

The Glass Menagerie

Plot Overview

The Glass Menagerie is known as a “memory play” because it is based on the way the plays narrator, Tom, remembers events. The story is told to us by Tom Wingfield, a merchant marine looking back on the Depression years he spent with his overbearing Southern genteel mother, Amanda, and his physically disabled, cripplingly shy sister, Laura. While Amanda strives to give her children a life beyond the decrepit St. Louis tenement they inhabit, she is herself trapped by the idealised memory of her life past. Tom, working at a shoe factory and paying the family’s rent, finds his own escape in drinking and going to the movies, while Laura pours her energy into caring for her delicate glass figurines. Tom, pressured by his mother to help find Laura a suitable husband, invites an acquaintance from the factory to the apartment, a powerful possibility that pushes Amanda deeper into her obsessions and makes Laura even more vulnerable to shattering, exposed like the glass menagerie she treasures. Williams’ intensely personal and brilliantly tender masterpiece exposes the complexity of our memories, and the ways in which we can never truly escape them.

Detailed Summary

Scene 1

“I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.” – Tom

The narrator, Tom, explains directly to the audience that the scenes are “memory,” therefore nonrealistic. Memory omits (leaves out) details and exaggerates them according to the value of the memory. Memory, as he explains, rests mainly in the heart. We learn from the narrator that the gentleman-caller character is the most realistic because he is from the world of reality and symbolizes the “expected something that we live for.” The photograph is of the father who left the family a long time ago. Amanda begins talking, describing all her gentleman-callers from her southern Blue Mountain days, and Laura simply tells her mother that none of those “callers” are coming for her.

Scene 2

Amanda comes home and says, “deceptions.” She tells Laura that she visited Laura’s business college and now knows that she has been lying to her. Instead, Laura explains, she has been walking all day because she threw up when she went to typing class and was too embarrassed and afraid to go back. Amanda whines to her daughter about her terror of what will happen to the two of them if Laura remains untrained for work. Amanda decides Laura will have to marry. Laura again tries to tell the truth to her mother and says it will never happen because she is “crippled.” Amanda answers Laura by warning her never to call herself that and, she insists, Laura will just have to be more charming.

Scene 3

After the fiasco of the business college, the idea of a gentleman caller for Laura becomes an obsession with Amanda. Tom and Amanda quarrel after she has sent back his library books without telling him. She accuses him of doing things he is ashamed of and she doesn’t believe that he is going to the movies every night. He tells her how he hates working in the warehouse, how he yearns (desperately wants) to leave. Tom dashes for the door, struggles with his coat, and finally flings it across the room into the glass menagerie. He stops, bends to the shelf of glass, collects the pieces but cannot speak.

Scene 4

Tom appears drunk and loses his key at the door in the middle of the night. Laura comes to him and begs him to make up with their mother and talk to her. The next morning at breakfast, Tom speaks to Amanda and apologizes. Amanda declares her devotion to the children and starts giving him instructions again on how to eat. She makes him promise not to become a drunkard, and then asks him how he feels about his life in the apartment. She says they have to make “plans and provisions” for Laura and that once Laura has a husband he can leave. Until then, she demands that he not think about “self” and that he ask someone at work to be a “gentleman caller” for Laura.

Scene 5

Amanda is giving Tom instructions as usual and telling him that he smokes too much. Tom becomes the narrator in memory once again, and talks about the Paradise Dance Hall across the alley from them, and how couples were caught up in their private lives while in Spain there was Guernica (Civil War) and in Europe “the world was waiting” (on the brink of war). Tom then turns back to Amanda and tells her they are, at last, going to have a gentleman caller. He explains that he has asked someone from work to come over for dinner the very next night. Amanda must now rush around in excited preparation. Tom, meanwhile, is worried about Laura being different and peculiar. Amanda brushes that aside, and the scene ends with Amanda asking Laura to make a wish on the moon -a wish for “happiness and good fortune.”

Scene 6

The apartment is ready for the “gentleman caller,” Jim O’Connor, who was “the most likely to succeed” at the high school he attended with Tom. Jim likes to be around Tom at work because Tom remembers the glory of his high school days. Amanda puts on a dress from her past, one that she wore when she met her husband. When Laura finds out that the “caller” might be the boy she had had a crush on in high school, she refuses to answer the door and threatens not to eat at the dinner table. When Jim arrives, Amanda oozes her southern charm, talking nonstop. Tom tells him secretly that he bought a seaman ticket with the money for their light bill. Laura realizes the “caller” is the young man she knew at school, and she hides in the kitchen, becoming faint and ill with a fever.

Scene 7

The lights go out in the apartment, and Amanda declares how lucky they are that they have candles on the table- When Amanda realises that Tom has not paid the light bill, she maintains her southern charm and punishes him by making him come with her into the kitchen and wash the dishes. Jim and Laura are left alone in the living room. Jim puts the candles on the floor and asks Laura to sit on the floor with him. He immediately tells Laura she is “an old-fashioned type of girl,” and Laura suddenly asks him if he still sings. It is then that Jim realizes that he recognizes Laura and that he called her “Blue Roses” in school because she had been ill with pleurosis. They look at their high school yearbook together, and Jim tries to cheer Laura. He tells her that if she is disappointed with her life, not to be discouraged.

Laura tells Jim that her greatest interest is her collection of glass animals. He tells her that he is going to go into television and make something of himself. She shows him her unicorn (a horse with a horn coming from its forehead). Jim places the glass unicorn on the coffee table and asks Laura to dance to the music coming from across the alley. She lets herself go, whirls around and they knock the table, throwing the unicorn on the floor and breaking off its horn. Jim feels terrible, but Laura tells him it is alright because now the animal is more like the others and will feel more comfortable.

Jim tells Laura how pretty she is. He confesses that he won’t be coming back again for another visit because of “strings” - he is engaged to be married. His fiancée is out of town and that is why he accepted the dinner invitation from Tom. Laura hands him the broken unicorn and wants him to have it as a souvenir.

When Amanda finds out Jim is engaged, she fights with Tom after Jim says goodbye to the three of them. Tom runs away, and as he turns to the audience we see Amanda comforting Laura in a rare, loving moment in the background. Tom tells of how far and fast he has kept moving, trying to leave Laura’s image behind. In his last words, he asks Laura to blow out the light of her candles. She leans toward them and, in a moment, the theatre is dark.

Who’s Who in the Zoo?

The characters

Amanda Wingfield Much of her life revolves around the past, particularly her time as a privileged debutante in the Mississippi Delta. She is the quintessential Southern Belle and a proud member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She has only momentary flashes of confronting reality in the present, particularly in terms of her daughter and son. She attempts to control both her children’s lives and experiences almost no success in this endeavor with

respect to her son Tom. She was abandoned by her husband 15 years ago and has struggled to keep her family together ever since. She comforts herself with the memories of the numerous gentlemen callers she entertained as a young lady. She is terrified by the fact that her children are not strong enough to navigate a Darwinian world.

Tom Wingfield A poet trapped by lower-middle class family circumstances and stuck in a job that offers no creative or emotional outlet. He struggles with his duty to support his mother and sister and yearns for the day that he can be free of the constraints they represent. At work, he is nicknamed "Shakespeare" because of his ambition to become a successful writer. One of his few acquaintances on the job is Jim O'Connor. Tom is also the narrator of this "memory" play, through which he intends to memorialize Laura.

Laura Wingfield Tom's older sister, nearly 24, who wears a brace on her foot due to a childhood illness. She is physically and emotionally frail, painfully shy, insecure, and isolated. Laura sympathizes with Tom's dreams, but attempts to keep peace in the family by placating her mother. She has suffered a great deal throughout her life and constitutes a powerful effect upon Tom. As a romantic, she seeks escape in nature, art and music. Laura dropped out from high school, in part due to her shyness, and was also not able to attend classes at Rubicam's Business College.

James Delaney O'Connor, "Jim" Tom's colleague at the shoe warehouse, and the gentleman caller for Laura whom Tom persuades to come to dinner. As an ambitious "self-starter," he is strongly grounded in reality. He also attended the same high school as Tom and Laura.

Mr. Wingfield His picture is displayed prominently in the Wingfield apartment, despite the fact that he abandoned his family fifteen years before the play begins. Served in World War I as a military officer. Described as a particularly handsome and romantic man who stole Amanda's heart from her multiple gentlemen callers. Later, "a telephone man who fell in love with long distances." Though Mr. Wingfield never appears in the play, and the audience never learns his first name, his presence is deeply felt.

