



A Streetcar Named Desire

By Tennessee Williams

Student Workbook

Name: _____



How to respond to a play



Understanding

Context

- When was the play written?
- Where is it set?
- What do you know about society at the time it was written?
- Who were the intended audience? What were they like? How would they have reacted to the play? Is this different to how a modern audience would react?
- Who is the playwright? What do you know about them? Why did they write this play?



Use this guide sheet to help you develop your own personal response to any play.



What is the play about?

- Where is it set? Time, place, era.
- What kind of setting or staging is utilised?
- What happens?
- What is the main plot? Is there a subplot?
- How does the play begin and end?
- What are the **themes**?
- How does the action progress?
- What are the conflicts?

What is the genre?

- Is this a tragedy, comedy, romance? How do you know?
- To what extent is this genre adhered to?
- Is there a subgenre?

Characters

- Who are the characters? What are their roles?
- How do they act / speak?
- What do they add to the play?
- Do you like/dislike them? Why?
- How do they change or develop? Why?
- How do they interact with others?
- What do they represent?
- How do they link to the themes?



What methods are used by the playwright?

- Symbolism
- Dramatic devices
- Language
- Imagery
- Circular structure
- What is the effect of each?

What is the **message**?

- What are the '**big ideas**' that are presented?
- What does the playwright want you to understand?
- Is their message still relevant today?
- Why did they write the play?
- What are their concerns/ideas?
- Is there a moral/religious/philosophical lesson?
- Is this a universal message? A personal message? A societal message?
- Why does the playwright want to leave you with this message?
- Are they highlighting, critiquing, emphasising, revealing etc.



What are 'big ideas'?

These are the bigger issues that are being presented in the play. These can be *social, political, environmental, moral, existential or religious*. These are often ideas that go beyond what is merely written on the page e.g. a play about a family may actually be about wider societal issues. Try and think about what is being suggested in the play and see if you can spot any *wider issues* that the playwright may be alluding to.

How to respond to a play: methods



Analysing: consider the methods used and analyse their effect The methods are like the writer's toolbox.

You will need to be able to identify the methods used by the writer and comment on their effect. You should not merely technique spot, but should instead consider why these methods have been used, how they reinforce the message and what effect they have on the audience.

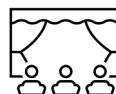
□ Language

- What kinds of words have been used?
- Try and identify word classes. What are the connotations of these words? Why have they been used? What do they suggest about the characters/action/relationships? How do these words enhance a technique or vice versa?
- Has imagery been used? Why? What does it reveal? How does it enhance the meaning?



□ Dramatic Devices

- Identify the different dramatic devices used.
- Why have they been used? What is the effect?
- How do they reinforce the message/meaning?
- How do they help to create a tone/mood?
- How can you interpret meaning?
- What do these devices reveal about character/action/events/setting/ relationships?
- How do the devices reflect the themes?



□ Structure and Form

- What can you say about the structure of the play?
- How do events develop and progress?
- How are characters introduced? When? Why at this point? How do they develop throughout the play?
- When do characters enter and exit? Why?
- How do characters interact with and speak to each other?
- Does the tone change or is it consistent?
- How is the stage utilised? What are characters doing? How? Why?
- Does the setting change? Why?
- Is there a shift in the direction of the action? At what point?
- How does the play begin and end?
- How does it look on the page? What is the effect?
- Where are the key events? How are they linked?
- Where is the climax? How does the writer prepare the audience for this?
- Is anything repeated? When? How? Why? What does this represent? How does this move the action forward and link events or characters?



Remember to consider the effect on the audience. How is this achieved?
Why?



Dramatic Devices & Form

Long pauses, silences, hesitations and interruptions	Stage directions	Sound	Props
Entrances and exits	Monologue	The introduction of characters	Foreshadowing
Lighting	Soliloquy	Set	Dialogue vs stage directions
Length of sentences and speech	Beginning and ending of acts and scenes	Time	Costume
Dramatic irony & verbal irony	Symbols and motifs	Music	Dialogue

Using 'what, how, why' to develop your response

What – this indicates when you are providing a personal response (What do you see? What is presented? What do you learn?)

How – this often refers to method and techniques (How is this shown?)

Why – this often refers to writer's intention or message (Why has this been used? Why are you being shown this? Why is it presented in this way?)

