

A Streetcar Named Desire

Scene I

Vocabulary

attenuates – weakens in strength, force, or degree

auxiliary – secondary, in addition to

dubiously – with doubt or uncertainty

fluency – ease, smoothness, eloquence

heterogeneous – varied, diverse; mixed

implicit – contained, embedded, inherent

incongruous – not compatible; out of place

infatuated – obsessed, passionate

lyricism – an emotional or expressive quality

radiant – bright; glowing

raffish – having a carefree or unconventional style

redolences – fragrances

reproach – to scold or criticize

spasmodic – fitful; occurring in a sudden burst

unrefined – crude, unsophisticated

valise – a suitcase

vivacity – liveliness, cheerfulness

1. Describe the setting of the play.

2. From her very first appearance, how is Blanche's vulnerability expressed?

3. Blanche tells Eunice how she arrived at Elysian Fields. What two streetcars did Blanche take to get there? What is the significance of the names of these streetcars?

4. How does Blanche feel about Stella's home? How does Stella react to her sister's assessments?

5. According to Blanche, why has she left her teaching job and come to visit Stella?

6. What are some indications that Blanche may be an alcoholic? Provide examples from the text to support your answer.

7. What evidence suggests that Blanche is insecure about her appearance?

8. According to Blanche, what has caused the loss of Belle Reve?

9. After Blanche explains what happened to Belle Reve, Stella leaves the room crying. Why is she upset?

10. According to the stage notes, what kind of person is Stanley Kowalski? What is his attitude toward women?

11. How is the basic contrast between Stanley and Blanche presented in this opening scene? What does each character seem to represent?

12. As the scene ends, Stanley mentions that Blanche had once been married. What is Blanche's reaction? What happened to Blanche's husband?

Scene II

Vocabulary

absconding – running away, usually after having stolen something
airily – in a light or frivolous manner
atomizer – a type of spray dispenser that turns liquids (perfume, in this usage) into a fine mist
fornications – sexual acts
gander – a look
improvident – careless, reckless, irresponsible
perpetrated – committed, carried out
peruse – to read carefully or thoroughly
swindled – cheated
tiara – a type of jeweled headdress resembling a crown
treachery – betrayal, disloyalty

1. Why is Stanley upset about the loss of Belle Reve? Explain the “Napoleonic code” to which he refers.

2. What makes Stanley think that Blanche has “swindled” him and Stella? What does he assume has happened to Belle Reve?

3. What does Stanley think Blanche has done with the money? What does Stella tell him?

4. Why does Stanley refuse to leave the room when asked by Stella?

5. How does Stanley react to Blanche's flirting?

6. How does Blanche characterize Stanley during their conversation? Does Stanley think she is being sincere? How does he dismiss her act?

7. What reason does Blanche give Stanley for the loss of Belle Reve? How do the papers in the tin box convince him that she is telling the truth?

8. Aside from the legal documents concerning Belle Reve, what else is in the tin box? How does Blanche feel about these items? Give examples from the text to support your answer.

9. What news does Stanley reveal to Blanche at the end of the scene? How does Blanche react to the news?

Scene III

Vocabulary

diffidently – shyly, timidly
dissonant – jarring; harsh
feigned – artificial; not real or sincere
gallantry – good manners; gentlemanly behavior
indolently – lazily
kibitz – to watch and make comments on
lurid – strikingly bright and garish
nocturnal – of the night
portieres – curtains that are hung across a doorway
reverence – respect
sanctuary – a shelter; a safe place
whelp – a young dog

1. How would you describe the general mood of the poker game? What is Stanley's demeanor during the game?

2. Why does Mitch say he has to leave?

3. Why is Blanche interested in Mitch? How does Mitch seem to feel about her?

4. During the scene in which Mitch shows Blanche the inscription on his cigarette case, Williams references a sonnet by a poet that the audience will most likely recognize. What is the inscription on the cigarette case? Who is the poet? What literary term does this passage demonstrate?

5. What is significant for Mitch about the cigarette case and its inscription? In light of this information, what do Mitch and Blanche have in common?

6. How does Stanley show his domination over Stella and Blanche in the first half of this scene?

7. What lie about herself and Stella does Blanche tell Mitch? Why?

8. Why does Blanche ask Mitch to hang the paper lantern?

9. What causes Stanley to explode? Describe what he does to Stella in the kitchen. How does Williams present the scene in the kitchen?

10. Why does Stanley react so violently in the scene?

11. Describe the scene in which Stanley stands on the pavement bellowing for Stella. What simile does Williams use in the stage notes to describe Stanley and his behavior?

