

**Reflections:**

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *A Streetcar Named Desire*

*by Tennessee Williams*

written by Lisa L. Burris

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## **Pre-Reading**

1. This play has a very unusual title. Judging by the title, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, what do you think this play is about? Without looking at the play, make a list of plot points or events that you think will happen in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Then, using those plot points, write a paragraph in which you explain what happens in the play.
2. Like many of Tennessee Williams' plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was made into a film. In your opinion, which is a more valid or more important art form, film or theater? Write a short article for *Arts Monthly* magazine, explaining whether film or live theater is a better art form and why. If you feel that both forms are equally valid, write your article comparing and contrasting the positive and negative aspects of each form.
3. The playwright of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is known by his nickname, "Tennessee." His given name, however, was Tom. "Tennessee" was a sort of stage name for him.

What would you call yourself if you were creating your own stage name? Create a stage name for yourself. Then, in a short essay, explain why you selected that name and why you think it suits you.

## Introduction

4. In the introduction, Tennessee Williams writes about how the production of his previous play, *The Glass Menagerie*, changed his life forever. I'm sure you've had events happen to you that have forever changed you, too.

Write an e-mail to Tennessee Williams, describing an event in your life that forever changed your circumstances or your view of the world.

5. Williams tells us that he never wrote with success on his mind. He wrote because he felt compelled to, not just to become rich or famous.

Write a blog posting for an arts website, explaining whether you think modern artists, writers, novelists, playwrights, musicians, or singers work for the sake of their art or simply to become rich and famous. Make sure you use plenty of examples to support your opinion.

6. Tennessee Williams says that the fame he got from writing *The Glass Menagerie* made him listless and depressed, so much so that he even distanced himself from his friends. Later, when he went to Mexico, though, he found comfort in being a stranger to the people there.

In what other ways could Williams have found comfort and respite? Think of at least 10 things a person can do to relax and relieve stress. Then, using five (5) of those things as examples, write a section about relaxation for the self-help book, *Stress and You: A Handbook*.

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7. Williams' first play was, indeed, an enormous success. It figures, then, that he would be extremely well-known after it was produced. Williams found his version of success, though, in simply writing. Writing is what brought him joy and satisfaction.

In a humorous paragraph or two, write the script for a stand-up comedian, detailing your own definition of success. What makes a person successful? How can one achieve success?

8. In the introduction, Tennessee Williams tells us all the bad things about fame. Rhetorically, he asks, though, "What is good?"

Make a list of 20 things that you consider "good." Using at least five (5) of these, write the lyrics for a song entitled "It's All Good."

## **Scene One**

9. Williams' description of the setting at the opening of this scene is extremely detailed and creates a vivid image in our minds as we read it. He not only tells us what the scene looks like, but also how it smells and the kinds of sounds that surround it. "You can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with their faint redolences of banana and coffee." Even the color of the sky is specified as "a peculiarly tender blue, almost a turquoise." He puts us into the scene.

Think of a setting familiar to you: your classroom, your room at home, or a favorite outdoor place, etc. Using the sort of description Tennessee Williams uses, write the notes for a play about your life, setting the scene as thoroughly as Williams does. Remember to describe what it looks like, what it sounds like, and any smells associated with it. Put your audience into a scene from your life.

10. Williams' stage directions compare Blanche to a moth, noting that her clothes and her "uncertain manner" are like the insect. Which animal do you think best represents your personality? A coat of arms was originally used by Knights as a way to make their shield stand out so that they could be quickly identified during combat. In a short essay, describe what your coat of arms would look like based on an animal that you think represents your personality. Then, explain why you think the animal you selected represents you well.
11. The directions Blanche refers to tell her that she should take a streetcar named Desire to get to the house. This, we will see later, is Tennessee Williams' way of creating irony. Desire, as indicated by the play's title, has a significant role in this work.

Write a list of other ironic street names and situations. Then, write a brief note explaining to a visitor from a foreign country why those names are ironic. Here are a few to get you started

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12. When Stella rushes home to see Blanche, Blanche blurts out a cutting comment about Stella's apartment. In fact, she calls it "a horrible place."

What would you consider the absolute worst place to live? Write the script for a 60-second TV commercial, describing the worst place to live. Make sure you explain why that particular place is "horrible."

13. Blanche seems to need alcohol to cope with things. She takes a drink before Stella comes home, and then when Stella gets there, she makes a show of looking around the apartment for more liquor. This is liquor which, by the way, she prefers to drink straight, without a mixer.

As a substance abuse counselor, write a brochure to be given to Blanche, explaining why it is better to live life free of dependence on alcohol.

14. Saying "I'm not going to be hypocritical," Blanche seems to have no problem telling her sister exactly how she feels about her living conditions. Some people may find this rude, while others may think it is simply being honest.

Write a note to Blanche, supporting her decision to tell Stella exactly what she thinks.

15. Blanche's personality was so overpowering when she and Stella were children that Stella "got the habit" of just being quiet around her. After all, Blanche never gave Stella a chance to talk. Blanche, however, considers this "a good habit."

Think about habits for a moment. What are some good ones? What are some bad ones? Write the text for a children's book in which you describe the five (5) best habits anyone can have.