*'Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.'* (Blanche, scene eleven)

**Tennessee Williams *A Streetcar Named Desire***

What is fascinating about the play, is that characters are neither completely good or completely bad. Stanley, while brutal and animalistic, cannot function without Stella. Blanche is both intelligent and fragile, selfish and manipulative. Stella is sweet and kind, yet perfectly happy to be in an abusive relationship.

Just as in *The Glass Menagerie*, symbolism abounds. That streetcar is more than just a mode of transportation. The characters represent more than mere human beings. It's a mistake to think of these characters, and for that matter the play, too realistically. Williams has enhanced every syllable, every name, every action with meaning. So much so, that aspects of Blanche and Stanley have been stamped and stereoptyped on the psyche, generation after generation. There are few out there even today, who have never cried out STELLAAAA, or referred to 'depending on the kindness of strangers.'

You can't feel ambivalent about *Streetcar*and its characters. You either feel intense love or intense hate. Or intense sadness. Stanley and Blanche represent the huge, the dramatic, the intense. The emotionally charged. Streetcar has intensely beautiful poetic images and clashing, brutal, coarseness. The fantasy world is both refined and base. There is passion and there is disgust. Streetcar is a bloody tug-of-war that lunges back and forth. The characters lunge at each other, the theme lunges at the audience.

More than a tug-of-war, *Streetcar*is a downright war. A Battle Royale. How often can you say that about a play? It's a clash of everything and everyone. A clash between old and new, civilization and brutality, of slow old-fashioned values and modern aggressive industry, of those who embrace change and those who resist, of fantasy and reality, of genders, of truth and lies. The gentile are ripped to shreds. Is the modern world filled with animal brutality?

Does Stanley rape Blanche? If he does, what purpose does the rape hold thematically? Is it realistic or symbolic? Is it man beating women? New America beating Old America? The truth beating a life of lies? All these aspects must be considered.

No one wins in this play. No one is happy at the end. There are only losers.

* Opened on Broadway on Dec 3, 1947 at the Barrymore Theatre
* On opening night there was 30 minute standing ovation
* Won the Pulitzer Prize
* Stared Jessica Tandy as Blanche, Marlon Brando as Stanley, Kim Hunter as Stella and Karl Malden as Mitch.
* Directed by Elia Kazan
* Movie version opened in 1951, Jessica Tandy was replaced by Vivian Leigh, who had played Blanche in London.
* The rape moment was kept in the movie, but Stella leaves Stanley at the end.
* Liv Ullman directed and Cate Blanchett stared as Blanche for the Sydney Theatre Company. The show played in New York in a recent 2009 sold out production at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Dominant Themes and Motifs

*Williams is the master at embodying his work with themes and symbols. When you study the play, take a look at every aspect and ask yourself the question: What does this mean?*

**Illusion vs Reality**

'I don't want realism, I want magic.' (*Blanche, scene nine*)

Every action and every word out of Blanche's mouth is based on illusion. Her story of why she's ended up at Stella's door is an illusion. The way she covers the harsh light of the bare bulb with a paper shade is an illusion. The lies she tells Mitch are an illusion. The only positive time in her life was when she was 'happily' married to her first husband; she was young, the world moved to her tune, her pace. Every action and every word out of Blanche's mouth is determined to recreate this time, this youth. But even that happiness was an illusion, her husband only married her in an attempt to deal with his homosexuality.

Illusion is hard work for Blanche. She is purposeful in her attempts to create illusion: ' *I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion.'*(scene two) Not only does she shroud the people around her in illusion, she attempts to shroud her own memories and her mind. But illusion is hard to keep up and Blanche is at the end of her strength. Fragments start seeping through: *'Legacies! Huhâ. And other things such as bloodstained pillow-slips 'her lines need changing' yes Mother'*(scene nine) When Blanche's strength wears out, there is no safe place for her; not out in the world, not in her mind. When reality comes crashing down on her, Blanche has no choice but to go insane.

As her polar opposite, Stanley is the bulldog of reality. Literally. Stanley has neither imagination nor use for living in an illusion. He has no patience for Blanche's desire to live in a shrouded world. As Blanche uses illusion to survive, Stanley uses brute force. His words are forceful, his moves are forceful, his actions are decisive and forceful: *'She's not stayin' here after Tuesday. You know that, don't you? Just to make sure I bought her a ticket myself. A bus ticket! She'll go! Period. P.S. She'll go Tuesday!*' (scene seven)

Stanley does everything he can to unravel the illusion Blanche presents. He wants the papers to prove what happened to Belle Reve instead of believing Blanche's story. He goes out of his way to learn the facts regarding why Blanche left Laurel. And when he finds out the truth, he makes sure everyone knows it.