12. What does Eunice say that suggests Stanley has hit Stella before?

13. Describe Stanley and Stella's reunion. Why do you think she comes downstairs to him?

14. Throughout this scene, Stanley is compared several times to an animal. Identify at least three instances of this comparison.

15. How have your perceptions of Stanley changed after reading this scene? Do you find it harder or easier to sympathize with him, in comparison to the previous two scenes?

Scene IV

Vocabulary

anthropological – concerning the study of human evolution and development

bestial – like a beast; inhuman

bromo – a type of headache remedy

cultivated – developed; nurtured

narcotized – drugged, tranquilized

serene – calm, tranquil

stealthily – in a sneaky or quiet manner

1. As the scene begins, Blanche is trying to persuade Stella to leave Stanley. What is Blanche's plan for her and Stella? Is it a realistic plan, in your opinion?

2. Why does Blanche find it hard to believe that Stella is uninterested in leaving Stanley?

3. In this scene, Williams alludes once again to the title of the play. How is the streetcar named Desire presented during Blanche and Stella's conversation? How might it act as a metaphor?

4. How is Stanley able to eavesdrop on Blanche and Stella's conversation?

5. Briefly summarize what Stanley overhears. What picture does Blanche paint of him? How does Blanche's speech further emphasize the contrast between her and Stanley?

6. As this scene ends, how are Stella's feelings visually revealed?

Scene V

Vocabulary

contemptuously – in a hateful manner
coquettishly – in a flirtatious manner
daemoniac – [*demonic*] of or relating to a demon
gossamer – delicate; flimsy; sheer
inanimate – non-living
morbid – gloomy; pessimistic
wrath – rage, fury

1. What kind of people are Steve and Eunice, the couple upstairs? How does their behavior parallel that of Stanley and Stella?

2. What does Stanley tell Blanche about his acquaintance, Shaw? How does Blanche react? Why is the mention of Shaw threatening to her?

3. In her conversation with Stella, what are Blanche's main concerns?

4. Blanche is trying to attract Mitch. Why?

5. Blanche admits that she wants to deceive Mitch. What does she want to deceive him about, and why?

6. Describe Blanche's behavior with the young man who comes to the door. What is it about the young man that attracts Blanche?

Scene VI

Vocabulary

demureness – modesty; respectability

neurasthenic – relating to a condition characterized by fatigue, anxiety, and depression

reproving – scolding

stolid – not showing emotion

1. As the scene opens, Blanche and Mitch have just returned from their date. How did the date go? Provide examples from the text to support your answer.

2. As Blanche looks at the sky before going into the apartment, she talks about the stars. How does she describe the stars? What literary term does she use in her description?

3. Why must a single girl, according to Blanche, “keep a firm hold on her emotions”?

4. Why does Blanche resist Mitch’s advances? What is hypocritical about her behavior?

5. What is significant about Mitch’s mother asking about Blanche’s age?

6. Why is loneliness a specter for Mitch? Why is Blanche so familiar with loneliness?

7. Blanche tells Mitch the circumstances surrounding her husband's death. Briefly describe what happened to him.

8. In what way does Blanche feel responsible for her husband's death?

9. As she talks about her husband, Blanche says that she discovered love at sixteen years old. What metaphor does she use to describe what that discovery was like? How does Williams extend this metaphor to the end of Blanche's speech?

10. Why do you suppose Blanche tells Mitch the details surrounding her husband's death?

11. Briefly describe what happens at the end of the scene. When Blanche says, "Sometimes—there's God—so quickly!" what does she mean?

Scene VII

Vocabulary

blithely – in a merry or carefree way
contemptible – disgraceful, despicable
contrapuntally – relating to two or more voices speaking at the same time
ordinance – a rule or law
saccharine – overly sweet

1. As the scene begins, Blanche is taking yet another one of her frequent baths. Why does she bathe so much? What seems to be symbolic about her bathing?

2. Stanley has found out several things about Blanche. What is “Lie Number One,” according to him?

3. What is “Lie Number Two”? How does this information fit with Blanche’s kissing the young man who had come to the door? What might these incidents explain about Blanche?

4. How does Stella react to what Stanley tells her about Blanche? Do you think Stella is correct in her opinion about the stories?

5. How does the audience know that Mitch will probably not be coming to Blanche's birthday party? How does Stella feel about this?

6. What is significant about the song Blanche is singing in the tub? What is the song about? What effect does Williams achieve by juxtaposing it with Stanley's harsh words?

7. Briefly describe the end of the scene, when Blanche finally emerges from her bath. How does Williams imbue the scene with dramatic irony? What does the audience know that Blanche does not?

