Stella, who lives in with her husband Stanley in a poor area of New Orleans. She hides her past and fragility behind her Southern aristocrat clothes and manners and is critical of Stanley, calling him “bestial” (71). When her past is revealed, she loses Mitch's love and the potential of marriage. At the end of the play, she is raped by Stanley, falls into insanity, and is taken to the state mental asylum. Perhaps because of his famous scene screaming "Stella, Stella!" Stanley is probably the best-known character; however, most critics agree that Blanche is the focus of the play. She is a complex character worth serious study. "If a single character in contemporary American stage literature approaches the classical Aristotelian tragic figure, it must surely be Blanche DuBois. Deceptive, dishonest, fraudulent, permanently flawed, unable to face reality, Blanche is for all that thoroughly capable of commanding audience compassion, for her struggle and the crushing defeat she endures have the magnitude of tragedy. The inevitability of her doom, her refusal to back down in the face of it, and the essential humanity of the forces that drive her to it are the very heart of tragedy. No matter what evils she may have done, nor what villainies practiced, she is a human being trapped by the fates, making a human fight to escape and to survive with some shred of human dignity, in full recognition of her own fatal human weaknesses and the increasing absence of hope" (Miller 11).

- **STANLEY KOWALSKI**
  Like Blanche, Stanley is a complicated mix of coarseness and sensitivity. He clearly loves his wife Stella, as is shown when he fears that she has left him after he has thrown a radio through a window and then attacked her. His famous cry, “Stella! My baby doll's left me!”
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. . . Stell-ahhhhh!” (59), makes clear both his love for her and his violent nature. The very act of hitting her shows his crude and violent side. Early in the play he says to Blanche, “I’m afraid I’ll strike you as being the unrefined type” (31). When he hears her describe him as “an animal,” “ape-like,” and “bestial” (71-72), she becomes his enemy. His violence is not aimed just at Blanche or Stella; he fights with his friends while playing poker. “Stanley, as brute force incarnate, has no poetry or sensitivity or nobility in him . . . His intelligence is mostly animal cunning and his power of speech limited to expressing basic desires” (Brustein 10). After several violent acts related to Blanche's clothing, jewelry, and love poems from her dead husband, his final act is to rape her. He does so saying, “We've had this date with each other from the beginning!” (130).

**STELLA KOWALSKI**

Blanche's sister and Stanley's wife, Stella is happily married throughout the play, in spite of incidents such as the argument resulting in Stanley hitting her. Even then, she is quickly brought back to her happiness by Stanley's crying out for her. She is a contented person, adjusted to a life that is very different from her younger years on the plantation. She has many friends, most of whom reflect the neighborhood in which she lives. The contrast between the two sisters—Stella a normal, happy, and average woman and Blanche a refined, hypersensitive, and decadent aristocrat—is soon obvious. Shortly after Blanche’s arrival, Stella seems uneasy although she clearly wants to help her sister. Stella is the real hero of the play, “for she alone is prepared to offer the necessary comfort and understanding. She discovers a genuine fulfillment based on sexuality but, more significantly, she thereby stumbles on the urgent need for that tenderness and compassion which . . . is the key to human predicament” (Bigsby 107-108). At the end of the play, as she holds her child and sobs as Blanche is led away by the doctor and nurse, she is held “voluptuously, soothingly” by Stanley who “kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse” (142). Stella has to make a choice between dedication to Blanche and commitment to Stanley. She chooses Stanley, although painfully, and lets her sister walk out of her life.

**HAROLD MITCHELL (MITCH)**

Mitch, one of the poker players, is a young unmarried man who lives with his mother. During the poker scene, he and Blanche are attracted to each other. He leaves the game to talk with her. Blanche turns on a radio and they dance until Stanley in a rage throws the radio out a window and hits Stella. Later Blanche and Mitch talk. She tells him of the death of her husband, at first making it appear she was not critical or angry with him, then confessing the truth. Mitch comforts her, then proposes: “You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be—you and me, Blanche?” (96). Later Stanley tells Mitch the full story about Blanche's past. Mitch confronts Blanche and attempts to have sex with her, but she drives him away. “Blanche knows that any hope now of establishing a saving relationship with another human being is lost” (Adler 22).