Betty Jim's fiancée, who never appears in the play. She and Jim are to be married in June, just a few months after the night of the climactic dinner.

Tennessee Williams, the Man behind the Menagerie

"I don't think I would have been the poet I am without that anguished familial situation." Tennessee Williams, 26th March 1911 - 25th February 1983

Born Thomas Lanier Williams III on March 26, 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, Tennessee Williams' life seemed almost destined to become the stuff of which stories are made of. His mother was the daughter of a minister and brought up with Southern manners. He had an older sister, Rose, and a younger brother, Dakin. His father was a traveling businessman until the family moved to St. Louis when Tennessee was 7 years old. The move was tough on all the family members, but particularly for Tennessee. He was immediately hired at the local shoe factory, was teased incessantly by classmates for his Southern accent, and overall found St. Louis to be a dirty, polluted city. His father turned to alcohol, his parents started fighting, and his sister began to withdraw from the world. To deal with the depressing new situation, Tennessee turned to writing. While he began writing poetry at the age of 12 and won his first prize (\$5) for a short story at the age of 16, it was many years until he earned a living from writing. He held many menial jobs in between while continuing to write on the side, but eventually graduated from the University of Iowa's theatre programme and

became a screenwriter for MGM. During this time, he completed his breakthrough hit, *The Glass Menagerie*. After *Menagerie* transferred to Broadway in 1945 and played for two years, he followed up with his most well-known play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947. This play won 2 Pulitzer Prizes and catapulted Williams to superstar status. *Streetcar* was later immortalized in film by director Elia Kazan and launched the career of actor Marlon Brando. Other notable works of his catalogue, 70 plays, two novels, two books of poetry, 15 screenplays, an autobiography, and numerous essays—include *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Summer and Smoke*, *The Night of the Iguana*, and *The Rose Tattoo*. His personal life remained as tumultuous as his early childhood. After *The Night at the Iguana* ran on Broadway in 1961, he struggled for critical acclaim. He battled for many years with drug and alcohol addiction, was haunted by his sister's Rose turn towards insanity, and was devastated when his long-term partner, Frank Merlo, passed away in 1963. Although Williams continued to write up to 8 hours a day every day until he died, he never matched his earlier successes. He died in 1983 at the age of 71 in a hotel room in New York City from choking on the lid of a pill bottle.

TIMELINE OF THE WILLIAMS FAMILY IN THE CONTEXT OF AMERICAN HISTORY

1909

Cornelius begins work as a traveling salesman for a men's apparel company. November 19—Rose is born.

1911

March 26—Tom "Tennessee" Williams born in Columbus, Mississippi.

1914

Cornelius begins work as a travelling salesman for the International Shoe Company.

World War I begins 1916

Tom almost dies from diphtheria.

1918

Family moves to St. Louis.

World War I ends 1919

February 21—Dakin is born.

1926

Family moves to dismal apartment complex at 6554 Enright Way, which was to become the inspiration for the Wingfield apartment.

Tennessee enrolls for one term at Soldan High School.

1927

First piece of published writing (“Can a Good Wife be a Good Sport?”) in *Smart Set* magazine. **First talking movie released**

1928

Rose starts to exhibit signs of depression. Tom travels to Europe with his grandfather.

1929

Tom graduates from high school and enrolls at the University of Missouri. Sees a production of *Ghosts* that inspires him to try playwriting.

Stock market crashes, Great Depression begins

1932

Cornelius withdraws Tom from school and forces him to work in a shoe factory.

Depression hits bottom: one quarter of US workforce unemployed during the winter of ‘33–‘34

1935

Tom suffers a nervous breakdown and is left with partial paralysis of his legs, which later subsides. First play produced (*Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!*). Resigns from Continental Shoemakers.

1936

Tom enrolls at Washington University in St. Louis. Edwina attends a DAR convention.

1937

Tom withdraws from Washington University and enrolls at University of Iowa. Rose hospitalized for mental illness; receives insulin shock therapy.

Economic recession

1938

Tom graduates from the University of Iowa. Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* opens.

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1939

Tom moves to New Orleans. Changes his name from Tom to Tennessee.

World War II begins

1941

Writes *Portrait of a Girl in Glass*. **US enters World War II**

1943

Hired as a writer for MGM Studios in LA. Writes screenplay *The Gentleman Caller*; it is rejected. Rose's lobotomy.

1944

Finishes writing *The Glass Menagerie*. *The Glass Menagerie* opens in Chicago.

1945

The Glass Menagerie premieres on Broadway. Wins the Drama Critics Circle Award. **WWII ends**

Williams' thoughts on *The Glass Menagerie*

"The menagerie" is no lie about this company — and neither is glass! I sometimes wonder if we'll all really get to New York in one piece. The play backstage is far more exciting than the one on!

LETTERS ON THE GLASS MENAGERIE

By Tennessee Williams

From Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham, 1940-1965. Edited with comments by Donald Windham. New York: Penguin Books, 1976, 1977.

These excerpts were selected from the published letters of Tennessee Williams to his friend Donald Windham. In them, Williams writes about the original production of *The Glass Menagerie* which he refers to at first as "The Gentleman Caller."

April 22, 1943

I am out of cigarettes and very nervous so I cannot write much of a letter. I have been writing with tigerish intensity on "The Gentleman Caller" every day, and today I felt like I was going to just blow up, so I quit. What I am doing to that quiet little play I don't know.

July 28, 1943

"The Gentleman Caller" remains my chief work, but it goes slowly. I feel no overwhelming interest in it. It lacks the violence that excited me, so I piddle around with it. My picture work is to make a scenario out of "Billy the Kid" material — as good an assignment I could hope for, but I am lazy about it and barely am started.

July ?, 1944

I have just finished the "Caller" and am slowly retyping it. I think I will submit the short version first and if people like it, will add the rest. It is not a very exciting business but it keeps me occupied while I wait for the energy to do something more important.

August 18 or 25, 1944

Have finished "The Caller." No doubt it goes in my reservoir of noble efforts. It is the last play I will try to write for the now existing theater.

December 18, 1944

(At this time, *The Glass Menagerie* was rehearsing in Chicago.)

We're having a bloody time of it here — as expected. Yesterday, Sunday evening, I thought the situation was hopeless — as Taylor was ad libbing practically every speech and the show sounded like the Aunt Jemima Pancake hour. We all got drunk, and this A.M. Taylor was even worse. I finally lost my temper and when she made one of her little insertions I screamed over the footlights, "My God, what corn!" She screamed back I was a fool and playwrights made her sick — then she came back after lunch and suddenly began giving a real acting performance — so good that Julia and I, the sentimental element in the company, wept. So I don't know what to think or expect . . .

January 11, 1945

It is four A.M. but I feel like talking to you a little. The show is doing swell now. Weekends almost capacity and other nights about fifteen hundred and still building. So it looks like we'll remain here — they're selling tickets up till Feb. 10th. Everybody except Dowling is eager to get into New York — especially Laurette. She gets better all the time. However I guess it's wise to milk Chicago a little before we face another set of critics.

March 8, 1945

"The menagerie" is no lie about this company — and neither is glass! I sometimes wonder if we'll all really get to New York in one piece. The play backstage is far more exciting than the one on!

February 26, 1983

Tennessee Williams Is Dead at 71

By MEL GUSSOW

Tennessee Williams, whose innovative drama and sense of lyricism were a major force in the postwar American theater, died yesterday at the age of 71. He was found dead about 10:45 A.M. in his suite in the Hotel Elysee on East 54th Street. Officials said that death was due to natural causes, and that he had been under treatment for heart disease. An autopsy is scheduled for today.

Author of more than 24 full-length plays, including "The Glass Menagerie," "A Streetcar Named Desire," "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" - Tennessee Williams was the most important American playwright after Eugene O'Neill. The latter two won Pulitzer Prizes - and "The Night of the Iguana," he had a profound effect on the American theater and on American playwrights and actors. He wrote with deep sympathy and expansive humor about outcasts in our society. Though his images were often violent, he was a poet of the human heart.

Plays Intensely Personal

His works, which are among the most popular plays of our time, continue to provide a rich reservoir of acting challenges. Among the actors celebrated in Williams roles were Laurette Taylor in "The Glass Menagerie"; Marlon Brando and Jessica Tandy in "A Streetcar Named Desire" (and Vivien Leigh in the movie version), and Burl Ives in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof."