Scene VIII

Vocabulary

ineffectual – weak, feeble; inadequate
repertoire – a catalog, list, or collection

1. What is behind Stanley's anger when Stella tells him that he eats like a pig? What is it he wants?

2. What does Blanche say about Stanley's ethnicity that offends him? How does he respond?

3. What is the birthday remembrance that Stanley gives Blanche? What is her reaction to the gift?

4. According to Stella, what was Blanche like as a girl? What caused her to change?

5. Why does Stanley give Blanche the ticket? According to him, how has he changed Stella?

6. On what dramatic note does the scene end? What is happening to Stella?

Scene IX

Vocabulary

malarkey – nonsense

recriminations – accusations, charges

uncavalier – inconsiderate, ungentlemanly

1. The Varsouviana has become a major motif. What is the significance of the song? What does it represent for Blanche?

2. Why does Mitch refuse Stanley's liquor?

3. Why does Mitch want to see Blanche in the light? What has the light come to represent?

4. What might be the symbolic significance of Mitch ripping the paper lantern off the light bulb? What is his reaction after seeing Blanche in the light? What bothers him most?

5. Blanche says that she does not want realism; she wants magic. She wants things not the way they are but the way they ought to be. What does this imply about her use of deceptions and her view of life?

6. What explanation does Blanche give for her promiscuity?

7. As Blanche and Mitch converse, a Mexican woman is heard out in the street. What is she selling? What is significant about the scene?

8. Blanche concludes that death is the opposite of desire. What does she mean?

9. In what way is Blanche a little different in this scene? How might the audience sympathize with her?

10. What does Mitch tell Blanche at the end of the scene? What is her reaction?

Scene X

Vocabulary

amiably – in a friendly or agreeable manner
destitute – very poor
geyser – a fountain of liquid
grotesque – ugly; distorted; monstrous
implored – begged
inert – still, motionless; lifeless
spectral – ghostly
transitory – fleeting, temporary

1. As this scene opens, what illusion is Blanche creating?

2. Whom does Blanche claim to have received a telegram from, and what does she claim it says?

3. What does Blanche say she can offer someone like Shep?

4. What story does Blanche invent about Mitch? What does she say she cannot forgive? What is Stanley's reaction to the story? How does he catch her in the lie?

5. To Blanche's shock and distress, Stanley enters the bedroom and stalks her in a threatening manner. How does Williams use shadow, light, and sound to add to the drama and suspense of the scene?

6. What is happening out on the sidewalk while Stanley is stalking Blanche around the bedroom? What is the symbolic significance of the drama that is taking place outside?

7. Summarize the play's climax, which occurs in the last few moments of this scene. Although Williams does not show the actual rape of Blanche, it is clearly implied. What evidence suggests this conclusion?

8. What motivates Stanley's sexual attack on Blanche?

Scene XI

Vocabulary

agonizingly – in a painful or distressing manner
callous – hard-hearted, unfeeling
colloquy – a discussion
divested – stripped; deprived
gravity – seriousness
perplexity – confusion
prodigiously – hugely, immensely
quinine – a medicine used to treat malaria
reverberated – echoed
sinister – threatening; scary
sotto voce – [*Italian*] in soft or hushed tones
voluptuously – in a sexy or seductive manner

1. How has Stanley's rape affected Blanche?

2. Why does Stella refuse to believe that Stanley attacked Blanche? What advice does Eunice give Stella?

3. Where is Blanche going? Where does she think she is going?

4. How does Mitch seem to feel about what is going on? How does Stanley appear to feel? Give examples from the text to support your answers.

5. Identify at least three examples from this scene that reference the idea of cleanliness. What is significant about this concept in light of Stanley's rape of Blanche?

6. According to Blanche, how will she die? How is this connected with the ideas of purity, cleanliness, and innocence?

7. When Blanche realizes that the doctor is not Shep Huntleigh, she steps back into the apartment and begins making her way into the bedroom. What does Stanley do at this point? How does his action bring the traumatic rape back to Blanche's mind? How does Williams illustrate this to the audience?

8. How does Stella react when Stanley and the nurse close in on Blanche? How does Eunice try to comfort Stella?

9. When the doctor removes his hat and offers Blanche his arm, what effect does this have on Blanche? Why?

10. As the doctor leads Blanche away, she says to him, "Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." What is ironic about this statement?

11. Briefly summarize the final few moments of the play, after Blanche is led away. What happens between Stella and Stanley?

12. The play ends with Stanley putting his hand inside Stella's blouse and her not objecting. What does this type of ending suggest?