*'Set down! I've got th' dope on your big sister Stella.'*(scene seven)

He's like a dog with a bone and refuses to let up.

By the end of the play, both Stella and Mitch must choose between Blanche and Stanley. They are both given the opportunity to side with either illusion or reality. Both choose reality, or more correctly, what they think is reality. As we'll see as delve further, Stanley, does not necessarily fully represent reality, or the 'winning' side

**Questions**

1. Why is Stanley so intent on destroying Blanche's illusion?
2. Why does Blanche go insane at the end of the play? What does that represent?
3. Blanche admits to being a liar. How does that affect her attempts at illusion?
4. Is Blanche aware that her world is made up of illusion? Why or why not?
5. How do Blanche's rhinestone jewels and fake furs contribute to her illusion?
6. What does the battle between Illusion and Reality represent?
7. Stella says that Blanche is emotionally honest. Is this true?
8. Have you ever created an illusion about a situation?

**Desire vs Death**

'Death I used to sit here and she used to sit over there and death was as close as you are

The opposite is desire' (*Blanche, scene nine*)

Desire and Death act hand in hand in *Streetcar*. Williams makes it very evident from Blanche's first words that we are supposed to pay close attention to both these themes:

*'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.'* (scene one)

It's important to note that Elysian Fields are the Greek mythology version of heaven. More specifically, the final resting place of heroes. Which is even more interesting given the fact that there are no heroes in the play.

The path that Blanche has taken to get to Stella and Stanley's, represents her downward spiral: desire leads to death and the afterlife. It's the same downfall that befell her first husband: his desire led to his suicide. Blanche's journey to Elysian Fields represents many deaths: it's her cultural demise from refined southern lady to broke and mentally ill, it's her demise from a huge plantation to a cot in a one bedroom lower-class apartment. Every thing leads to a symbolic death for Blanche. Living the truth (someone who fulfills their desire by entertaining men at a seedy hotel) is death for Blanche.

Blanche has been surrounded by death and desire for years. Her first husband shot himself, her home was lost through the 'desires' of her ancestors, family members have 'been on parade' to the graveyard, she lost her job because of an affair with a student, and she does not deny rumours of entertaining men at a seedy hotel.

*'After the death of Allan intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with.'*(scene nine)

The tragedy of Blanche's situation is that she's not dumb. She knows what's coming no matter how hard she tries to hide from the truth. Despite a flair for the dramatic, she knows what will happen between her and Stanley: *'The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner.'* (scene six)

Blanche is not the only character who lives face to face with Desire and Death.

Stanley has a cavalier attitude toward death. He believes in his own ability to make things happen, to keep himself alive. He believed he would survive the battle at Salerno during the war, even though many didn't:

*'You know what luck is? Luck is believing you're lucky. Take Salerno. I believed I was lucky. I figured that 4 out of 5 would not come through but I would and I did.'* (scene eleven)

It's pretty evident that Stanley functions on desire. Williams makes this clear in his description of Stanley before his first run in with Blanche:

*'Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitude. Since earliest manhood the centre of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it;¦he sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them.'*(stage directions, scene one)

The embodiment of Stanley's desire is most evident when he loses Stella after hitting her. He becomes incoherent and base, left to shouting out his need like a primal scream on the porch.

The most interesting thing about this moment is how clearly Stella is attracted to Stanley's behaviour and attitude. She is not put off by his desire, and in turn has desires of her own. This is what Blanche finds most shocking: *'What you are talking about is brutal desire, just - Desire!'*(scene four)

While Stella seems to have the same level of desire as Blanche (no matter how much Blanche would try to deny it) Stella seems to have completely avoided any association with death. She left Belle Reve the same summer as her Dad's death and never really went back. '*You came home just in time for the funerals, Stella. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths.'* (scene one) Further to that, with Stella expecting a baby, she will actually bring life into the world as the outcome of her desire.