"The Glass Menagerie," his first success, was his "memory play." Many of his other plays were his nightmares. Although seldom intentionally autobiographical, the plays were almost all intensely personal -torn from his own private anguishes and anxieties.

He once described his sister's room in the family home in St. Louis, with her collection of glass figures, as representing "all the softest emotions that belong to recollection of things past." But, he remembered, outside the room was an alley in which, nightly, dogs destroyed cats.

Mr. Williams's work, which was unequalled in passion and imagination by any of his contemporaries' works, was a barrage of conflicts, of the blackest horrors offset by purity. Perhaps his greatest character, Blanche Du Bois, the heroine of "Streetcar," has been described as a tigress and a moth, and, as Mr. Williams created her, there was no contradiction. His basic premise, he said, was "the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstance." Just as his work reflected his life, his life reflected his work. A monumental hypochondriac, he became obsessed with sickness, failure and death. Several times he thought he was losing his sight, and he had four eye operations for cataracts. Constantly he thought his heart would stop beating. In desperation, he drank and took pills immoderately.

He was a man of great shyness, but with friends he showed great openness, which often worked to his disadvantage. He was extremely vulnerable to demands - from directors, actresses, the public, his critics, admirers and detractors. He feigned disinterest in reviews, but he was deeply disturbed by them. Unfavorable ones could devastate him. Favorable ones might corrupt him. The most successful serious playwright of his time, he did not write for success but, as one friend said, as a "biological necessity."

Frightened by Success

Success struck him suddenly in 1945, with the Broadway premiere of "The Glass Menagerie," and it frightened him much more than his failure.

He was born as Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Miss., on March 26, 1911. His mother, the former Edwina Dakin, was the puritanical daughter of an Episcopal rector. His father, Cornelius Coffin Williams, was a violent and aggressive traveling salesman who later settled down in St. Louis as manager of a shoe company. There was an older daughter, Rose (memorialized as Laura in "the Glass Menagerie"), and in 1919 another son was born, Walter Dakin.

"It was just a wrong marriage," the playwright wrote. The familial conflict is made clear by instances from the son's art. His mother was the model for the foolish but indomitable Amanda Wingfield in "The Glass Menagerie," his father for the blustering, brutish Big Daddy in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof."

Acted Out Fantasies

While his father traveled, Tom was mostly brought up, and overprotected, by his mother - particularly after he contracted diphtheria at the age of 5. By the time the family moved to St. Louis, the pattern was clear. Young Tom retreated into himself. He made up and told stories, many of them scary.

In the fall of 1929 he went off to the University of Missouri to study journalism. When his childhood girlfriend, Hazel Kramer, also decided to enroll at Missouri, his father said he would withdraw him, and succeeded in breaking up the incipient romance. It was his only known romantic relationship with a woman.

In a state of depression, Tom dropped out of school and, at his father's instigation, took a job as a clerk in a shoe company. It was, he recalled, "living death."

To survive, every day after work he retreated to his room and wrote - stories, poems, plays - through the night. The strain finally led to a nervous breakdown. Sent to Memphis to recuperate, the young Mr. Williams joined a local theater group. Back in St. Louis, he became friendly with a group of poets at Washington University, particularly Clark Mills McBurney who, among other things, introduced Mr. Williams to the poems of Hart Crane. Crane became his idol.

In 1937, Mr. Williams re-enrolled as a student, this time at the University of Iowa. There and in St. Louis he wrote an enormous, and uncounted, number of plays, some of which were produced on campus. In 1938, nine years after he had entered college, he graduated.

Success seemed paired with tragedy. His sister lost her mind. The family allowed - with subsequent recriminations - a prefrontal lobotomy to be performed, and she spent much of her life in a sanitarium.

Life in New Orleans

At 28, Thomas Williams left home for New Orleans, where he changed his style of living, as well as his name. He offered several reasons for the name change. It was a reaction against his early inferior work, published under his real name. It was a college nickname. It was because his father was from Tennessee. It was distinctive.

In New Orleans he discovered new netherworlds, soaking up the milieu that would appear in "A Streetcar Named Desire." He wrote stories, some of which later became plays, and entered a Group Theater playwriting contest. He won \$100 and was solicited by the agent Audrey Wood, who became his friend and adviser.

"Battle of Angels," a play he wrote during a visit of several months to St. Louis, opened in Boston in 1940 and was a disaster. It closed in two weeks and did not come to New York.

Mr. Williams, however, brought it back in a revised version in 1957 as "Orpheus Descending" and as the Marlon Brando-Anna Magnani movie, "The Fugitive Kind," and in 1973 it was presented at the Circle Repertory Company.

To his amazement, Audrey Wood got him a job in Hollywood writing scripts for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer at \$250 a week for six months. He wrote a Lana Turner picture, worked briefly on a Margaret O'Brien picture and, disdainfully, began writing an original screenplay, which was rejected.

Still under contract, in a house at Malibu, he began turning the screenplay into a play titled "The Gentleman Caller," which slowly evolved into "The Glass Menagerie." On March 31, 1945, five days after its author became 34, it opened on Broadway and changed Mr. Williams's life, and the American theater..

He was inundated with success -the play won the New York Drama Critics' Circle award - and he fought to keep afloat.

"Once you fully apprehend the vacuity of a life without struggle," he wrote, "you are equipped with the basic means of salvation." His art was his salvation. Apprehending, he wrote his second masterpiece, "A Streetcar Named Desire."

Opening in December, 1947, "Streetcar" was an even bigger hit than "The Glass Menagerie." It won Mr. Williams his second Drama Critics' award and his first Pulitzer Prize.

Never Stopped Revising

For many years after "Streetcar," almost every other season there was another Williams play on Broadway (and a one-act play somewhere else). Soon there was a continual flow from the stage to the screen. And he never stopped revising his finished work. For more than 35 years, the stream was unabated. He produced an enormous body of work, including more than two dozen full-length plays, all of them produced - a record unequaled by any of his contemporaries.

There were successes and failures, and often great disagreement over which was which. In 1948 there was "Summer and Smoke," which he wrote on Nantucket while sharing his house with his friend Carson McCullers (at his encouragement she was dramatizing "The Member of the Wedding"). It failed on Broadway, was a huge success in a revival Off Broadway and made a star of Geraldine Page, one of many magnificent leading ladies in Mr. Williams's works (Laurette Taylor, Jessica Tandy, Vivien Leigh, Maureen Stapleton, Anna Magnani).

There followed "The Rose Tattoo," "Camino Real" (a flop in 1953, but revived as a classic at Lincoln Center in 1970), "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (his third Drama Critics' prize, his second Pulitzer), "Orpheus Descending," "Garden District," "Sweet Bird of Youth." Most of these plays have been seen again in major revivals.

In addition to the plays, he wrote two novels, "The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone" and "Moise and the World of Reason"; short stories, such as "One Arm" and "Hard Candy"; a book of poetry, "In the Winter of Cities," the film "Baby Doll" and his "Memoirs." In his "Memoirs," for the first time he wrote in detail about his homosexuality but, as usual, he was restrained in dealing with his creative life, explaining that his art was "private."

As he became more and more successful, Mr. Williams lost his look of boyish innocence and became somewhat portly and seedy. Gradually he found it more and more difficult to write. The turning point, as he saw it, was 1955, and after "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" there was a noticeable decline in his work. To keep going, he began relying on a ritualistic combination of ingredients -strong coffee, cigarettes, drugs and alcohol.

In the late 1950's, Mr. Williams undertook psychoanalysis, explaining, "If I am no longer disturbed myself, I will deal less with violent material." His first postanalysis work was the 1960 "Period of Adjustment," a comedy that by common critical agreement was one of the slightest of his works.

He went back to his nightmares and reached further out for subject matter. In terms of subject and theme, he was a pioneer, working with dark, theater of the absurd or the theater of cruelty was fashionable.

"The Night of the Iguana," which won a fourth Drama Critics' award for Mr. Williams in 1961, was considered a return to his earlier important work. As it turned out, it was his last major success.

Converted to Catholicism

After "Iguana," Mr. Williams went searching and seemed to fall apart. But at the same time he discovered religion. In 1968 he was converted to Roman Catholicism. And his last plays, though still dealing with grotesques, also dealt with salvation.

"The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore," which failed in successive years on Broadway and as an Elizabeth Taylor-Richard Burton movie entitled "Boom!", was an allegory about a Christlike young man and a dying dowager. His next three plays, "Slapstick Tragedy," "The Seven Descents of Myrtle" and "In a Bar in a Tokyo Hotel," also had minuscule runs.

