# A Streetcar Named Desire

By Tennessee Williams

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As we read, we will examine the following literary elements:

Theme:
- Conflict between masculine and feminine
- Reluctance/ inability to accept the truth
- The effects of desire
- The loss of/ destruction of the “old South”

Motifs and symbols
- Light
- Darkness
- Name symbolism - people and places
- Bathing
- Animal imagery
- Clothing (esp. Blanche)

And attempt to apply the following critical literary theory lenses to the play:
- Formalism
- Reader response
- Psychoanalytical
- Feminist/ Gender
STUDY GUIDE

Directions:

Complete the following questions on separate paper. Reference the text (page numbers). Write full, thoughtful responses throughout.

Scene 1 (p.13-31)

1. What does Stanley carry as he enters at the beginning of the play?
2. How is Stella described as she enters? (p. 13-14)
3. To what does Williams compare Blanche’s manner and clothing in the stage directions?
4. What directions was Blanche given to Stella’s place?
5. While Blanche waits for Stella to come home, what does she do?
6. What job did Blanche previously have?
7. What is Belle Reve?
8. How does Blanche feel about Stella’s home?
9. What background information is given about Stanley?
10. Why does Blanche say she left her job?
11. What happened to Belle Reve?
12. What is Stanley’s motto? What does this show about him? (pg.30)
13. What happened to Blanche’s husband?

ANALYSIS QUESTIONS:

Scene 1:

1. When we first meet Blanche DuBois, she has traveled to see her sister Stella. She took streetcars named Desire and Cemeteries to arrive at her sister’s apartment. What might these names represent?
2. What does Belle Reve mean? (translate from French)
3. Blanche says to Stella: “You haven’t said a word to me” (19). Consider how Stella responds. What does this show about their relationship?

Scene 2 (p. 32-44)

1. Why is Blanche soaking in the tub? (32)
2. What about herself does Stella ask Stanley not to mention to Blanche?
3. What, according to Stella, is Blanche’s “little weakness”? (33)
4. What does Stanley say the Napoleonic Code is?
5. What favor does Blanche ask Stanley? Do you think this is appropriate? Why or why not?
6. Why does Blanche ask Stella to get her a Coke at the drugstore? (p. 40)
7. Describe the confrontation between Stanley and Blanche. (What does Blanche say she’ll burn?)
8. For what does Stella apologize to Blanche?
9. What is your impression of Stella? of Blanche? Why? (Refer back to text specifically.)
Scene 3 (45-61)
1. Why do Blanche and Stella go out on poker night?
2. Why doesn’t Mitch enjoy going out? (46)
3. What about Stanley makes Stella think that he will succeed in life?
4. Who gave Mitch his silver cigarette case? What is the inscription and who wrote it?
5. What lies does Blanche tell Mitch about Stella?
6. After Blanche and Mitch begin dancing, what does Stanley do with the radio?
7. For what does Blanche thank Mitch?
8. How would you characterize Stanley based on this scene? Be specific.

ANALYSIS:
1. Sum up the exposition Williams defines for "The Poker Night" Scene. What do you notice about the use of color in this scene?
2. What does the name Blanche mean? (translate from French) What does this typically symbolize?
3. What does the name DuBois mean? (translate from French)
4. Why doesn’t Blanche like bright lights? How might this be significant?

Scene 4 (p. 62–73)
1. How does Blanche respond to Stella’s returning to Stanley? Do you think her reaction is appropriate?
2. What did Stanley do on his and Stella’s wedding night? What was Stella’s response to Stanley’s wedding night behavior?
3. What does Stella mean when she says she is not in anything that she has a desire to get out of?
4. Who is Shep Huntleigh? (p. 66)
5. Blanche tells Stella she can’t live with Stanley. Why can’t she?
6. What does Blanche say about Stanley when she speaks “plainly” about him? Do you think her assessments are accurate? Why or why not?

Scene 5 (p. 74–84)
1. To whom is Blanche writing a letter?
2. Of what does Eunice accuse Steve? To where does Eunice go after her fight with Steve?
3. Blanche discusses astrological signs. What sign does she think Stanley was born under and why?
4. What sign does she say she was born under? What does it mean?
5. Who is Shaw? How does Blanche respond physically (according to the stage directions) to Stanley’s inquiry about Shaw? Why is this significant?
6. What does Blanche say about the Flamingo hotel?
7. What does Blanche say about “soft people”?
8. Why does Blanche want to deceive Mitch? Why does Blanche want Mitch?
9. What does Blanche do to the newspaper boy?

Analysis Questions
1. Blanche is drinking again. Why do you think she drinks? (Don’t say she’s an alcoholic.)
2. After Stella and Stanley leave, a young man comes to the door collecting money for the local newspaper, The Evening Star. What does Blanche do to him?
3. Blanche and Mitch discuss Stanley. She asks him if Stanley talks much about her and explains how horrid he is making her life there with them. What does Mitch respond?
4. Blanche confides in Mitch by telling him the story of how her husband died. How did he die? What led to that?
5. What do you predict will happen with Blanche and Mitch? Why?
Scene 6 (p. 85–96)
1. How does Blanche define “the law of nature”?
2. What does Blanche look for in the sky?
3. What personal information does Mitch ask Blanche while Stanley and Stella are out?
4. Why does Blanche secretly roll her eyes?
5. What does Blanche tell Mitch about Stanley?
6. What does Blanche reveal about her husband?
7. How did Blanche’s husband die?

Scene 7
1. For what occasion is Stella preparing at the opening of Scene Seven?
2. Why did Blanche leave the Flamingo?
3. How does Stella react to Stanley’s revelations about Blanche?
4. What song does Blanche sing in the bathtub while Stanley tells Stella what he has learned about Blanche?
5. According to Stanley, why did Blanche leave the school?
6. Why doesn’t Mitch come over for the birthday celebration?
7. What did Stella hope about Mitch and Blanche?
8. How does Stanley make sure that Blanche will leave?

Scene 8
1. Why does Stanley hurl a plate to the floor?
2. To whom does “pair of queens” refer?
3. What does Stanley mean by “get the colored lights going”?
4. What does Blanche realize that she shouldn’t have done?
5. What does Stanley give Blanche as a birthday present?

Scene 9
1. Why does Mitch ask Blanche if she is out of her mind?
2. Why does Mitch turn on the light?
3. How does Blanche respond when Mitch confronts her about the Flamingo?
4. What does Blanche say is the opposite of Death? How is this significant?
5. Why doesn’t Mitch want to marry Blanche anymore?

Scene 10
1. At the beginning of Scene Ten, what is Blanche wearing?
2. From whom does Blanche claim she has received a telegram? Why might this be significant?
3. What will make Blanche “weep with joy”?
4. What lie does Blanche tell Stanley about her meeting with Mitch?
5. What can the audience see through the back wall after Blanche’s frantic attempt to call Shep Huntleigh?
6. What happens at the end of Scene Ten?

Scene 11
1. As the final scene opens, what are the men doing?
2. Where is Stella sending Blanche in the final scene of the play?
3. Where does Blanche believe that she is going in the final scene?
4. What advice does Eunice give Stella?
5. What does Blanche say will cause her to die?
6. What item does Stanley ask Blanche if she wants to take with her?
7. On what does Blanche say she has always depended? *famous line*