Mitch is haunted by both desire and death. He lives with a dying mother with a few months to live who wants to see him married. He carries a cigarette case given to him by a girlfriend who has since died. He has a need to share the quote on the case with Blanche: *'And if God choose, I shall but love thee better after-death.'* (scene three)

In a way it's very sad to see desire and death so intertwined in the lives of these characters.

**Questions**

1. Why did Stella marry Stanley?
2. Given Williams' description of Stanley (see above), why does he hate Blanche so much?
3. Once you know Blanche's true story how do her views on desire differ from Stanley's?
4. Compare and contrast Blanche and Stella's views on desire.
5. How does Stella view death?
6. Does Stanley think himself indestructible? Why or why not?
7. Discuss Blanche's metaphorical 'death' at the end of the play.
8. Are there any examples of good desire in the play?
9. The Elysian Fields are supposed to represent heaven. What is Williams trying to say by having this shabby, lower class apartment represent heaven? Further to that, what is he trying to say given that Elysian Fields are the final resting place of heroes, and there are no heroes in this play?

**Activities**

* Look at each character and determine whether or not they fear death. Do they do anything to entice or avoid death?
* Improvise a scene that shows Stanley during the war. What was he like as a soldier? Did he kill anyone? Was he heroic? Did he mock death? Did he enjoy killing? How does his war self compare to his civilian self?

**Old versus New OR Past versus Present'**

*And I - I'm fading now. I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick.'* (Blanche, scene five)

This play is very much about the symbolic clash between old versus new and past verses present. Whether that's Old America versus New America, old south versus new south, the dying aristocratic class versus the rising industrial working class, or imagistic pastoral sensitive past versus harsh straightforward brutal present.

In all of these examples, Blanche and Stanley act as representatives of their respective sides. Blanche is all about the past. We learn about her past, the fake version and then the real. Stanley has no past. We know he was a soldier, but that's it. He is always in the moment, consistently present. Everything we know is what we see in front of us.

Whatever the clash, there is a clear victor in Stanley: A new industrial straightforward harsh America rises to the top. I wouldn't necessarily say that Stanley wins the battle but he's certainly the victor.

When it comes to past/present, Blanche not only has to battle Stanley, she has to battle herself. Blanche tries to recreate her past and suppress her past. She tries to create a new version of herself in the present when she dates Mitch, which is sabotaged when her past returns to haunt her.

Old/new also explores the notion of power what's new is always going to have more strength that what's old and living in the present is always going to have more strength than living in the past. Stanley is clearly the stronger representative. At one point Blanche would have had extreme power: in her looks, her behaviour, her ability to entice men. But all these attributes belong to a Blanche of the past. They lack strength. She is no longer new and she knows it.

**Questions**

1. Why is Blanche out of place in the modern world?
2. What does Williams think of modern America? (his modern America)
3. Does Stella fit into the modern world? Why or why not?

**Activities**

* Look through the play and come up with lines that show Blanche and Stanley as representatives of the Old/New and Past/Present. Set up a scene in which two actors (Blanche and Stanley) engage in a tug-of-war. On each pull, each character states a line (or have someone standing behind the actors reading the lines). Stanley's pulls should always be strong, while Blanche's should get progressively weaker throughout. In the end Stanley wins. What line represents his final pull? What is it like for those observing the tug-of-war to see Blanche get progressively weaker? Is it satisfying to see Stanley win? Why or why not?
* In groups itemize all references to Belle Reve (what does the name mean, how is it significant) and compare and contrast these with all references to the Kowalski apartment.

**Motifs/ Colours**

*'When people are soft they've got to put on soft colours, the colours of butterfly wings, and put a paper lantern over the light*' (Blanche, scene five)

**White**

* Blanche's name means white in French.
* Blanche wants everyone to see her as 'white' to see her behaviour and status as white, to see her past as white.
* When Blanche makes her first appearance Williams specifically mentions that she wears a white suit, pearl earrings, white gloves, which makes her look like a moth.
* Belle Reve had white columns.
* Stanley comments on Blanche's snow-white fox pieces and refers to her 'lily-white fingers.'