**EUNICE AND STEVE HUBBELL**

The upstairs neighbors of the Kowalskis. Eunice is present when Blanche arrives. Steve is one of the poker players.

**YOUNG MAN**

A boy who arrives in Scene Five to collect money for the newspaper and is approached
sexually by Blanche, although, other than flirting and a kiss, nothing happens between them.

**Pablo Gonzales**

A player in the poker game.

**Colored Woman**

A neighbor of the Kowalskis, about whom, Williams writes, “the colored woman [is] a neighbor, for New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city where there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old part of town” (13).

**Mexican Woman**

A street vendor about whom Williams writes, “She is a blind Mexican woman in a dark shawl, carrying bunches of those gaudy tin flowers that lower class Mexicans display at funerals and other festive occasions” (119). She appears selling flowers near the end of the final argument between Blanche and Mitch.

**A Doctor and a Nurse**

They arrive at the end of the play and lead Blanche away to the mental hospital.

**Synopsis of the Play**

**Scene One**

*A Streetcar Named Desire* begins as Stanley and Mitch leave their apartments to go bowling. Stanley calls for Stella. When she appears, he tosses her a package of red meat as he and Mitch leave. Blanche arrives elegantly dressed and asks for her sister Stella. Eunice, who has been sitting outside, tells her where Stella is, and the Negro Woman offers to go bring her back. Eunice and Blanche talk about the neighborhood and where Blanche has come from, and Eunice lets her into the Kowalski's two-room apartment. Stella arrives and expresses happiness in seeing her sister. Blanche asks for a drink, and Stella prepares it. They chat, and Blanche tells Stella how terrible the neighborhood is. Stella responds positively about her home. Blanche explains why she left her teaching job, an explanation that proves to be false. She expresses a concern that Stanley may not like her. Stella reassures her but also tells her not to compare him to men they knew when they lived at Belle Reve. Blanche tells her that Belle Reve has been lost and blames Stella for the loss because she left home. They have an argument about who is to blame. Stella begins to cry and goes into the bathroom.

Stanley, Steve, and Mitch return, and Blanche hides from Stanley. He enters the house, sees Blanche, and they talk. Stanley asks her if she is "going to shack up here. Blanche says she will if he approves. He tells her he does but asks if she was ever married. Blanche says yes and tells him "the boy died" (31).

**Scene Two**

Early the following evening, Stella and Stanley talk while Blanche is in the bathroom preparing to go out to dinner with Stella because it is poker night. She mentions that Belle Reve has been lost and asks Stanley to be nice to Blanche. She tells him of the
difficult life Blanche has led and that she has never told Blanche about the apartment and neighborhood. Stanley asks about the plantation and becomes angry as Stella tries to downplay the loss. He tells her that the Napoleonic code means that he, because he is married to her, owned part of Belle Reve and they have been swindled. He goes to Blanche’s trunk and pulls out her clothes and jewelry to prove that she has money when they do not. Stella becomes angry, tells him, “You have no idea how stupid and horrid you’re being” (36) and leaves. Stanley stays in the kitchen waiting for Blanche.

When she enters from the bathroom, Stanley mentions her elegant and expensive clothes, and they talk about her appearance and his manliness. When Stella calls out from the street, Blanche asks her to get her a lemon-coke at the drugstore, obviously a ploy to get her out of hearing distance. Stanley’s comment—“If I didn’t know that you was my wife’s sister, I’d get ideas about you” (41)—makes clear the underlying sex that is part of their new relationship. Stanley asks to see papers related to the loss of Belle Reve. Blanche says that everything she owns is in her trunk. He rummages through the trunk, and she reaches in to get the box containing her papers. Stanley notices other papers under the box. When Blanche tells him that they are “love letters . . . all from one boy” (41), he grabs them. She demands them back and says, “Now that you’ve touched them, I’ll burn them!” (42), adding that they are poems written by the young husband she hurt. As Stanley looks through the papers, she tells him that blame for the loss of the plantation belongs to “our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers [who] exchanged the land for their epic fornications” (43). While explaining the Napoleonic code, Stanley also mentions that Stella is pregnant.