What



- What do you see?
- What do you think?
- What is your impression?
- What is your view?
- What do you learn?
- What do you understand?
- What is being presented?
- What is the writer showing you?
- What can you say about character/action/themes/relationships /events?

How



- How do you know this?
- How is it shown to you?
- How is it presented?
- How are you affected?

Why



- Why does the writer do this?
- Why does the writer present it in this way?
- Why does the writer want you to feel this way?
- Why has this word / technique been used?

Language, Structure & Form

Dramatic language	Symbolism	Juxtaposition	Personification
Figurative language	Rhetorical question	Fragments	Standard English
Lyrical language	Foreshadowing	Syntax	Sarcasm
Monosyllabic	Repetition	Contrasts	Hyperbole
Colloquial language	Exclamatory phrases	Interrogatory phrases	Allusion

Dramatic Devices & Form

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How to analyse a quotation



1. Ensure the quotation you have chosen is **interesting and relevant**.
2. Highlight anything **significant** in this quotation. This could be a technique or interesting word choice.
3. **Identify** the technique or word class.
4. Go through the steps in the boxes below. Try and say as much as you can and layer your analysis.



How to analyse a technique or device:

- **What** technique or device is used?
- **Why** is it used?
- **What** is the effect?
- **How** does it reinforce the message?
- **How** does it reinforce or reflect the themes?



How to analyse language:

- **What** word stands out?
- **Why** has it been used?
- **What** is the effect?
- **How** does it reinforce the message?
- **How** does it reinforce or reflect the themes?
- **How** does it reinforce the effect of the overall technique?



Why did Williams make these choices?
How is he crafting the scene?
How is he presenting characters, action or relationships?
Why?
How is Williams controlling the audience's reactions?
What is the impact on the audience?

Using 'what, how, why' to develop your response



What – this indicates when you are providing a personal response (What do you see? What is presented? What do you learn?)

How – this often refers to method and devices (How is this shown?)

Why – this often refers to writer's intention or message (Why has this been used? Why are you being shown this? Why is it presented in this way?)

What

- What do you see?
- What do you think?
- What is your impression?
- What is your view?
- What do you learn?
- What do you understand?
- What is being presented?
- What is the writer showing you?
- What can you say about character/action/themes/relationships/events?



How

- How do you know this?
- How is it shown to you?
- How is it presented?
- How are you affected?

Why

- Why does the writer do this?
- Why does the writer present it in this way?
- Why does the writer want you to feel this way?
- Why has this word / technique been used?



How to turn this into a written response:

WHAT: Writer's name + adverb + analytical verb + your idea

HOW 1: Embed quotation

HOW 2: Method + analysis + interpretation of meaning + connective to double up analysis

WHY: Non-definitive statement + Writer's name + critical verb + interpretation (context / reader)

Use the phrases on the next page to help you build your response

Developing your analysis: guiding questions



Points – Development and analysis	Development by linking – take ideas further
<p>What kind of mood/tone/atmosphere is created? How? Why?</p> <p>What do you learn about the characters/action/relationships/themes? How are these presented? Why?</p> <p>What is the intended effect of...? How is this achieved?</p> <p>What technique/dramatic device has been used?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why has it been used? • What is the effect? • How does it reinforce the message? • How does it reinforce your point? • How does it reinforce or reflect the themes? • Can you <u>double up</u> on the techniques used? • What is the effect? • Why was it chosen? <p>What kind of language has been used? Diction/word choice/imagery?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the connotations? • How does it affect the audience? • Why has it been used? Why this particular word? • Where is it? Why? • How does it reinforce the message/playwright intention? • How does it reinforce your point? <p>How is the audience supposed to feel/react? How do you know?</p> <p>What ideas are expressed/presented? How? Why?</p>	<p>Link to context as a way of developing interpretation of meaning:</p> <p>What do you know about the time period?</p> <p>What do you know about the playwright?</p> <p>Why was the play written?</p> <p>Issues that the playwright is commenting on.</p> <p>Link to the genre:</p> <p>What is the genre?</p> <p>What do you know about the features of this genre?</p> <p>To what extent does the play adhere to the features of the genre? Why?</p> <p>Link to playwright's intention:</p> <p>What is their message? How does your example show this?</p> <p>What do they want you to understand? How do you know?</p> <p>What do they want you to do? How do you know?</p> <p>Key phrases:</p> <p>This suggests</p> <p>This implies</p> <p>This reinforces</p> <p>This reveals</p> <p>This shows</p> <p>The writer is:</p> <p>Critiquing</p> <p>Highlighting</p> <p>Subverting</p> <p>Presenting</p> <p>Emphasising</p>

Essay Companion

Developing a Response:

What is your idea? What is your response?