Recovering from an illness, he plunged back to work, writing and rewriting. In the 70's he was, characteristically, prolific, but success continued to elude him. "Small Craft Warning" had a comfortable run Off Broadway in 1972, and at one point, the author himself made his professional debut as an actor in his own play, assuming a small role.

"Out Cry" was a quick failure on Broadway in 1973 and "The Red Devil Battery Sign" closed in Boston, although it was subsequently presented in London. "Vieux Carre" had a brief Broadway run in 1979 (and will be revived next month at the WPA). Of his later plays, his most popular was the poignant "A Lovely Sunday at Creve Coeur" in 1979.

His last Broadway play was "Clothes for a Summer Hotel," a drama about Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald that proved to be one of his biggest failures. Though wounded by the critical reception, he continued writing, in his last years working with noncommercial institutional theaters.

"Something Cloudy, Something Clear" was produced Off Off Broadway at the Jean Cocteau Theater in 1981, and last year his final play, "A House Not Meant to Stand," had its premiere at the Goodman Theater of Chicago. That play, subsequently presented at the New World Festival of the Arts in Miami, deals with the physical and emotional disintegration of an older married couple in Mississippi.

In recent years, Mr. Williams divided his time between his apartment in New York at the Elysee and his house in Key West. He also kept an apartment in the French Quarter of New Orleans, the scene of "A Streetcar Named Desire."

Several weeks ago Mr. Williams had come to New York from Key West. According to a close friend, "He complained constantly of being exhausted and overworked and he said he was suffering with a shoulder condition."

Mr. Williams's secretary, John Uecker, who shared the playwright's two-room hotel suite, said that at about 11 P.M. Thursday he heard a noise from Mr. Williams's room, but did not investigate. Yesterday morning at approximately 10:45 he entered the room and found him lying next to his bed.

Mr. Williams is survived by his brother, Dakin, a Collinsville, Ill. attorney, and by his sister, Rose, who is in a nursing home in Westchester County.

"I always felt like Tennessee and I were compatriots," said Marlon Brando. "He told the truth as best he perceived it, and never turned away from things that beset or frightened him. We are all diminished by his death."

Historical Background

When Tennessee Williams was Tom Wingfield's age in *The Glass Menagerie*, the United States of America was going through a period of great change and contradiction. The Wall Street Crash plunged the country into a depression and large numbers of people lived in poverty, yet individual entrepreneurs were still able to become millionaires if they had an enterprising idea. Most industries floundered yet the Cinema flourished. Mass unemployment meant that more people were out of work yet women were heading out into the workplace in greater numbers than ever before. This article looks at several cultural references made during the play and aims to set them into an historical context.

Great Depression

The great Depression began with the dramatic crash of the stock market on Black Thursday, 24 October, 1929 when 16 million shares of stock were quickly sold by panicking investors who had lost faith in the American economy. Businesses closed their doors, factories shut down, banks failed and many people lost their jobs and their savings. At the height of the Depression in 1933, nearly 25% of the nation's total work force, 12,830,000 people, were unemployed. Wages for workers who were lucky enough to have kept their jobs fell almost 43% between 1929 and 1933. It was the worst economic disaster in American history. Despite all the government's efforts the Depression hung on until 1941, when America's involvement in the Second World War resulted in the drafting of young men into military service, and the creation of millions more jobs in defence and war industries.

Technological Advances

The Century of Progress international Exposition was the name of the World Fair held in Chicago in 1934 to celebrate technological innovation. Exhibits included cutting edge cars, limousines, trains and a 'Homes of tomorrow' section. The exposition celebrated advancement and encouraged America to continue to be at the forefront of the developed world. Think of the fortune made by the guy that invented the first piece of chewing gum. Although the country was in the midst of a depression, entrepreneurs looking to become the next Wrigley or Rockefeller were still able to become millionaires if they could find the right product. The electric razor, nylon, photocopiers, magnetic recording, polaroids and sticky tape were all invented in the 1930s and went on to have mass appeal and success.

Working Women

Traditional roles within the family changed in the 1930s. During the First World War and in the 1920s women had begun to go out and work in greater numbers and this trend continued in the 1930s. Many men found themselves out of work due to the Depression and it was often easier to find opportunities for female employment. This was partly due to the nature of the work undertaken and also because women could be paid less. By the 1940s, over one third of white American women were working in the clerical sector. As unemployment rose during the 1930s there was increasing resentment at women going out to work and taking jobs away from the 'male breadwinner'. This was particularly true for married women as it was felt they could be supported by their husband. There was more tolerance for single women or young women.

Cinema

One-third of Americans were below the poverty line, yet some industries actually managed to make a profit at the beginning of the 1930s as the public looked towards entertainment as a form of escapism. If Americans couldn't find work, at least they could go for a drive, have a cigarette, or go to a movie. Correspondingly, sales of oil, gas, cigarettes, and movie tickets all went up. The 1930s was "the golden Age of Hollywood", it was the era in which the silent period ended, and Hollywood turned out movie after movie to entertain an audience looking for an evening of escapism. People of all classes now flocked to the grand movie palaces to see favourite celebrities.

Travel

In order to combat the depression, President Roosevelt put money into public works and many people found themselves at work building new roads, railway lines and telephone communications. The highway route 66 was completed in the 1930s and ran from Chicago to Los Angeles, creating connections between hundreds of small American towns. It carried thousands of Depression-era migrants to California hoping for jobs and a better life. Others earned a living on the road, or by its side, running businesses.

Autobiographical influences

My loneliness makes me grow like a vine about people who are kind to me.

Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams drew extensively from his experiences with his family when writing his theatrical masterpieces. Stanley Kowalski from *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Big Daddy from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are both modelled on Williams' own father; *Streetcar's* fragile Southern belle, Blanche Dubois, is said to be at least partially inspired by the playwright himself. *The Glass Menagerie*, however, was Williams' first and most autobiographical work for the stage—he wrote the play during a time when he was still in the process of transforming himself from Tom Williams into the playwright Tennessee Williams.

The Glass Menagerie is deeply personal, and this new revival's framework emphasizes the autobiographical nature of the play even further. The play centers around a family with Southern roots that is now living in a slightly squalid St. Louis apartment, just as the Williams family did in real life. The narrator and possibly writer of the play is named Tom, just like the playwright himself. The fictional Tom struggles with a domineering mother, a frail, disabled sister, and an absent father figure who echo much of the dynamic of the real-life Williams family. The vulnerable but overpowering Amanda Wingfield is a dramatized version of Williams' driven mother.

His sickly and mentally unstable older sister Rose provides the basis for the fragile Laura (whose nickname in the play is "Blue Roses", a result of a bout of pleurosis as a high school student), though it has also been suggested that Laura may incorporate aspects of Williams himself, referencing his introverted nature and obsessive focus on a part of life (writing for Williams and glass animals in Laura's case). Williams, who was close to Rose growing up, learnt to his horror that in 1943 in his absence his sister had been subjected to a botched lobotomy. Rose was left incapacitated (and institutionalized) for the rest of her life. With the success of *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams was to give half of the royalties from the play to his mother. He later designated half of the royalties from his play *Summer and Smoke* to provide for Rose's care, arranging for her move from the state hospital to a private sanitarium. Eventually he was to leave the bulk of his estate to ensure Rose's continuing care. Rose died in 1996.

Themes

The American Dream

Our Gentleman caller, Jim, is the embodiment of the American dream. He is a young man who is actively trying to improve himself by attending night school whilst still earning a living by working in the shoe factory by day. The American dream is an arguably, unattainable ideal that believes a person can improve his or her circumstances through hard work and determination. The term "American Dream" was first used by the American historian James Truslow Adams in his book *"The Epic of America"* published in 1931, ten years before Williams started writing *The Glass Menagerie*. The American people, needed to believe that there was hope, in the wake of the Great Depression. Amanda dreams of her daughter living a "normal life", by marrying an eligible bachelor.

Reality vs. Self-Deception

Each of the three main characters has great difficulty in dealing with reality. Tom drinks to escape facing reality and spends time watching movies. In the final scene, Amanda accuses Tom, "You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!" Tom seeks distraction at the movies at night and in the literature of D. H. Lawrence. Further, he dreams of being a poet; Laura, whose inner life is extremely fragile as she is unable to go into the real world, retreats to her glass

menagerie at home; Amanda has trouble accepting her present day reality. She still dreams of her past, of being a Southern Belle with gentleman callers. She also has unrealistic goals for her children, expecting Laura to be able to work in the business world, and planning on Tom's unending support of the family. Amanda does not understand why Laura has no gentleman callers because, she frequently reminisces, she had so many herself. In self-delusion, she criticizes her children, telling Laura,

"I'm sick too--of your nonsense! Why can't you and your brother be normal people?"