Stella returns, Stanley takes the papers into the bedroom, and Blanche joins Stella outside. After Blanche tells her that she treated Stanley’s comments as a joke, she admits to flirting with him. The poker players arrive, and Blanche and Stella leave for dinner and a show.

SCENE THREE

The scene begins with Steve, Pablo, Mitch, and Stanley playing poker. Mitch says he wants to leave to check on his mother. Stanley treats this with contempt, and Mitch heads to the bathroom. During the next hand, Stella and Blanche return and stay outside briefly while Blanche worries about how she looks. As they enter Stanley asks where they’ve been. Stella mentions the show and introduces Pablo and Steve to Blanche. When Stella mentions that it is two-thirty and suggests they end the game, Stanley “gives a loud whack of his hand on her thigh” (48). Stella and Blanche retreat to the bedroom and encounter Mitch leaving the bathroom. Mitch returns to the game, and Blanche comments, “That one seems—superior to the others” (49). Stella agrees and answers Blanche’s questions about him, including that he is not married.

Blanche and Stella discuss Stanley and the other poker players. As they talk, they begin to undress. Stanley tells them to be quiet. Blanche turns on a radio, and Stanley yells at them to turn it off. When they refuse, he rushes into the room, turns it off, and goes back to the game. After some argument about the game, Mitch goes into the bedroom, saying he is going to the bathroom. He and Blanche talk. He lights a cigarette and gives her one. They discuss his cigarette case and the girl, now dead, who gave it to him. He places a Chinese lantern over a bare light at Blanche’s request, because she fears that the bright light will reveal her age. They continue talking despite Stanley’s shouting at him. After a discussion about Blanche as a teacher, Stella returns to the bedroom from the bathroom and turns on the radio. Blanche and Mitch begin to dance. Stanley rushes in and throws the radio out the window. Stella says, “Drunk—drunk—animal thing, you!” (57), and
he rushes toward her. She runs from the room, yelling, “You lay your hands on me and I’ll—” (57). He follows, and Williams’s stage directions tell us, “There is the sound of a blow. Stella cries out. Blanche screams and runs into the kitchen” (57). The other men drag Stanley away. Blanche takes Stella upstairs as the men take Stanley into the bathroom and, after a struggle, turn the shower on him. The men leave. Stanley comes out of the bathroom, soaking wet, and calls for Stella. Getting no answer, he says, “My baby doll’s left me!” (59). After trying to call upstairs, Stanley goes outside to the front of the house and “throws back his head . . . and bellows his wife’s name, “STELLA-LAHHHHHH!” (60). Stella comes down the stairs, and “they come together with low, animal moans” and he carries her into the house (60).

Blanche appears at the top of the stairs looking for Stella. Mitch enters, speaks with her, offers her a cigarette, and they sit on the steps. Blanche closes the scene with a comment that anticipates a famous line at the end of the play, “Thank you for being so kind! I need kindness now” (61).

SCENE FOUR

The next morning Blanche finds Stella in bed alone and asks where Stanley is. Learning that he is away briefly, she begins to express her disgust for Stanley, saying, “You’re married to a madman” (64). Stella defends him, although she admits he can be violent. Blanche suggests contacting a wealthy man to get money and tries to call him on the phone, but Stella rejects the message Blanche wants to send. Blanche says she cannot live in the same house with Stanley and that she has “to plan for us both, to get us both—out!” Stella and Blanche argue. Stanley returns unseen and listens to their conversation. Blanche describes Stanley, using words like “sub-human,” “ape,” and “brutes” (72). He steps outside and calls Stella as if he has just arrived. They embrace, and Stanley grins at Blanche.