**And it's no mistake that:**

* Blanche's first husband's last name was 'Grey'
* Blanche notices Stella has spilt something on her 'white' collar.
* Stanley and the men wear brightly-coloured shirts at the poker game. Williams expresses the connection between manliness and primary colours in the stage directions to scene three. And when Stanley returns to the apartment after taking Stella to the hospital, he puts on red pyjamas.
* The cake for Blanche's birthday cake are white while the candles that burn atop the cake are blue.
* Stella spills Coke on Blanche's 'pretty white skirt.'
* After being rejected by Mitch, the white gown Blanche puts on is crumpled and soiled

**Blue**

* The blue piano that is heard playing outside the apartment Williams states in the stage directions that the blue piano 'expresses the spirit of life' in the area. What does this mean?
* Stanley makes his first appearance in blue denim work clothes.

**Questions**

1. What do the 'spills' represent? There is the one on Stella's white collar in scene one, and then the second on Blanche's white skirt in scene five.
2. Stanley mentions 'the coloured lights' twice to Stella. What is he talking about?
3. It's easy to understand what the colour 'white' represents (fragility, youth, purity, cleanliness). What does the colour blue represent in the play?
4. Are there any other colours referenced in the play? What do they represent?

**Light and Dark**

*'I like it in the dark. The dark is comforting to me.'* (Blanche, scene nine)

Blanche makes many strides to keep everything and everyone around her in the dark. She never wants to be seen in daylight '*daylight never exposed so total a ruin.*' (scene one) When she starts dating Mitch, she only wants to see him at night. She requests a paper shade to go over the bare lightbulb to dim the light. When Mitch wants to 'see' Blanche for who she truly is, both literally and metaphorically, he turns on the light.

Interestingly, both Stella and Stanley are comfortable in the dark as well. Stanley breaks all the lightbulbs with his shoe on their wedding night and Stella is quite clear she's not afraid of the dark:*'There are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark that sort of make everything else seem unimportant.'* (scene four)

If the light represents reality, or the truth that Blanche is trying to avoid, what are Stella and Stanley avoiding by preferring the dark as well?

Light imagery does not just occur in the literal sense. When Blanche speaks of the love for her first husband, she talks about it as a 'blinding light.' (scene six)

Blanche also makes light and dark references in her description of the past and present: *'such things as art as poetry and music such new kinds of light have come into the world since then. In this dark march toward whatever it is we are approaching’* (scene four)

**Questions**

1. Blanche spends all her time wearing white, being clean, presenting a certain image. So why does she find the dark comfortable?
2. Both Blanche and Stella like the dark. Are their reasons similar or different?
3. Where is Stanley more comfortable the light or the dark?

**Cleanliness**

Blanche is constantly in the bath. The baths are a physical symbol of Blanche's desire to be clean - both literally and metaphorically. When she emerges from the bathroom she often announces she 'feels like a new human being.'

In contrast, Stanley is constantly sweaty or greasy. He comes home in grease-stained clothes. Stella chastises him for having a greasy face and hands. He is described as a pig and an ape.

Further to the metaphor, Blanche constantly tries to 'wash' her troubles away with alcohol.

**Questions**

1. Why is important to Blanche to become new?
2. In terms of symbolism, why is Blanche clean and Stanley dirty?
3. Why does Blanche drink?

**Traps**

Blanche is trapped in a way of life that does not allow her to move forward. She's trapped in the past, never having got over the death of her first husband. She's trapped in the present in that tiny apartment with Stanley. She is trapped living with Stella and Stanley because she doesn't have any money. She is trapped playing the southern belle in order to trap a man to marry her.

**Questions**

1. Is Stella trapped?
2. Does Stanley ever feel trapped in the apartment?
3. Are Steve and Eunice in a trap?

**Activities**

Physicalize Blanche's traps. In groups, perform the following Blanche monologues. Have students physically restrain each other as the monologue is performed. Students playing Blanche must work to escape. How does the text change or expand in meaning when the traps are physical? Is there a point when Blanche stops fighting?

* + Scene one: I, I, I, took the blows on my face and body...
	+ Scene six: He was a boy, just a boy¦
	+ Scene nine: Yes, a big spider! That's where I brought my victims¦
	+ Scene ten: It won't be the sort of thing you have in mind¦

**Paper**

'I think it's wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should finally be this bunch of old papers in your big capable hands!' (*Blanche, Scene one*)

Paper is referenced in various ways throughout the play. Blanche checks Stella's address on a slip of paper, the paper documents, the lantern, the boy collecting for the paper, Blanche sings about 'a paper moon.'

Paper is fragile: the documents represent the loss of Belle Reve, the lantern can only hide Blanche's true age for so long, the boy collecting for the paper represents youth that will fade any second, the paper moon is far from the solidness of the real thing.