Escape

Tom wishes to escape from his life, just as the magician escaped from the coffin. He is most impressed by the magician's ability to escape without destroying the box or removing a single nail, and he marvels that anyone can accomplish such a feat. Tom's goal is to likewise remove himself from his life because Amanda and Laura make him feel trapped— but in the end this turns out to be impossible. Tom escapes, but he remains haunted by the memory, as he is recounting the event to us. Because Tom and Laura's father deserted his family, Amanda places undue pressure upon Tom, forcing him to act as a surrogate father. When he finally goes out the fire escape for the last time, Tom abandons his family, but he should not have been forced into the role Amanda assigns him.

While Laura does not accept the responsibility of earning a living for herself by attending Rubicam's Business College, for which her mother has paid. Instead of telling her mother the truth, she escapes the uncomfortable situation by she walking around the zoo; at home she toys with her glass menagerie and plays music.

Amanda Wingfield places too much responsibility for the family upon Tom in her effort to escape the anxieties of her life without a husband. And, while she worries about the family's future, she retreats in the final act to the memory of her youth and her gentleman callers in the "slow and impacable fires of human desperation."

The Power of Memory

As the play opens, the stage directions in Scene I state,

The scene is memory and is therefore nonrealistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. it omits some details; others are exaggerated....

Acting as both narrator and character, the point of view of Tom shades the drama. Music and symbolism, therefore, play an important part in expressing the message of this play with its characters who are surrounded in illusion.

As Tom himself states clearly, the play's lack of realism, its high drama, its overblown and too-perfect symbolism, and even its frequent use of music are all due to its origins in memory. Most fictional works are products of the imagination that must convince their audience that they are something else by being realistic. A play drawn from memory, however, is a product of real experience does not need to drape itself in the conventions of realism in order to seem real. The creator can cloak his or her true story in unlimited layers of melodrama and unlikely metaphor while still remaining confident of its substance and reality. Tom—and Tennessee Williams—take full advantage of this privilege. Tom, is not the only character haunted by his memories. Amanda too lives in constant pursuit of her bygone youth, and old records from her childhood are almost as important to Laura as her glass animals. For these characters, memory is a crippling force that prevents them from finding happiness in the present or the offerings of the future. But it is also the vital force for Tom, prompting him to the act of creation that culminates in the achievement of the play.

We have to distrust each other. It's our only defense against betrayal.

Tennessee Williams

Life imitates art

"Well, how did you like you'seff, Mis' Williams?"

From *Remember Me to Tom* By Edwina Dakin Williams as told to Lucy Freeman. St Louis: Sunrise Publishing Co.

The evening of the premiere was the night after Christmas, Tuesday, December 26, 1944. Everything seemed against the play, even the weather. The streets were so ice-laden we could not find a taxi to take us to the Civic Theatre and had to walk. The gale blowing off Lake Michigan literally hurled us through the theater door. This was the first of Tom's plays I had seen and I was thrilled to think he had created a play without a wasted word and one in which every moment added drama. I don't think there's been a play like it, before or since. The audience seemed spellbound throughout and in the corner of the stage behind a thin veil of a curtain, Laura bent low over the candles in her tenement home as Tom said sadly, "– for nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura and so good-bye..."

And the curtain dropped slowly on the world premiere of *The Glass Menagerie*. At first it was so quiet I thought the audience didn't like the play... Then, all of a sudden, a tumultuous clapping of hands broke out. The audience had been recovering from the mood into which the play had plunged it. I wanted to congratulate Laurette Taylor, who had brought down the house with her amazing performance as Amanda Wingfield, the faded, fretful, dominating mother lost in the dream world of her past, bullying her son into finding a gentleman caller for his abnormally shy sister. I entered Laurette's dressing room, not knowing what to expect, for she was sometimes quite eccentric. She was sitting with her feet propped up on the radiator, trying to keep warm. Before I had a chance to get a word out, she greeted me. "Well, how did you like you'seff, Mis' Williams?" she asked.

I was so shocked I didn't know what to say. It had not occurred to me as I watched Tom's play that I was Amanda. Tom has contradicted himself when asked if the play were based on his life. Once he told a reporter it was a "memory play," adding, "My mother and sister will never forgive me for that." Then again, he denied it was autobiographical, calling it "a dream or fantasy play. The gentleman caller is meant to be a symbol of the world and its attitude toward the unrealistic dreamers who are three characters in this play." I am not Amanda. I'm sure that if Tom stops to think, he realizes I am not. The only resemblance I have to Amanda is that we both like jonquils."

Glossary and references

Beleaguered – put in a very difficult situation, besieged.

Benjamin Franklin – (1706-1790) one of the founding fathers of the United States of America. Franklin was a leading author, printer, satirist, statesman, inventor, scientist, and diplomat. He is famous, among other things, for his theories regarding electricity and the invention of the lightning rod.

Berchtesgaden – A beautiful area in Germany that was used by the Nazis for their officers' pleasure. Hitler had a home there. There was also a famous hotel there that welcomed such guests as Goebbels and Himmler.

Business College – School for students to train for secretarial work. Typing, stenography, and other tasks needed for office work are the usual courses offered in this type of school. In the 1930s many women were joining the work force and gained valuable skills at such schools.

Cake-walk – A light-hearted dance competition or musical chairs type game played in the late 1800s or early 1900s often in the southern states. Sweets or small cakes were offered as prizes to the winners.

Cathouse – House of ill-repute, a brothel.

Celotex interior – building board or panelling.

Century of Progress – A major exhibit in the 1933-34 Chicago Exposition (World's Fair), the exhibit was intended to highlight the century 1833-1933 but came to represent the modern world. The exhibit was wildly popular and helped create a feeling of hope for the future during the Great Depression.

Chamberlain – author Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940) was a British Conservative politician who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from May 1937 to May 1940. Best known for his failed “appeasement policy” towards Nazi Germany and Hitler, which culminated in the signing of the Munich Agreement of 1938.

Chamberlain – Neville Chamberlain was British Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940. He is remembered, among other things, for his signing of the Munich Agreement in 1938 giving part of Czechoslovakia to the Nazis.

Christian martyr – a person who is killed for following Christianity, through stoning, crucifixion or other forms of torture. The first martyr was St. Stephen.

Cotillion – A formal dance occasion

Cretonne – A printed cotton fabric usually used for upholstery, drapery, etc.

D.A.R. – daughters of the American Revolution. A non-profit group working to promote historical preservation and patriotism in the United States.

Dance “program” – In past centuries, a young lady attending a ball or dance would have a dance card or “program”. Gentlemen would ask to be included on her program and their names would be listed so that they could have a dance with the lady when it was their turn. Obviously, a young woman wanted as many names as possible on her program so that she would appear popular and so that she might meet eligible young men among whom she might find a prospective husband.

Dandelion wine – wine, often associated with southern states and summer months, made from the flowers of the dandelion.

Discreet – quietly, in a dignified way.

Dizzy Dean – Popular baseball player of the 1930s known for bragging about his abilities although one of his most famous quotes was, “It ain’t braggin’ if you can do it.”

Domestic – Having skills (cooking, cleaning, sewing) that make one a good homemaker

Edison – Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) was an American inventor and businessman. He developed many devices that affected life around the world, including the phonograph player, the motion picture camera, and a long-lasting electric light bulb.

Eloquent – well-spoken.

Emissary – a person sent on a special mission.

Episcopalian – part of the communion of Anglican Churches. It describes itself as being Protestant, yet Catholic.

Fiasco – something that is a complete failure.

Fire escape – Tenement style houses and apartment buildings in cities have metal fire escapes that allow inhabitants to get out of the house quickly in the event of fire. Often people use these as a place to get outside without having to go all the way downstairs. For some, it is as close to a porch as they can get and they use it as such even though the landing is usually quite small.

Future of television – Television, in the 1930s, was an interesting concept but its possibilities were only beginning to be realized.

Gable – Clark Gable (1901-1960) was a major Hollywood actor, nicknamed “The King”. Best known for playing Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*.

Gallant – brave, noble, chivalrous.

Garbo picture – movie starring famed actress Greta Garbo (1905-1990), whose movies were adored by the public. She was considered one of the great beauties of the time.