SCENE FIVE

Later, as Blanche is writing a letter and reading it to Stella, the Hubbells have a loud and violent fight. Eunice rushes out saying she is going to the police. Stanley and Blanche exchange insults, and he brings up the hotel where she was a prostitute. He exits. Blanche asks Stella if she has heard any rumors. When she says no, Blanche begins to hint about what happened in the hotel. When Stella brings Blanche a drink, Blanche becomes emotional about the support that Stella gives her and promises to leave soon. She tells Stella that Mitch is coming that evening and admits to wanting him but needing “to deceive him enough to make him—want me” (81). Stanley returns, and Stella leaves with him, cautioning Blanche not to have anything more to drink. A young man arrives collecting for the newspaper, and Blanche flirts with him and kisses him as he tries to leave. Mitch then arrives with roses.

SCENE SIX

At two o’clock the next morning, Blanche and Mitch return from “the amusement park on Lake Pontchartrain” (85). Blanche is exhausted, and Mitch recognizes that she hasn’t had a happy time. She invites him in and, in the dark, serves drinks. They talk about themselves. Blanche describes Stanley’s treatment of her as “rude” and says he hates her. Changing the subject, Mitch asks her age. The conversation then turns to Mitch’s relationship with his mother, her sickness, and the loneliness he will experience following her death. Blanche talks of her husband’s death in an extended monologue. She lies to Mitch telling him that she accepted Allen’s older lover and they went out
together as friends. Later, she says that Allen shot himself because she had told him, “I saw! I know! You disgust me...” Mitch then puts his arms around her and says, “You need somebody. I need somebody, too. Could it be—you and me, Blanche?” Blanche replies, “Sometimes—there’s God—so quickly!” (96).

SCENE SEVEN

Several months later, Stella is setting the table for Blanche’s birthday dinner. Stanley arrives and, learning that Blanche is soaking in the tub, ridicules her. Stella briefly defends Blanche as she sings, “Say, it’s only a paper moon, Sailing over a cardboard sea—But it wouldn’t be make-believe, If you believed in me” (99). Stanley tells Stella that he has learned from someone at work that Blanche lived in a hotel where she had prospective husbands, each of whom left her after two or three dates, was a prostitute with soldiers from a nearby army base, was told by the hotel to leave and not come back, and had an affair with a seventeen-year-old boy whose father discovered what happened and told the superintendent of the school where she taught. As a result, Blanche was fired and “practically told by the mayor to get out of town” (100). Before Stella can reply, Blanche calls her to bring a towel. Stella rejoins Stanley, denying the stories are true. She admits that Blanche is “flighty” and tells Stanley about the boy Blanche married and what she had discovered about him. She goes back to preparing the birthday cake and tells Stanley that Mitch has been invited. Stanley confesses that he has told Mitch about Blanche’s life and that Mitch won’t be marrying her. He tells Stella that Blanche will be leaving in a few days and he has bought her a bus ticket. They argue about forcing Blanche to leave. Stanley, having asked Blanche several times to leave the bathroom so he can use it, orders her out. After telling Stella how refreshed she feels after the long bath, Blanche notices Stella’s expression and asks what is wrong. Stella denies that anything has gone wrong. Blanche says, “You’re lying! Something has!” (105).

SCENE EIGHT

The birthday dinner is nearly over, and Mitch has not joined them. Trying to relieve the tension, Blanche asks Stanley to tell a joke. When he says he doesn’t know any jokes that are “refined” enough, Blanche tells one. Stanley shows no expression, and Stella criticizes him for his greasy hands and face. She tells him to wash his hands and help clear the table. He smashes a plate on the floor, grabs her, and orders her not to call him “Pig—Polack—disgusting—vulgar—greasy” (107). He throws a cup on the floor and goes onto the porch. Blanche tells Stella that she suspects Stanley has told Mitch something and, against Stella’s urging, tries to call Mitch and leaves her number.