**The Sound of the Play**

'There is a confusion of street cries like a choral chant.' (*stage directions, scene four*)

*The sound of the play is important to Williams. From the music to sound effects to language, the study of sound in Streetcar is as essential as the study of the story and characters.*

**Language**

The characters in *A Streetcar Named Desire* speak a language specific to their symbolic nature. Williams chooses each word carefully starting with the names of the characters (Stella means star in Latin), to the way Stanley pronounces certain words (he says subjeck, instead of subject), to Blanche's use of French when she flirts with Mitch.

Even if you don't know anything about Stanley and Blanche, instant tension is created through their opposing language. Stanley's speech is littered with slang, with a stereotypical lower-class sentence structure, with the crude and the crass. Blanche speaks 'proper' English, with constant literary references and condescending word choices. ' *Poker is so fascinating. Could I kibitz?*' (scene three) These two come from completely different worlds and their language reflects that.

For an example of this tension, all you have to do is look at the first exchange between Stanley and Blanche. Stanley is brusque, forward and questioning:

* Stella's sister?
* Where's the little women?
* Where you from, Blanche?
* You going to shack up here?

Every sentence is like a hammer. Blanche is not used to being spoken to in this manner and it throws her off guard. It even takes her awhile to form a complete sentence. When she does, the difference between the two characters is clear. Her language is not of Stanley's world:

* I rarely touch it.
* I thought I would if it's not to inconvenient for you all.
* When I was quite young.

**Questions**

1. If Stanley represents the new world and Blanche the old, what is Williams saying when Blanche's language is cultured while Stanley's is base?
2. What words do the characters use to describe each other? For example, what words does Stella use for Stanley? Blanche for Stanley? Stanley for Blanche?

**Activities**

* Study the different word choices of Blanche and Stanley. Write down five words that embody Blanche five words for Stella, and five words for Stanley. In groups, create tableaux that physicalize these words.
* What is the most important word for each character? Create a pose that reflects that word. What's the opposite of the most important word? Do any of the other characters embody that opposite word?
* Divide the class into groups and assign a character to each. What is the first word used to describe their character? What is the last? What is the first line of dialogue for each? What is the last? Now create an evolving tableau that moves from these first language choices to the last. Discuss the changes in the characters, if any.
* Blanche means white. Stella means star. What is the history and background of the name Stanley? How does his name reflect his character?

**The Sound of the Characters**

As always with Tennessee Williams, the stage directions tell you just as much as the actual dialogue. Look at how Williams suggests each one speaks their first line:

* Stanley bellows 'Hey, there! Stella, baby!
* Stella is mild 'Don't holler at me like that.'
* Blanche is filled with faintly hysterical humor 'They told me to take a street-car named Desire.'

Williams establishes what each character represents from the first sound that they make.

**Questions**

1. How often does Stanley bellow in the play? Does he ever speak softly? What are the circumstances?
2. How often is Blanche faintly hysterical?
3. How often is Stella angry? When does she yell?

**Activities**

* When in the play does Stella talk like Blanche and when does she talk like Stanley? What are the circumstances? What are the reactions?

**Music**

There are two specific types of music referenced throughout the play.

**The Blue Piano and The Varsouviana (a polka tune**).

The Blue Piano represents the present. Williams describes the sound as a *'tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This 'blue piano' expresses the spirit of lifeâ¦'*(stage directions, scene one)

The Varsouviana represents the past. It was the music playing when Blanche's first husband killed himself. It plays on an almost endless loop in Blanche's head and is always accompanied by a gunshot.

Each piece of music also represents life and death. Think of that in each instant that either music plays. What is happening in that moment and why does the music play?

**Questions**

1. Blanche sings two songs during the play, offstage while in the bathtub. What is the significance in the story of each song?
2. The piano represents the present and the polka represents the past. Find and listen to pieces of music that embody each state. How do they differ? What images come to mind when you listen to the music?

**Activities**

* Document each moment the blue piano plays. Why does Williams choose to bring up the blue piano sound in these moments? Why is it significant? What does it represent?