Gay – Cheerful or happy. Many people today have stopped using this word to mean its original definition because they do not wish to be misunderstood to mean “homosexual.” The word is used in the play in its original definition.

Gentleman Caller – Boyfriend; Young man interested in dating a young woman. In the Old South a young man would be expected to visit a girl at her home where she might entertain a group of young people.

Dating at the time was not acceptable so young people gathered at their homes and flirted and enjoyed each other’s company in the presence of chaperones.

Gesticulate – to gesture, a physical movement that communicates meaning.

Guernica – Artist Pablo Picasso was inspired to create a massive painting that evoked the horrors of war. He named it after the town in which thousands of innocent people were killed in a bombing on April 26, 1937 during the Spanish Civil War.

Houseboy – In the old south many white families had servants (this was after the end of the Civil War so these servants were paid laborers but were still considered of a lower class) and it was common to refer to them in this way. Today referring to a person in such a demeaning way is considered very offensive.

Horse set on Long Island – Wealthy Americans who dabble in equestrian events and live in large mansions.

Imperious – arrogant and domineering.

Incandescent – glowing, full of strong emotion; passionate.

Inducted – introduced into office.

Insolence – rudeness.

Irish – fish on Friday – In the play Amanda makes an assumption that an Irish person is Catholic and therefore eats fish on Friday – most practicing Catholics refrain from eating meat on Fridays during Lent but years ago Catholics abstained from eating meat on all Fridays. Fish was generally substituted.

Jalopy - Car

Jaunty – easy and sprightly, cheerful.

Jonquils – A yellow flower similar to a daffodil.

Malaria fever – A mosquito-borne disease that causes fever, weakness and sometimes death. It was often treated with quinine, a fever reducing drug.

Mastication – Chewing

Mazda Lamp – a trademark name registered by General Electric in 1909 for electric light bulbs.

Menagerie – collection of wild or unusual animals.

Merchant Marine – “The Merchant Marine is the fleet of ships which carries imports and exports during peacetime and becomes a naval auxiliary during wartime to deliver troops and war materiel.

Midas Touch – Midas was the legendary king of Phrygia. The legend says that he was granted the power to change whatever he touched into gold.

Milk Fund – the milk fund was founded during the Great Depression in 1932. It was a charity designed to raise money to buy milk for needy children.

Monogrammed – stitched with initials.

Movies – In the 1930s a person could spend quite a bit of time in a movie theatre watching not just the movie itself, but Travelogues (short documentaries of fascinating places around the world);

Motley – assorted, mismatched, varied.

Mr. Edison’s Mazda lamp – Early light bulb standard (around 1909) for bulbs with a tungsten filament – an improvement over other bulbs of the era

Mr. Lawrence (“that hideous book”) – D.H. Lawrence was a famous (some would have said, infamous) writer whose books were known for their overt depictions of sexuality – a taboo subject during the early part of the twentieth century. One of his most famous books, published in 1928, was Lady Chatterley’s Lover. Many women professed horror at his books but they were widely read although, perhaps, in secret.

Newsreels (films that updated the public about current events – these were the days before television – and showed scenes of war, human interest stories, new products and inventions, etc.); and Organ Solos (at the time of silent movies

theatres had an organist who would provide the soundtrack for the films. Once films had sound the organs were still in place in the theatres and for some years they continued to be played before and/or after the feature film); and vaudeville acts such as singers, dancers, comedians and magicians.

Paragon – a model of excellence or perfection.

Pirates of Penzance – One of many comic, light operas written by Gilbert and Sullivan

Pleuriosis – An inflammation of the lungs

Portieres – heavy curtain hung across a doorway.

Querulous – full of complaints.

Quinine – a drug used in the treatment of malaria, lupus and arthritis.

Sixty-Five dollars a month – A low, but not unusually so, salary during the 1930s. The average salary at the time was about \$1,500 so it would be a salary typical of someone fresh out of school – an entry level position.

Slacken – to loosen.

Solitary – alone.

Sons of planters – In the south, a “planter” was someone who owned a significant amount of property and wealth. Sons of planters inherited that wealth.

Southern behavior – stereotypical idea of people from the south having particularly good manners. Southern people are often seen as more “genteel” than people from other parts of the country and some are proud of this reputation.

Spartan endurance – the people of the ancient Greek city of Sparta were known for being strong, self- disciplined, austere people.

Spinster – an unmarried woman. Another term often used is “old maid.” Both terms can be derogatory because the expectation in the early part of the 20 she was not married and raising a family.

Stumblejohn – Clumsy or foolish person

Supercilious – to be supercilious is to be indifferent or haughty.

Tenement – a run-down and overcrowded apartment house.

Turgid – inflated, overblown.

Veranda – a roofed platform along the outside of a house, level with the ground floor.

Victrola – An early type of record player that was wound with a crank to operate the turntable

Vivacity – liveliness.

Questions on the play

1. Why does Tom go to the movies so often?
2. What are the similarities between Tom and his father?
3. Why does Amanda nag Tom so much?
4. Why does it take Tom so long to decide to leave home?
5. Why does Amanda blame Tom for the failure of the evening?
6. Why does Laura give the unicorn to Jim?
7. Does Jim have the potential for greatness attributed to him by Laura?
8. Why does Jim, an ordinary person, seem so wonderful and exceptional to Laura?
9. Does Laura understand the responsibility that Tom feels for her? Explain.
10. What do you think of Tom's act of rebellion at the end of the play? Is he justified in what he does? Explain.
11. In his opening monologue to the audience, Tom says that the stage magician "gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth, I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion." What does he mean?
12. Amanda has closed her mind to the reality that Laura has no prospects for gentleman callers. Does Amanda want the callers for Laura or does she want them so that she can relive her own youth? Explain, using examples from the play.
13. Tom is a character in the story of the play and the narrator who steps outside of the story and creates the memory. Do you like that technique in playwriting? Why, why not? How do Tom's explanations and comments about his family life affect you? Describe.
14. Unicorns remain a popular mythological creature even through modern times, as seen in the popular series Harry Potter. Research the origins, characteristics, and history of unicorns. Discuss why the unicorn is an appropriate symbol for Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*.
15. Each character in the play has suffered from significant disappointment in their life. What things were each character disappointed by, and what strategies did each use to cope with these disappointments? How did the characters' age, gender, culture, etc. affect how they coped with these disappointments?
16. What do you think Amanda and Laura's lives are like after Tom leaves? Do you think Laura will ever leave home?
17. How do these characters aspire to "The American Dream?" What do they think "The American Dream" is? How is our contemporary notion of "The American Dream" similar and different from how it is presented in the play?
18. How has Williams incorporated humor into this play? What does this tell us about the Wingfield family?
19. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each character.
20. Read the scene summaries and find quotes from the play, or from Williams' life that could be titles for each scene.
21. Look on the internet for pictures that could depict (represent) moments from the play.
22. Make a storyboard with a partner, describing what happens during the play. What do you think is the most important moment?
23. One of the themes in the play is of "escape". All three characters have a way of coping with life. How do they escape?
24. Read the Mel Gussow article, what American spellings can you identify. For example, In British English, theatre is spelled with the ending -re and in American English is spelled theater.

Writing Exercises

- What are your responsibilities at home?
- If you could change something in your family life, what would that be?

- Each character has strengths (positive) and weaknesses (negative parts of their character). Write down the strengths and weaknesses for each character in the play.
- Do you know someone like Laura? Or someone ambitious like Jim? Is there anyone in the play who reminds you of someone you know?
- Who do you most feel connected to? Why?
- Look up the meaning of the word menagerie. Why is it used here as the title of the play?
- What was the play's original title, and why do you think it changed. Which do you think is more appropriate?
- Do you remember? Think of an event that happened at school where a lot of your classmates were present. Especially choose an event that has been photographed or been video recorded. Write down everything you can remember about that event, what you wore, what the weather was like and so on...and then compare your notes with the rest of the class

Questions on Tennessee Williams

1. What is Tennessee Williams real name?
2. There are different opinions on why he changed his name. Provide two of these.
3. What happened to Tennessee Williams when he was 5 years old?
4. Williams started university in 1929. Name an important historical event that happened in this year.
5. Who is Rose?
6. What happened to Rose in 1938?
7. The Glass Menagerie is based on a short story written by Williams. What is the title?
8. What was the original title for The Glass Menagerie? Which title do you prefer?
9. The Glass Menagerie was followed by another successful play in 1947. What is the title of this play?
10. Watch this youtube clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLdY4qM1Fxm> After seeing the clip and reading Williams' biography, you should have noticed that there are several similarities between his life and his plays. Brainstorm the similarities and connections you see between The Glass Menagerie and Williams' Life.

