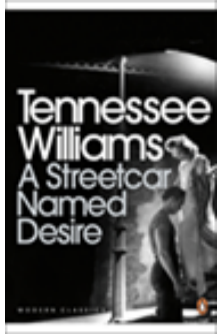




A Streetcar Named Desire Tennessee Williams (1947)



Assessment: Paper 1 Drama

Section B Other Drama
One essay question from a choice of two (25 marks) 1 hour



AOs

- AO1 Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression
- AO2 Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts
- AO3 Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received

Terminology

- coda**
a conclusion which provides a satisfying ending
- connotations**
the associations that words have
- denouement**
the final resolution or clarification of the plot-the events following the climax of the action
- epigraph**
a short quotation or saying at the beginning of a literary work intended to suggest its theme
- Expressionistic theatre**
Theatre which expresses the inner world of emotion rather than external objective reality
- foil**
a character who clearly contrasts with another
- hamartia**
tragic flaw or error of judgement
- hyperbole**
exaggeration
- metaphor/simile**
comparison between two things where one thing is said to be another/ comparison using like or as
- monologue**
a long speech by one character as part of a conversation
- motif**
recurring image or idea
- oxymoron**
a combination of contradictory or incongruous words
- pathos**
a deep feeling of sympathy or pity for a character
- peripeteia**
a character's tragic reversal of fortune
- Plastic theatre**
Williams' term for his style- mix of naturalism and expressionistic theatre
- protagonist/antagonist**
main character/character who is in opposition to the main character
- tableau**
a depiction of a scene where the characters are silent and motionless

Characters (vocabulary)

Blanche	Stella	Stanley	Mitch
vulnerable	dependent	masculine	gentle
delicate	devoted	sexual magnetism	sensitive
dismissive	loyal	(n)	awkward
superior	pliant	confident	inexperienced
self-absorbed	amenable	contemptuous	naïve
vain	dutiful	hostile	gauche
refined	placid	bravado (n)	
fanciful	obliging	coarse	
deluded	forgiving	shrewd	
volatile		domineering	
impassioned		callous	
fantasist (n)		primitive	
histrionic		vengeful	



Wider Reading/Further Study

- Tennessee Williams:
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof;
- The Glass Menagerie*
- Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*
- Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* or 1939 film version starring Vivien Leigh
- Tennessee Williams, *Memoirs* (1976)
- S.McEvoy, *Tragedy: A Student Handbook* (2009)



Past Paper Questions

SAMS

Explore the presentation of desire in A Streetcar Named Desire. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.
Or
Explore Williams's presentation of illusion and reality in A Streetcar Named Desire. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

2017

Explore how Williams allows us to see different points of view in A Streetcar Named Desire. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.
Or
Explore the ways Williams portrays the rise of a new social order in A Streetcar Named Desire. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

2018

Explore how Williams presents characters' inner lives in A Streetcar Named Desire. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.
Or
Explore the ways in which Williams makes use of confrontation in A Streetcar Named Desire. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

2019

Explore the extent to which Williams presents A Streetcar Named Desire as tragedy. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.
Or
Explore the ways in which Williams presents masculinity in A Streetcar Named Desire. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

***2020 (Autumn)**

Explore how Williams presents marriage in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

Or

Explore how Williams presents the play's opening in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

***2021 (Autumn)**

Explore Williams' presentation of family bonds in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

Or

Explore how Williams makes use of stage directions in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

2022

Explore Williams' presentation of an uncertain world in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

Or

Explore the ways in which Williams presents the tension between the past and the present in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

2023

Explore how Williams makes use of light in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

Or

Explore Williams' presentation of class differences in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

2024

Explore Williams' use of stagecraft in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

Or

Explore how Williams presents the relationship between Blanche and Mitch in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

2025

Explore the extent to which Williams makes use of the conventions of tragedy in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

Or

Explore the presentation of insecurity in Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

Context

Playwright

- In 1931 Williams had a nervous breakdown, and in 1937 his sister Rose was sent to a mental institution – like Blanche – and was lobotomised.
- Like Blanche's husband Allan (called 'a degenerate'), Williams was a practising homosexual at a time when it was still illegal.
- Suffering from depression, he resorted to heavy drinking (like Blanche) and drugs.
- He had a lifelong fear of death, especially death from cancer – hinted at in the death of Margaret, one of the many at Belle Reve.

Geographical (New Orleans)

- A city in Louisiana, a southern state in the USA, whose legal system was influenced by the Napoleonic code, cited by Stanley.
- Known as something of a cultural melting pot, where in some parts, including the French Quarter (district), black and white lived alongside each other.
- A 'streetcar' (tram) went to an area called Desire, another to Cemeteries; there is also an avenue called Elysian Fields, referring to where the souls of heroes and the virtuous went in Greek mythology.
- Known as a free-and-easy sort of place, with a lot of music (as in this play), especially jazz, bars and gambling – including poker.

The South

- The DuBois family's wealth would probably have been built on slavery, abolished in the South in 1865.
- After the Southern Confederate states lost the Civil War (1861–5), the South became poor and families like the DuBois declined.
- The decline of wealthy (but slave-owning) Southern families was romanticised in literature and the cinema, for example in *Gone with the Wind*.
- Blanche's refined tastes, including her dislike of vulgarity, reflect the values of the old South

Literary and Theatrical

- Williams can be seen as part of the 'Southern Gothic' movement, characterised by a rich, even grotesque, imagination, and an awareness of being part of a decaying culture.
- Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* is based on a declining family, like the DuBois family, who have to sell their property.
- Strindberg's *Miss Julie* may have influenced Williams's pairing of class conflict and sexual tension in Stanley and Blanche.

American Values

- The USA prided itself on opening its arms to immigrants from all over the world, including Poland, but Blanche still calls Stanley a 'Polack'.
- Stanley feels he is all-American, and that America is 'the greatest country on earth'.
- Stanley has a positive attitude towards conflict and fate, as shown by his belief that, despite poor odds, he would survive the war.
- Stanley is an example of a go-getting, thrusting, competitive working-class man, prepared to crush others (like Blanche) to get what he wants.