**Sound Effects**

The sound effects in Streetcar are not just there to create ambiance and atmosphere. They almost seem to make the Kowalski apartment more cramped and crowded. They add to the tension and the symbolic battlefield. They are the noises of past and present. They are the noises of old and new. They are never comforting and most often keep Blanche from ever finding a moment to relax:

* A cat screeches causing Blanche to jump.
* The sound of a train passing very close by.
* The sound of crashing, aluminum striking a wall, furniture overturned during Steve and Eunice's fight.
* The sound of confusing street cries at the top of scene four.
* The sound of the tamale man and the Mexican woman selling flowers.
* The sound of a faraway gun shot.
* The sound of inhuman voices that surround Blanche as she crumbles.

**Questions**

1. The moment where Stanley hits Stella is only heard, not seen. What images do you get in your head from the sound of this moment? Why is this a moment of sound and not a visual?

**Activities**

Isolate all the sound moments in the play. What story is being told through sound? What images do you get of this area of New Orleans, just by the sound?

**Characters**

*'Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace, and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail garden in the garden district.'*(stage directions, sc. one)

The characters in *Streetcar*are iconic. More specifically, Stanley and Blanche are iconic and the other characters exist to aid or hinder the battle between these two giant figures. There's a bit of a catch-22 when examining Stanley, Blanche and Stella: You can neither think of these characters as human nor can you think of them as wholly symbolic. This just makes studying and performing the play all the more interesting.

**Are Williams' characters three-dimensional? Or are they a vivid portrayal of one dimension? Are these characters specific individuals or symbolic representations?**

*Blanche - I want to deceive him enough to make him like me'* (Scene five)

When we first meet Blanche Dubois, Williams describes her as a moth, which is an apt image: always pale, always fluttery and flighty, often filled with panic. And just as a moth dies when it gets too close to the flame, Blanche dies when she is brought out into the light.

Blanche has worn a mask for many years. There is a mask over her hot, frazzled nature. There is a mask over her age and demeanour. Her gentile, pious attitude masks her alcoholism. There is a mask over her past and over her present. She wishes to present the image of a southern belle dressed head to toe in white. A laughing, never lonely, always flirting type of young girl. Not only does she wish everyone believes in her image, her mask, she wishes the mask were true. This is different than believing it's true. She knows the mask is not true. She knowingly lies, she knowingly deludes herself, she knowingly does not present the whole truth, only the truth that ought to be.

The truth that Blanche wants is the moment of happiness she felt with her first husband. She wants that happiness in her life and to be her life. Every action Blanche makes is a desperate attempt fill the hole of loneliness that Allan's death created, that she had a hand in creating. She is aware this happiness is not possible, but that doesn't stop her from trying.

It's important to remember that Blanche is an intelligent woman. She may be deluded but she is by no means a fool. She lies, she uses her mind and her body to create a specific world, she struggles and strives to mold that world to her liking. If she wants a paper lantern over the light, she's going to get a paper lantern over the light. She never stops trying regardless of the obstacles in her way and will do anything to get the world the way she wants it. She never stops trying until she's incapable.

Blanche also has a superiority complex. She thinks she is better than Stella and she certainly thinks she is better than Stanley. On some level it's not surprising that Stanley lashes out as he does. Blanche addresses him like an animal, calls him one, and treats him like one. She never gives him a chance. This is part of her delusion: a man who isn't a gentleman can never be a human being.

**Questions**

1. What type of teacher would Blanche be?
2. What does the word 'kindness' mean to Blanche? Why is this her last line in the play?
3. Why are many of Tennessee Williams' female characters so deluded?
4. Is Blanche out of place in the modern world? How can that be shown?
5. Compare and contrast Blanche's mode of survival to Stella's.
6. Compare and contrast Blanche's view of desire with Stella's.
7. Is Blanche a victim of circumstance, or has she made herself the victim?
8. Is Blanche weak? Why or why not?
9. Why does Blanche drink?
10. Why does Blanche choose to imagine a better life instead of face reality?
11. What is Blanche preserving when she lies about her past?
12. Does Shep Huntleigh exist?

**Activities**

* What single words define Blanche? What line? What action?
* Research what what it means to be a southern belle. Does Blanche truly embody the qualities of the southern belle? What lines of dialogue are typical southern belle?
* In groups, examine the play and determine when Blanche's mask slips. When do we see her true self? How does Blanche move, sit, pose when she is her true self and not the image she is trying to present?