Meanwhile, Stella goes to Stanley on the porch. He attempts to heal the rift between them by speaking of their love and life together. They rejoin Blanche as Stella lights the candles on the cake. Blanche and Stanley argue. The phone rings, and Stanley answers it. It is not Mitch. Stanley gives Blanche a birthday present, the bus ticket back home. Blanche runs to the bathroom where she can be heard vomiting, Stella criticizes him for having done that to Blanche. He changes into his bowling shirt as he reflects on the happy lives they led together until Blanche arrived. As he talks, Stella goes into labor. Stanley holds her as they leave for the hospital.

SCENE NINE

Later, Mitch rings the doorbell. After Blanche applies makeup and puts away the whisky she has been drinking, she lets him in. She offers to kiss him, but he walks past her into
the bedroom. Noticing that something is wrong, she offers him a drink and describes the decorating she has done to the bedroom. Mitch comments that the room is dark. Blanche replies, “I like the dark. The dark is comforting to me” (116). Mitch tells her that he hasn’t had a chance to look at her in the light, as they never go out together during bright daylight. He tears the shade off the lamp and turns it on. She covers her face, and he tells her he does not mind her being older than she had looked in dim light but is angry about her lies and the pretense of being refined and idealistic. He confirms that Stanley told him the truth about her and that he has checked it out. She blames her affairs, including the one with a seventeen-year-old boy, on her loneliness following the death of her husband. She reminds Mitch that they both need someone. He accuses her of lying to him. As the Mexican woman peddles flowers, Blanche opens the door. When the woman offers to sell Blanche some flowers, she retreats, and closes the door. The flower woman’s calls mix with Blanche’s incoherent talk. Mitch attempts to put his arms around her. She asks what he wants, and he responds, “What I been missing all summer.” Blanche cries, “Then marry me, Mitch” (120). Saying he doesn’t want to marry her, he explains, “You’re not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother (121). She orders him to leave and screams “fire” out a window when he doesn’t. He exits and she drops to the floor.

**SCENE TEN**

Later that night, Blanche is drinking heavily. Sitting in front of the dressing table in the bedroom, she wears “a somewhat soiled and crumpled satin evening gown, and a pair of scuffed silver slippers” and a “rhinestone tiara” (122). Stanley arrives home and stands in the kitchen. After asking how the baby is and learning it will not be born until morning, Blanche tells him she has had a telegram from a former boyfriend inviting her on a cruise. He offers her a beer, comments on this news, and takes off his shirt.

She expresses joy at the privacy she will have on the cruise and launches into a long soliloquy on her many positive qualities. She tells Stanley that Mitch returned and asked for forgiveness. She tells him that she rejected Mitch but, in doing so, reveals that there was no telegram. Stanley accuses her of “lies and conceits and tricks,” including the lie about Mitch’s return. All she can say is “Oh!” after each criticism, including his negative comments on her dress. He walks through the bedroom and into the bathroom. Blanche tries to call the man who was supposed to have sent the telegram. When she is told she needs his address, she leaves the phone and goes to the kitchen. While there, she sees a violent scene through the now transparent wall to the street outside. Returning to the bedroom, she picks up the phone, asks for Western Union, and starts to dictate a message as Stanley returns from the bathroom. He hangs up the phone and moves to the front door. She tries to get by him, then breaks a bottle and threatens him. He grabs her and she drops the bottle. He carries her to the bed and rapes her.