What is the evidence to back this up?

What can you infer from the evidence?

How is your idea shown in the evidence?

How does the writer use techniques / language / structure?

How does this link back to your initial idea?

Why did the writer use this? *Why* did they want to show this? *Why* did they choose to present it in this way?



Verbs to show analysis and interpretation:

This reveals/ suggests/
implies/depicts/conveys/
emphasises/reinforces/
highlights/ portrays /presents

Verbs to show writer's intention:

Critiques / subverts / presents /
warns / challenges / explores /
questions / considers / examines

Tentative Phrases:

Perhaps the writer's aim is to...
It's possible the writer wants us
to understand ...
It may be that..
It could be argued that...
It is likely...
The writer probably...
It seems that...
This might suggest...

Words to discuss the effect on the reader/audience:

- Shocked
- Disturbed
- Compelled
- Engaged
- Guilty
- Compassion
- Relief
- Anger
- A sense of injustice
- Intrigued
- This provokes
- This induces
- This forces

Assertive Phrases:

The writer conveys/presents/contrasts/
implies/indicates/
creates/reveals

It's clear that the use of....shows how...

By using a the writer shows how ...

By using ... the writer is forcing the reader to...

This would be particularly powerful to an
...reader

The writer would have been influenced by...



Words to show a developed interpretation and to link ideas:

In addition, the use of a

Furthermore, the use of a ... develops the idea
of...

This idea is further strengthened by the use of...

Alternatively, the use of...could also show...

This idea could be linked to...

Perhaps the writer's aim is to...

The writer is obviously trying to...

Another interpretation...is...

Discussing method:

The most important word is...

Consequently ...

By using a...the writer creates the impression
of...

In particular, the use of...

The word...conveys...

A...has been used to highlight...

Adverbs:

Cleverly, accurately, clearly,
ironically, effectively,
undoubtedly, above all,
notable, especially,
significantly, expertly

Use this to help
you develop both
your verbal and
written response.



Play Information

In this section of the booklet, you will find a variety of resources that you can use for reference purposes as well as to consolidate your understanding of the play.



Plot Summary

Summary

The play is set in the shabby but charming New Orleans of the 1940s. Stanley and Stella Kowalski live in the downstairs flat of a faded corner building. Blanche DuBois, Stella's sister from Laurel, Mississippi, arrives. Blanche is a fading Southern belle, a school teacher and is dressed in all white, she is delicate and moth-like. Blanche tells Stella that Belle Reve, the family plantation, has been lost, and that she has been given a leave of absence from her teaching position due to her nerves. Blanche criticises Stella's surroundings and laments Stella's fall from their elite upbringing. Even though Blanche cannot afford to stay elsewhere, she is very judgmental of Stella's home in a noisy, diverse, working-class neighbourhood.

In contrast to Stella's self-effacing, deferential nature and Blanche's pretentious, refined airs, Stella's husband Stanley is representative of raw, animalistic masculinity. It is clear that Stella was happy to leave behind her background and is drawn to Stanley in a physical way – their marriage is based upon animal magnetism. When Stanley comes home he accepts Blanche's presence, but it soon becomes obvious that her genteel pretensions will clash with his macho self-image. Through his questioning of Blanche we learn that she has been married and that her husband died.

Stanley immediately distrusts Blanche to the extent that he suspects her of having cheated Stella out of her share of the family inheritance. In the process of defending herself to Stanley, Blanche reveals that Belle Reve was lost due to a foreclosed mortgage, a disclosure that signifies the dire nature of Blanche's financial circumstances. Blanche's heavy drinking, which she attempts to conceal from her sister and brother-in-law, is another sign that all is not well with Blanche.

Stanley is territorial about his wife. He feels that Blanche bad mouths him, and he resents her place in the home that he considers his own. Eventually, during a poker game with his friends, Blanche and Stanley get into a huge fight, and Stanley believes the two women are disrespectful to him. He proceeds to beat up his pregnant wife. Blanche and Stella escape to their upstairs neighbour Eunice's apartment. A short while later, Stanley is remorseful and cries up to Stella to forgive him. To Blanche's alarm, Stella returns to Stanley and embraces him passionately. Mitch, one of Stanley's co-workers and friends who Blanche has shown an interest in, meets Blanche outside of the Kowalski flat and comforts her in her distress.