**Stanley**

*Remember what Huey Long said 'Every Man is a King!' And I am the king around here, so don't forget it!'* (scene eight)

Stanley does everything to the extreme. He's extremely American. He loves Stella, he hates Blanche, he is a man, man is king. When he wins he is very happy, when he is losing he is a sore loser. There is no grey area in his emotions. Stanley moves forward in the play in a straight line, no deviation. He lashes out when anything or anyone gets in his way. Just as Blanche uses illusion to defend herself, Stanley uses force. Loudly. There is no discussion or arbitration.

Stanley's exerts his force on several levels. He believes in physical force, sexual force, he believes in the force of the truth, the force of fact. He believes in acting with force in whatever the situation, be it upending Blanche's case to find the Belle Reve documents, to forcefully telling Stella what he knows about Blanche, to throwing plates on the floor, to hitting Stella, to raping Blanche.

Blanche goes out of her way to describe Stanley in every animal form she can think of and in many cases the description does fit the bill. His mind and body are animalistic. He roars. He stakes claim on his territory. He uses his fists. When Stella leaves him, he reverts to a primal form almost incapable of forming a sentence. His cry of 'Stella' is less an attempt to communicate than a primal scream.

While Stanley is not intelligent, he has some smarts about him. He's smart enough to ferret out the truth about Blanche. But Stanley's mind is too focused on following that straight line. He never sees beyond black and white. For example, Stanley completely understands what Blanche is, and at the same time has no idea who she is. It's true that she never deceived him with her behaviour but he has no understanding for why she acts the way she does.

Blanche threatens to force Stanley to deviate, to see the world beyond his narrow path, to see Stella in a different way. This is something he is not willing to do. He is the king after all. What Stanley wants more than anything is for his world to return back to pre-Blanche times. To do that he willingly destroys Blanche, makes Mitch miserable, and lies to Stella. His straight line is maintained.

**Questions**

1. Is Stanley deliberately cruel or is he straightforward? What's the difference?
2. Is Stanley an animal? If so, is he happy to be an animal?
3. Why in Williams' mind is the modern man an animal?
4. Why is Blanche a threat to Stanley?
5. Blanche treats Stanley like an ape. Is he in any way justified in his treatment of her? Why or why not?
6. Did Stella ever talk back to Stanley before Blanche arrived?
7. Compare and contrast Stanley's definition of desire with Blanche's.

**Activities**

* What single words define Stanley? What line? What action? Once you have determined what best represents Stanley, create a tableau to show these words and actions.
* We don't know anything about Stanley's past. In groups, create a character profile for Stanley. Where was he born? What was his family life like? Does he have any brothers and sisters? What childhood memories does he have? How did the Stanley in the play evolve?

**Stella**

You take it for granted that I am in something that I want to get out of.' (*scene four*)

Stella is an enigma. She has the misfortune of playing second (or third, or fourth) fiddle to the storm that is Stanley and Blanche. She is caught between their worlds. If you think of this play as a battleground, then Stella might be considered the prize. Stella for star, Stella the about to be mother, is the possession both Stanley and Blanche grasp for. She is life. She is the rope between two worlds. To win is to have Stella on their side.

Stella is often characterized as weak, submissive and timid. Certainly she has these attributes. She lets Blanche push her around verbally and lets Stanley push her around physically. Both characters have control over Stella. They both order her around and she, for the most part, takes orders. But there are a couple of things to keep in mind.

* Stella left home at fifteen. It takes a fair bit of strength to do that. Whether she fled or whether she left with determination is up for discussion but the fact is she left the safety of her home, moved to another state, and for some period of time lived on her own.
* Stella talks back. She doesn't let Stanley say whatever he wants every single time. She stands up to him verbally. This is shown even before Blanche enforces her influence - she asks Stanley not to holler at her at the very beginning of the play. She can't win against a force such as Stanley but she consistently tries.
* Stella is loyal to both sides. She doesn't cave the instant Stanley comes to her with unsettling news about Blanche. She is loyal to Blanche just as she is loyal to Stanley when Blanche speaks of him as a filthy animal. If Stella were weak and timid, she would have folded like a house of cards under the pressure of either side.
* Stella does not see her life as downtrodden. When Blanche expresses distress over Stella's living conditions Stella is far from agreeing: '*Aren't you being a little intense about it. It's not that bad at all.*' (scene one)
* Stella has joy, love and laughter. She's one of the only characters who laughs and means it. She has passion and doesn't seem to be embarrassed by that passion. She is thrilled by Stanley's behaviour and attitude. She hates even spending even one night away from him.