**SCENE ELEVEN**

A few weeks later, the men are playing poker again. Stella is putting Blanche’s things in the trunk. Eunice arrives, tells Stella the baby is well, and asks about Blanche, who is in the bathroom. Stella replies that they’ve “made arrangements for her to rest in the country” and that Blanche thinks it means she will be with the man from whom she pretended to get the telegram. Blanche asks Stella to take a message if there is a phone call, describes the clothes and jewelry she wants to wear, and asks Stella to get them ready. When Blanche returns to the bathroom, Stella tells Eunice, “I couldn’t believe her
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story about the rape and go on living with Stanley” (133). Blanche comes out of the bathroom, asking if her imaginary beau Huntleigh has called. When Mitch hears Blanche’s voice, he withdraws from the game. Stanley tells him get back in the game. The sound of Stanley’s voice upsets Blanche, who asks, “What’s going on here?” (134). Stella and Eunice turn the conversation to Blanche’s clothes and trip. Blanche starts to leave, but Stella persuades her to stay until the poker game is over. Blanche launches into a monologue concerning her own death at sea.

A doctor and nurse arrive and ring the doorbell. Eunice answers the door and tells Blanche it is for her. Eunice confirms Blanche’s guess that it is “the gentleman I was expecting from Dallas” (137). Eunice leaves and later returns to tell Blanche her callers are waiting outside. Blanche, Stella, and Eunice walk through the kitchen, past the poker game, and outside. When Blanche discovers that the man outside is not Huntleigh, she becomes upset and returns through the kitchen to the bedroom. The nurse and Stanley move toward her, and Blanche become hysterical.

Outside Stella hears Blanche’s cries and blames herself for what has happened to Blanche. She tries to enter the house but is stopped by Eunice. Mitch heads for the bedroom but is stopped by Stanley. Mitch punches Stanley, drops to the table, and cries. The doctor enters the bedroom, calms Blanche, helps her up, and walks with her into the kitchen. Blanche, speaking to the doctor, utters one of the most famous lines from the play, “I have always depended on the kindness of strangers” (142). Stella is waiting for them and cries out to Blanche, but Blanche does not respond and walks away with the doctor and the nurse.

When Blanche, the doctor, and the nurse have turned the corner, Eunice brings the baby to Stella. Stanley speaks to Stella, who is crying, saying “voluptuously, soothingly: ‘Now, honey. Now, love. Now, now love.’” While speaking, “He kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse” (142). Steve utters the final words of the play, “This game is seven-card stud” (142).

TEACHING THE PLAY

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE PLAY

To begin the process of producing A Streetcar Named Desire, ask the class if any of them have participated in a production of a play and how they worked. After a discussion tell students that they are going to simulate a production of A Streetcar Named Desire. Based on the students’ choices, organize the class into groups to work on the different activities required to produce a play. Have them select two aspects of the production of a play from the following list:

1. The set for the play
2. Props, such as the radio
3. Music, both the blues and polka
4. Costumes
5. Actors for each of the characters

As they read and discuss the play, have each group meet one or more times for each scene.
to work on their part of the production. At the end of each scene, each group should share their plans and ask for input from the class. When the last scene has been read and studied by the groups, the Set group should draw a large picture of the set. The Props group should bring objects to class or draw pictures of the objects to be used in the production. The Music group should find recordings of music that are as close as they can be to the music in the play. The Costume group should bring class clothing items that are similar to those in the play. Finally, the Actors group should assign a character to each student in the group. If there are not enough students for each character, minor characters could be assigned to students in other groups. Two students can be cast for each major character, one to read the dialogue and the other to pantomime the actions.

The approach to the play suggested here is to simulate the act of producing the play using some of the activities described below integrated into the production approach to reading the play. If, however, the production approach is not used as the overall structure for teaching the play, in most cases, the activities can be used separately as part of a classroom reading and discussion of the play.

REVIEW OF THE PLAY

To help students gain a sense of how the play was received on its first production, give students copies of several reviews of the play [reviews by Hughes, Chapman, Watts, etc. in Miller, Jordan Y., Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire, Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971, for example]. Have them read the reviews as if they came across them while reading a newspaper. Then discuss whether the review would have encouraged them to go to the play.