The next day, Blanche tries to convince Stella to leave Stanley for a better man whose social status equals Stella's. Blanche suggests that she and Stella contact a millionaire named Shep Huntleigh for help escaping from New Orleans; when Stella laughs at her, Blanche reveals that she is completely broke. Stanley walks in as Blanche is making fun of him and secretly overhears Blanche and Stella's conversation. Later, he threatens Blanche with hints that he has heard rumours of her disreputable past. He says he knows that she had to leave Laurel due to her reputation as being sexually promiscuous. She is visibly dismayed and explains some of her past to Stella. Stella is still hopeful that Mitch may marry Blanche.

Blanche and Mitch have a very unsuccessful date however they then begin to talk and reveal information about their lives: Mitch talks about his sick mother and Blanche talks about her husband's suicide. They begin to bond and Blanche is finally hopeful that she will marry Mitch. This falls through when Stanley tells Mitch about Blanche's past. This past includes her finding her husband in bed with another man. Her husband committed suicide after this, and she sought comfort in sexual relations with a student of hers and lost her job.

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

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

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

After her relationship with Mitch falls apart, she seeps deeper into her gaudy dress and mannerisms and begins talking about a married man by the name of Shep Huntleigh who she claims will come and take her away on his yacht.

Stanley comes home one day and gets in a fight with Blanche. This fight becomes physical, and he sexually assaults her. This traumatises Blanche, and she is even more traumatised when no one will believe her. Her tremulous grip on reality is broken. The play ends with Blanche being taken to a mental institution while Stella and Stanley go on to care for their baby together.

Plot summary bullet points

My overview

Activities

In this section of the booklet, you will complete a range of activities. These activities will help to enhance and solidify your understanding of the characters, action, themes and dramatic devices.

You will also practise some exam skills here.



Key images annotation

Make notes



Epigraph analysis

And so it was I entered the broken world
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.
– “The Broken Tower” by Hart Crane

Scene 1: opening stage directions

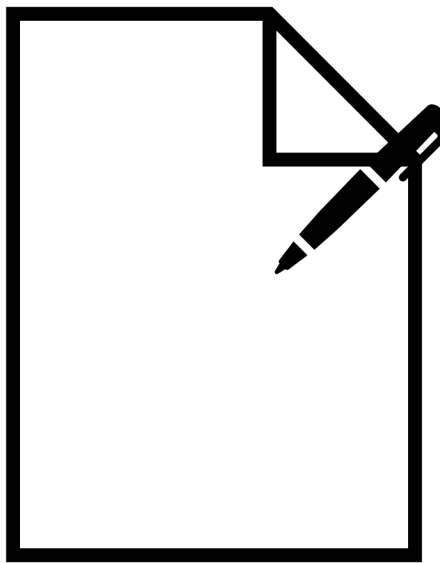
The exterior of a two-story corner building on a street in New Orleans which is named Elysian Fields and runs between the L & N tracks and the river. The section is poor but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a raffish charm. The houses are mostly white frame, weathered grey, 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. 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 tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This "Blue Piano" expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here.

[Two women, one white and one colored, are taking the air on the steps of the building. The white woman is Eunice, who occupies the upstairs flat; the colored woman 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.

Above the music of the "Blue Piano" the voices of people on the street can be heard overlapping.]

DWT

Dedicated Writing Time Tasks



DEDICATED WRITING TIME

How does Williams present the setting in the stage directions at the start of the play?

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical margin lines or other markings on the page.

DEDICATED WRITING TIME

How does Williams present the setting in the stage directions at the start of the play?



Peer assessment

Success Criteria	✓
Relevant point - What is shown in terms of the question? How are you responding to the question?	
Embed and introduce the quotation	
Explain the quotation in terms of your point and the question. What does the quotation show?	
Use keywords from the question throughout	
Analyse a technique that has been used - why has it been used? What is the effect?	
Analyse the language used and discuss the connotations	
Discuss author intention as a way of interpreting meaning	
Link to context if relevant	
Discuss the effect on the audience	
Prove how your point/idea/quote is relevant by returning to the keywords in the question	
Make sure your explanation, analysis and link are relevant to the quote you used	