Essay Topic

'The Glass Menagerie' may be viewed as an autobiographical play, featuring interpretations of Williams' own family, with Tom being the playwright's stand-in. Using your knowledge of Tennessee Williams, write a short account of his use of self-imagery in the first two scenes of 'The Glass Menagerie'

CREATE YOUR OWN SCENE

Choose one of the following options and write a short description of when you

- Felt very shy
- Bumped into someone you have not seen for a long time
- Were pushed to do something you didn't want to do
- Were in trouble for coming home too late

Devising

In small groups, each person should choose one of the characters from the play and devise 2 short scenes; one presenting that character in their ideal and fantasy life, what they truly desire, and the other their worst case scenario; what that character truly fears.

Consider the following:

What is Tom's true ambition and what is stopping him from living the life he wants?

When was Amanda happiest? Why does she push her children to succeed?

How does Laura feel about Jim? Why does she lie to her mother about attending the business course at college?

What are Jim's aspirations? How has Jim changed since High School?

Monologue

In small groups, read through Amanda's speech below. And then try performing the speech using these 2 different objectives: 1. Amanda wants to prove to Tom that she is of value and importance (emphasise the status and wealth of her suitors) 2. Amanda wants to inspire Laura to become a Southern Belle in her own image (try to involve and excite Laura with the story)

The Glass Menagerie, Scene 1

Amanda:

"...My callers were all gentlemen – all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta – planters and sons of planters!

(Tom motions for music and a spot of light on Amanda. Her eyes lift, her face glows)

There was young champ Laughlin who later became vice-president of the Delta Planters Bank.

Hadley Stevenson who was drowned in Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and fifty thousand in Government bonds. There were the Cutrere brothers, Wesley and Bates. Bates was one of my bright particular beaux!

He got in a quarrel with that wild Wainwright boy. They shot it out on the floor of Moon Lake Casino. Bates was shot through the stomach. Died in the ambulance on his way to Memphis. His widow was also well provided for, came into eight or ten thousand acres, that's all. She married him on the rebound – never loved her – carried my picture on him the night he died!

And there was that boy that every girl in the Delta had set her cap for! That brilliant, brilliant young Fitzhugh boy from Greene County!"

Question: Did the change in objectives bring out different aspects of the speech?

Scene Study – Scene 7

In pairs, read through the excerpt of Scene 7 below, when Jim O'Connor and Laura are alone together.

Discuss and consider the following questions:

How does Laura feel being alone with Jim?

What are Jim's initial impressions of Laura?

Jim says that he suffered from an inferiority complex like Laura. Does this surprise you? How do you think this has affected his ambitions? Do you think Jim will fulfil his dreams?

How does Laura make Jim feel when she talks about his singing?

Decide what the crucial moments of the scene are. Create a sequence of images which when put together tell the story of the scene.

Give each image a title or a headline to describe the essence of it.

Run through the images in sequence and now for each action image, create another parallel image of this moment, which demonstrates how the characters are feeling inside, this can be abstract and expressionistic, rather than naturalistic.

Now go back to the script and read through again. Discuss how this exercise affected your understanding of the text: in terms of your understanding of the characters and how they feel, what they want and what their obstacles are in this scene.

The Glass Menagerie, Scene 7

Jim: Hello, there, Laura.

Laura [faintly]: Hello. [She clears her throat.]

Jim: How are you feeling now? Better?

Laura: Yes. Yes, thank you.

Jim: This is for you. A little dandelion wine. [He extends it toward her with extravagant gallantry.]

Laura: Thank you.

Jim: Drink it – but don't get drunk! [He laughs heartily. Laura takes the glass uncertainly; laughs shyly.] Where shall I set the candles?

Laura: Oh – oh, anywhere...

Jim: How about here on the floor? Any objections?

Laura: No

Jim: I'll spread a newspaper under to catch the drippings. I like to sit on the floor. Mind if I do?

Laura: Oh no. Jim: Give me a pillow?

Laura: What? Jim: A pillow! Laura: Oh... [Hands him one quickly.] Jim: How about you? Don't you like to sit on the floor?

Laura: Oh – yes. Jim: Why don't you, then? Laura: I – will.

Jim: Take a pillow! [Laura does. Sits on the other side of the candelabrum. Jim crosses his legs and smiles encouragingly at her.] I can't hardly see you sitting way over there.

Laura: I can – see you.

Jim: I know, but that's not fair, I'm in the limelight. [Laura moves her pillow closer.] Good! Now I can see you! Comfortable?

Laura: Yes. Jim: So am I. Comfortable as a cow! Will you have some gum? Laura: No, thank you

Jim: I think that I will indulge, with your permission. [Musingly unwraps it and holds it up.] Think of the fortune made by the guy that invested the first piece of chewing gum. Amazing, huh? The Wrigley Building is one of the sights of Chicago. I saw it the summer before last when I went up to the Century of Progress. Did you take in the Century of Progress?

Laura: No, I didn't.

Jim: Well, it was quite a wonderful exposition. What impressed me most was the Hall of Science. Gives you an idea of what the future will be in America, even more wonderful than the present time is! [Pauses. Smiling at her.] Your brother tells me you're shy. Is that right, Laura?

Laura: I – don't know.

Jim: I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl. Well, I think that's a pretty good type to be. Hope you don't think I'm being too personal – do you?

Laura [hastily, out of embarrassment]: I believe I will take a piece of gum, if you – don't mind. [Clearing her throat.] Mr O'Connor, have you – kept up with your singing?

Jim: Singing? Me? Laura: Yes. I remember what a beautiful voice you had. Jim: When did you hear me sing? [Voice off stage in the pause]

Voice [off stage]: O blow, ye winds, heigh-ho, A-roving I will go!

I'm off to my love With a boxing glove – Ten thousand miles away!

Jim: You say you've heard me sing? Laura: Oh, yes! Yes, very often... I don't suppose – you remember me – at all?

Jim [smiling doubtfully]: You know I have an idea I've seen You before. I had that idea soon as you opened the door. It seemed almost like I was about to remember your name. But the name that I started to call you – wasn't a name! And so I stopped myself before I said it.

Laura: Wasn't it – blue roses?

Jim [springs up. Grinning]: Blue roses! – My gosh, yes – Blue roses! That's what I had on my tongue when you opened the door! Isn't it funny what tricks your memory plays? I didn't connect you with high school somehow or other. But that's where it was; it was high school. I didn't even know you were Shakespeare's sister! Gosh, I'm sorry.

Laura: I didn't expect you to. You – barely knew me! Jim: But we did have a speaking acquaintance, huh? Laura: Yes, we – spoke to each other.

Jim: When did you recognize me? Laura: Oh, right away! Jim: Soon as I came in the door?

Laura: When I heard your name I thought it was probably you. I knew that Tom used to know you a little in high school. So when you came out the door – Well, then I was – sure.

Jim: Why didn't you say something, then? Laura [breathlessly]: I didn't know what to say, I was – too surprised!

Jim: For goodness'sakes! You know, this sure is funny!

Laura: Yes! Yes, isn't it, though...

Jim: Didn't we have a class in something together?

Laura: Yes, we did.

Jim: What class was that?

Laura: It was – singing – Chorus!

Jim: Aw.

Laura: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Jim: Now I remember – you always came in late.

Laura: Yes, it was so hard for me, getting upstairs. I had that brace on my leg – it clumped so loud!

Jim: I never heard any clumping. Laura [wincing at the recollection]: To me it sounded like – thunder! Jim: Well, well, well, I never even noticed.

Laura: And everybody was seated before I came in. I had to walk in front of all those people. My seat was in the back row. I had to go clumping all the way up the aisle with everyone watching!

Jim: You shouldn't have been self-conscious. Laura: I know, but I was. It was always such a relief when the singing started.

Jim: Aw, yes, I've placed you now! I used to call you Blue Roses. How was it that I got started calling you that?

Laura: I was out of school a little while with pleurosis. When I came back you asked me what was the matter. I said I had pleurosis – you thought I had said Blue Roses. That's what you always called me after that!

Jim: I hope you didn't mind.

Laura: Oh no – I liked it. You see I wasn't acquainted with many – people...