CONSIDERING ARGUMENTS

Throughout the play there are many arguments between and among characters, some verbal and some both verbal and physical. To prepare students for understanding and responding to these scenes, ask each of them to think of an argument that happened recently. If they were a part of the argument, ask them to write a description of what they were thinking and how they felt. They should also include a description of what the other individual(s) probably were thinking and feeling and what an observer might have been thinking and feeling. If they were not a part of the argument, ask them to write a description of what they were thinking and feeling as an observer and a description of what those who were arguing were thinking and feeling. Have students share their writing in small groups and then have each group discuss the similarities and differences of the descriptions.

JUDGING PEOPLE

The major characters in the play—Stanley, Blanche, and Mitch—make judgments of the other characters. Many of these can be considered misjudgments, both by the characters being judged and by the audience. To prepare students to deal with these judgments and misjudgments, ask them to think about a situation when they misjudged someone and write about this incident in their journals. Ask students—perhaps in small groups—to tell the story of the situation and its outcome, being careful not to identify the individuals involved.
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE PLAY

KEEPING A JOURNAL

During the reading of the play, students should keep a journal of their questions about and observations of what is happening in the play, what the characters say and do, and the meaning of the actions and dialogue. These entries can be used as the basis for discussions of the following:

VISUALIZING THE SET

Divide students into groups as follows:

1. The bedroom
2. The kitchen
3. The outside of the house
4. The street outside the house

After reading the descriptions of the set at the beginning of the play, ask students to write and/or draw detailed descriptions of the part of the set assigned to their group and share them with the other group members. They should attempt to write in narrative style as if they were actually present in the place described. The group should agree on a tentative description, or several alternative descriptions if they cannot agree on details, and discuss them with the class. As the reading of the play progresses, each group should review its initial set description, modify it, and share the modifications with the class. Thereby, the “set” group can construct a model of the set with input from other students.

VISUALIZING CHARACTERS

Divide students into groups, one for each major character. After meeting each of the major characters, students can write and draw descriptions in their journals of the character assigned to their group. Ask them to write their initial reactions to each character and, as the play progresses, write about how their reactions change or what reinforces them. Each group should agree on a tentative description and picture, perhaps with alternatives reflecting lack of agreement on details, and discuss them with the class. As the reading of the play progresses, each group reviews its written description and drawing of its character, modifies them, and shares those modifications with the class.

WHAT IS IN THE MINDS OF THE CHARACTERS?

As students read those parts of the play where characters interact, they can write an interior monologue of what the character is thinking. Students should share these interior monologues in small groups or with the class.

WHAT DO I THINK OF HIM/HER?

At the end of each scene, have students write a brief statement of what they think of each character in the scene. After reading the play, have each student write a follow-up about how his/her feelings about the character changed or stayed the same throughout the eleven scenes. In small groups have students share and discuss what they have written.
REACTIONS TO KEY MONOLOGUES/DIALOGUES

There are a number of important lengthy monologues and dialogues in the play. After reading each, ask students to write their immediate reaction to it before continuing their reading. Examples of such monologues and dialogues include:

- Scene One: Blanche to Stella at their first meeting (18-19) and again just before Mitch enters
- Scene Two: Blanche to Stanley dealing with the papers in her trunk (43)
- Scene Four: Blanche to Stella the next day after Stanley hit Stella (72)
- Scene Six: Blanche to Mitch concerning her husband (95-96)
- Scene Seven: Stanley to Stella concerning Blanche's past (99-101)
- Scene Nine: Blanche to Mitch during their final confrontation (118)
- Scene Eleven: Blanche to Stella just before the doctor and nurse come to get her (136).

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE PLAY

PRODUCTION OF THE PLAY

If you are utilizing a production approach to teaching the play, have students meet in their production groups to determine how they will handle the aspect of production assigned to them. Once tentative decisions have been made, have each group share its decisions with the members of the other groups and, if necessary, revise them in order to integrate those decisions into a coherent approach to the production. Once that has been done, have each group complete whatever is necessary to implement those decisions. If possible, preparation for the production should be done in the school auditorium or theater. When preparation is complete, students should rehearse the play and, possibly, present it to other classes.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Some of the following activities may be helpful as the students prepare for the production. If the production approach has not been selected, once the students have completed their discussions during the reading of the play, these activities can be used to help promote meaningful reflections on the play.