The biggest challenge when looking at Stella's character is the end. She says, *'I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley.'* (scene eleven) She doesn't say 'I don't believe her story.' She chooses not to believe. She shrouds reality to make it better for herself, which sounds an awful lot like something Blanche would do. And really, the end is not the first time she shrouds reality. Stella doesn't tell Stanley that Blanche is coming to stay with them. She doesn't tell Blanche the whole story about where or how she lives.

Stella is a survivor, she's a blend of the survival tactics that both Stanley and Blanche use. Where Blanche adjusts reality to suit her needs, Stella adjusts her needs to suit her reality. But really, these actions are two sides of the same coin.

**Questions**

1. Why did Stella leave Belle Reve? Why did she turn her back on her family?
2. Does Stella believe deep down that Stanley raped Blanche?
3. Did Stella settle for less by marrying Stanley?
4. Blanche says that Stella doesn't like her to be 'sentimental.' Why would sentimentality offend Stella? Did it offend her when she lived at Belle Reve with Blanche?
5. Stella must choose between Stanley and Blanche. Why does she choose Stanley? What does this represent symbolically?
6. Is Stella a weak character?
7. Is Stella a victim?
8. What is the difference between the control Blanche has over Stella and Stanley's control?

**Activities**

* What single words define Stella? What line? What action? Once you have determined what best represents Stella, create a tableau to show these words and actions.
* Stella has two lines that illustrate her past in Belle Reve: *'I like to wait on you, Blanche. It makes it seem more like home.'* AND *'You never did give me a chance to say much, Blanche. So I just got in the habit of being quiet around you.'* Based on these two quotes, improvise a scene between Blanche and Stella when they were younger at Belle Reve.
* Decide how Stella chose to leave Belle Reve. Did she tell Blanche face to face, or write a letter and leave? Once you decide, either improv the moment or write the letter. What does Stella say? Knowing how Blanche controls Stella, how did Stella get away?

**Relationships**

You need somebody. And I need somebody too. Could it be you and me, Blanche?' (*Mitch, scene six*)

*Streetcar*is a play of many relationships. Everybody in the play needs somebody else. They hate being alone and terrible things happen when they're forced to be alone.

**Mitch and Blanche: A relationship based on loneliness.**

Even though Blanche's motivation for catching Mitch may not be entirely virtuous, both these characters have common ground in their loneliness. They know what it is to be alone and how horrible loneliness is. They have each had loved ones die and each in their own way have been unable to move forward.

**Stanley and Stella: A relationship based on traditional gender roles.**

Before Blanche arrived both Stanley and Stella played their respective roles exactly to Stanley's specifications: the man is in charge, the woman does what the man says. When Blanche arrives and these roles lose their permanence, Stanley reacts with violent force. He does whatever it takes to revert his relationship to his specifications. The question is, with Blanche completely out of the way, will Stella revert to her previous role? The final image of Stanley and Stella is of a 'perfect' family picture, but in that picture as Stanley reaches for her physically, Stella cries for Blanche.

**Stella and Blanche: A relationship based on tradition.**

Stella and Blanche haven't seen each other in a while and haven't lived together for ten years. And yet both revert to their Belle Reve relationship structure the instant Blanche enters the apartment. Blanche orders Stella around and Stella complies with silence. When Stella left Belle Reve, how much did this relationship with her sister bear on her decision?

**Steve and Eunice: A relationship based on repetition.**

Steve and Eunice fight and make up. They fight and make up. Their relationship is caught in an endless loop of violence and reconciliation. It's impossible for them to move forward or grow. Will Stanley and Stella turn into Steve and Eunice?

**Stanley and Blanche: A relationship based on power.**

There is no way that Stanley and Blanche could ever find common ground or get along. Blanche is convinced that Stanley is beneath her and an animal. Stanley is convinced that Blanche is a lying destructive force in his marriage. Each thinks they are superior to the other and each thinks the other should concede. Each thinks that they have power to subdue the other.

**Questions**

1. Does Stella like Blanche? Does Blanche like Stella?
2. Will Stanley and Stella's relationship turn out like Eunice and Steve's? Why or why not?

Williams put Stanley and Stella at the end of the streetcar line. Symbolically are they at the end of the line? Are they at the bottom of the pile? Are they destined to fail?