



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS



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Written by Pete Boysen

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Mood**

Objective: Using epigraphs to predict and respond to a story's mood

Activity

The epigraph to *A Streetcar Named Desire* is from Hart Crane's poem "The Broken Tower" and has been reproduced below:

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.

Read through these four lines, and determine the mood that the words and structure create.

Choose one of your favorite songs that you feel evokes a mood similar to these four lines from Crane's poem. Bring the music and lyrics to class. Be prepared to share the song with your class, and explain why the lyrics have similarity in mood to Crane's passage.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Introduction

Visualization

Objective: Using personal experiences and prior knowledge to relate to the text

Activity

Tennessee Williams entitled the play's introduction "On a Streetcar Named Success." Throughout the introduction, one can find some of the lessons that Williams learned during his years as a budding writer and the various changes that success wrought upon his personality and life.

At one point, Williams was relieved by the prospect of cataract surgery, because it would permit him to hide behind a gauze mask and listen to the voices of his friends (rather than see them). This distance allowed him to perceive his friends as they appeared to him before success altered his interactions with the world.

Think about how other people view you. Have you ever felt that someone does not understand you, or even notice that you are there? Or, have you felt that people see the external you, but do not understand the internal you? Make a collage, drawing, or painting relating to the perspectives of the outer and inner self and the differences that can exist between the two. Be prepared to share your work with the class.

Scene One

Names and Places

Objective: Exploring the symbolic and ironic names given to characters, objects, and places

Activity

Williams chose the names of his characters and places in this play quite carefully. Think about the names and places mentioned in Scene One. Many are symbolic, representing the characters' key personality traits and/or flaws.

Use an encyclopedia, dictionary, or the Internet to research the traditional meanings of the following names:

1. Stella: *star*
2. Stanley: *by a rocky clearing; like a rock*
3. Blanche: *white; pure*
4. Mitch: *like God*
5. Belle Reve is French. What does it mean? *beautiful dream*

Now, answer the questions on the following page:

Note to Teacher: You may want to revisit the significance of the streetcar names at a later point in the play. As the play progresses, students will realize that the names appropriately apply to Blanche's life, as she is fixated on death (the deaths of her relatives and her young husband), and she tries to deal with this by giving in to her indecent desires. Desire is also a key motif in the play, as it is both the force behind Stanley's actions and an integral part of Stella and Stanley's relationship.

Scene Three

Imagery

Objectives: Using imagery as a descriptive tool
Understanding how imagery can establish character and setting

Activity

Artistic imagery can be a powerful, non-verbal method of describing something or conveying meaning. The use of color, the people or objects depicted, the composition, and even the materials and method used to create a work of art can represent or symbolize a variety of elements. The stage directions at the beginning of Scene Three reference “The Night Cafe,” Vincent Van Gogh’s painting of a billiard-parlor at night. A connection through the use of color is made between the painting and poker night at the Kowalski’s. In both the painting and the scene, the use of color and composition connect the two images.

Find a picture of Van Gogh’s painting from the Internet, reference book, or other source, and compare it to the description of poker night. What images in each can represent a common element? Write your observations in the following chart. The first one has been done for you.

Discuss your observations in class to determine whether you and your classmates derived similar meanings from the various visual elements of the two scenes.

Note to Teacher: Answers may vary as students will interpret some visual elements from their own perspective. Discussion should provide interesting insights about how imagery is an important component in any art form. As an alternative to this activity, you might ask students to find an image that contains visual elements that convey meaning to them or represent qualities, emotions, etc... Invite students to share their observations with the class or write an essay that explains their opinions. If you’d like to turn this into an art project, students could create their own images.

The Night Café, by Vincent Van Gogh, 1888; Oil on canvas, 72.4 cm x 92.1 cm; Yale University Art Gallery
Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Night_Caf%C3%A9

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scene Four

Dramatic Monologue

Objective: Rewriting a monologue in current language to express character emotions and actions

Activity

Blanche vents to Stella about her frustration with Stanley. Most of the scene consists of Blanche attempting to convince Stella to run away with her to get away from the brutal existence Stella experiences as Stanley's wife.

Blanche is unable to get Stella to agree to run away with her. From the previous events of the play, it is fairly clear that when the sisters were young, Blanche was able to bully Stella into going along with her wishes. Here, though, she cannot get Stella to come around to her point of view regarding Stanley.

Blanche brings Scene Four to a resolution with a vitriolic diatribe containing her opinions of Stanley. This turns out to be anticlimactic because Stella responds by tightly embracing Stanley when he returns; however, that does not take away from the powerful feelings Blanche expresses in her speech.

Rewrite this monologue (beginning with the stage directions of Stanley overhearing Blanche and Stella's conversation) using emoticons or contemporary shorthand to reproduce the emotional power that Blanche displayed when she delivered it to Stella. If it is available to you, watch one of the film versions of *A Streetcar Named Desire* to aid you in adding the right emotional energy to the scene. After you rewrite the monologue. Decide whether using emoticons or shorthand, as today's students often do to communicate, gives the monologue the same emotional impact. In a classroom discussion, express your opinion on this topic.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scene Seven**Advice Column**

Objectives: Identifying conflict in the play and using it to understand character motivation
Writing a letter to an advice columnist

Activity

In Scene Seven, the conflict is clear: Stanley reveals the truth about Blanche to Stella. Stella refuses to believe Stanley's story and even states, "This is making me—sick!" Imagine that you are Stella, and write a letter to an advice columnist, such as "Dear Abby" asking for advice on how to proceed.

After writing your letter, write the advice columnist's response—what advice would you give Stella?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scene Nine**Social Commentary**

Objective: Uncovering social commentary as demonstrated through characters' words and actions

Activity

Blanche's dependence on alcohol and Mitch's desire to shed light on the truth are both borne of Blanche's dependence on men. Williams is using his characters to establish a commentary about women's dependence on men. This is a realistic portrayal of gender dynamics in America in the 1940s.

There was a shift in the paradigm, however, during the war when women stepped in to fill jobs that deployed men had occupied. When the men returned from the war, many of these women returned to the home to allow the men to resume their former jobs. The women in this play clearly did not take over men's roles during the war. Answer the following questions on the following page.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scene Eleven**Journal Writing**

Objective: Responding to events in literature through journal writing

Activity

By the end of Scene Eleven, Blanche DuBois is a drained and beaten woman. While she makes token resistance to the idea of the Doctor and Matron taking her away, she is ultimately won over by much less chivalry from the Doctor than it took for Stanley to break her spirit earlier in the play.

Stella has had to watch Blanche's long decline, and the events of this play have revealed much about her sister's recent past that she did not know. The shock of Blanche's commitment to a mental institution must be reverberating within Stella's own mind, but Stella is subdued, saddened, and sullen as her sister is led away.

Throughout the play, Stella refuses to acknowledge the state of affairs with Blanche. From Stella's perspective, write a journal entry expressing your thoughts and feelings concerning your relationship with Blanche, Blanche's commitment to a mental institution, and the events of her removal from the flat.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up**Letter to the Author**

Objective: Discussing the main events, characters, and motifs of the play in the form of a letter to the author

Activity

Write a letter to Tennessee Williams. In your letter, you should comment on the play—parts you liked, parts you didn't like, parts that were particularly compelling, suspenseful, etc. You should ask Williams questions about his interest in drama, the characters, or anything else that you are curious about regarding him and/or the play. Your letter should be about one page in length.