REVIEWS OF THE PLAY

After they have finished reading the play, have students look back at the reviews they read earlier and their reactions to them. They should discuss how they currently feel about going to a production of the play. After considering the accuracy and usefulness of each review, students should decide if the reviews would be helpful or harmful to their consideration to attend a production. If students believe the review was not helpful, they should suggest what the reviewer should have said. Students can then write reviews of their own and share them with the class.

WHAT WAS THE PLAY ABOUT AND WHAT DID I LIKE AND DISLIKE?

Ask students to consider what they might tell a friend who, on learning that they had seen the play, asks, “What was it about? What did you like about it? Would you recommend I see it?” Then have each student write a dialogue in which they answer the friend’s questions, the friend asks follow-up questions, and the friend reacts to what he/she has heard.
SEARCHING THE INTERNET

There is material on the Internet dealing with Tennessee Williams in general and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in particular. Ask students who would enjoy doing so to search the web for such material and share it with the class.

INTERVIEW WITH A CHARACTER

In pairs, students should select one of the main characters and watch that character throughout the play. They should also pick a popular magazine to which they will submit an interview of the character. After reading the last scene of the play, one student becomes the character and the other an interviewer for the magazine. They should record the interview, transcribe it, and then write an article for the magazine. The students should share the interview with the class and discuss the image of the character that the interview presents.

FILM

Students can watch a video of the play and compare their visualizations of the set, characters, and plot to the video version. If they have been divided into groups by scene and character, they should start the process with their group. They can refer to Yacowar’s *Tennessee Williams and Film*, especially the “Introduction” (1-7) and the second chapter on *Streetcar*. After making the comparisons, the group should decide what, if anything, they would change in the video.

ART

Have students select a character, an aspect of the set, or the costumes for one or more characters and prepare a drawing, painting, or collage of their choice.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE CHARACTERS

Each character has many different relationships by the end of the play. Divide students into groups based on two characters’ relationship. For example, one group could be assigned the relationship of Stanley and Stella and another Stella and Blanche and so forth. Ask students to identify and describe the relationship between the two characters, citing examples from the play. Each group should share and discuss the results of its study with the class.

BEYOND THE ENDING OF THE PLAY

Many relationships are left unresolved at the end of the play. Ask each student to consider each character and each character’s relationship to the other characters at the end of the play. They should write a scene that shows what happens between the characters the next day or a few days later. Ask them to try to use Williams’s style and to include commentary as Williams might have, had he written the scene.

ADDITIONAL READING OF OTHER WILLIAMS PLAYS

Ask students to read individually or in small groups other successful Williams plays, compare them to *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and present the comparisons to the rest of the class. Plays students might select include but are not limited to the following: *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Night of the Iguana*, *The Rose Tattoo*, and *Suddenly Last Summer*. 
WHO IS TENNESSEE WILLIAMS?

Tennessee Williams is himself a fascinating character. Although critics have disagreed about how his life influenced his plays, there are many connections between Williams's life and Streetcar, as revealed in his comment from Memoirs concerning the last line in the play. Students can find information in his autobiography Memoirs and in any of several biographies, including Spoto's The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams and Tischler's Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan. Students might also read his poems or short stories, which are available in The Collected Poems of Tennessee and Tennessee Williams Collected Stories. Such research can be shared with members of the class.

READING PLAYS BY OTHER AUTHORS FREQUENTLY COMPARED TO WILLIAMS

Have students read individually or in small groups plays by playwrights such as Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neill, and William Inge who are frequently compared to Williams. Students should present their reactions to these plays to the rest of the class. Some of the plays that might be read, compared, and discussed include: O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night and Mourning Becomes Electra, Inge's Come Back Little Sheba, and Miller's All My Sons and Death of a Salesman.

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