The Production

What were your expectations of the play before you saw it and how did you feel at the end of the play?

What image from the production has stayed in your mind and why?

What line from the play has stayed in your mind and why?

What surprised you the most?

Listening, Writing, Summarising

Reviews help to communicate to others what a play is about and how the theatre company has chosen to tell the story.

When writing a review you should consider who might be reading it and what will be important to them. You shouldn't spoil the plot for the reader, but make them feel as if they have a sense of the whole production.

When writing a review you should:

Say what you saw

Say what you think

Reflect on your responses

Write freely from the heart

Don't worry about given theories

Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid

Say why it spoke to you

- the light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
- the words, the music, the rhythms of the text • the set, the costumes, the style of the production, the objects • the themes • the Characters • the Story • the Ending

Write a review for a national newspaper. (Your review must be no longer than 500 words)

Write a review for a specific online website. (Your review must be no longer than 200 words)

Tweet your review. (Your review must be no longer than 140 characters)

An Interview Review

You know what you think about the play, but now it is time to find out from your classmates what they thought. Write down ten questions relating to the show and interview a classmate. Write a review based on what your classmate(s) tell you.

Lights! Camera! Action!

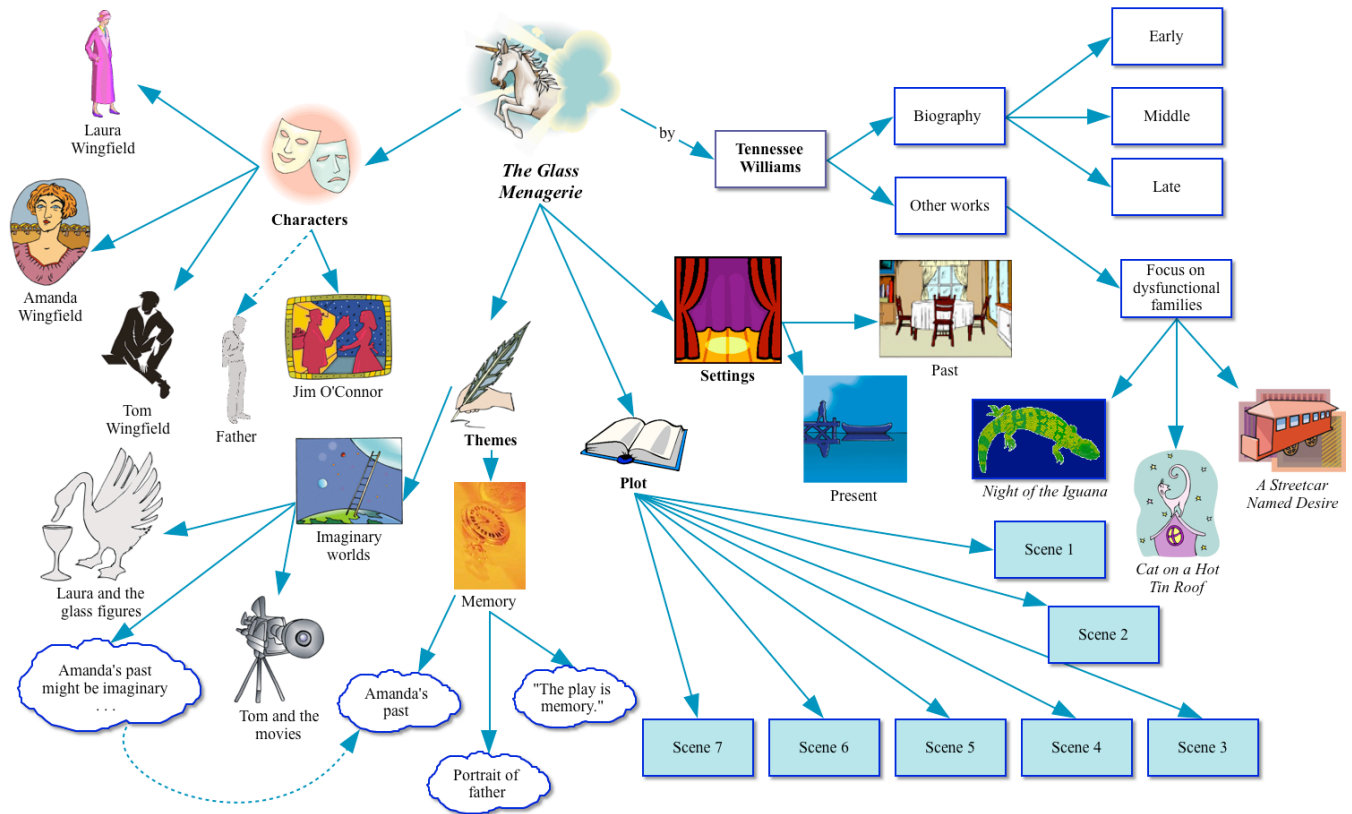
Select a scene from the play and plan how you would film this scene as a film director. Supply reasons for choosing a particular scene. Who would you cast and why? Where would you film the scene? In New York, Frankfurt etc? Would you change the setting and/or costume notes from the original play? What music would you use?

Activities

1. Have students create a mindmap for the production on an A3 page (or bigger) They can use pictures and information from the programme, from magazines, quotes from the show and their own thoughts and sketches to create a visual representation of all the information. Students should first plan the project before gluing items to the page.

Here is an example

Mindmap from http://www.inspiration.com/sites/default/files/images/examples/IE_Glass_Menagerie.png



2. Using pictures and words from magazines, make a collage for each character in the play that describes the essence of his or her personality. Remember that it is not just the individual items or words, but the total feeling of the picture that will provide insight into the personality being described. For example, Laura’s collage may have a faint, gauzy, pastel look to it, and might include images of fragile objects such as glass, flowers or lace.
3. Select or compose music that gives an impression of one of the characters in the play. Title it for the character you have chosen (e.g., “Laura’s Theme” or “Daydream Hero” for Tom or Jim). Share your selection with the class, and explain why that particular music and title were chosen
4. Picasso, like Tennessee Williams, created art which was autobiographical. Study the work that Picasso produced during the 1930s, the same period of time in which THE GLASS MENAGERIE takes place. How was the painting “Guernica” part of Picasso’s life? Why did Williams mention it in THE GLASS MENAGERIE?

Advice Column

Tom is in need of some advice about what to do concerning his family situation. He decides to write to someone neutral, an advice columnist from a local magazine or online psychology website, for guidance. Imagine you are Tom; write a letter

to “Dear Abby” asking for advice on how to handle your dilemma. Then, exchange your letter with a classmate’s, and write a response (as “Dear Abby”) to the letter you received. Address the concerns expressed in the letter, and give your best advice to Tom. Remember, as the advice columnist, you have only the facts that Tom has provided in the letter. However, you need to give him some solid advice.

Find an Elite Partner

Imagine that Laura lives in the present, and she has asked you to help her create an appealing profile for an online dating service. Create a profile for Laura in an online dating service. In developing her profile, supply enough personal details to give potential responders a real sense of who Laura is. In addition, provide a description of the type of man who would be a perfect match for her. Give your profile a catchy title, and include a photograph of Laura. The photograph should represent what you think Laura might look like. It can be computer generated, from the internet, or cut from any print media.

Say what? Who says the following lines in the play? Tom, Amanda, Laura or Jim?

1. You know it don’t take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?
2. I go to the movies because I like adventure. Adventure is something I don’t have much of at work, so I go to the movies.
3. Resume your seat, little sister. I want you to stay fresh and pretty for gentlemen callers!
4. Go, then! Go to the moon—you selfish dreamer!
5. Mother’s afraid I’m going to be an old maid.
6. I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl.
7. Girls that aren’t cut out for business careers usually wind up married to some nice man. Sister, that’s what you’ll do!
8. I don’t do anything—much. Oh, please don’t think I sit around doing nothing! My glass collection takes up a good deal of time. Glass is something you have to take good care of.
9. Hold him over the light, he loves the light! You see how the light shines through him?
10. Blue Roses! My gosh, yes – Blue Roses! That’s what I had on my tongue when you opened the door! Isn’t it funny what tricks your memory plays?
11. You’ll never forgive me. I bet that was your favourite piece of glass.
12. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!

ANSWERS

1.Tom, 2.Tom, 3.Amanda, 4.Amanda, 5.Laura, 6.Jim, 7.Amanda, 8.Laura, 9.Laura, 10.Jim, 11.Jim, 12.Tom

CROSSWORD KEY

1. subscriptions -Amanda sells this to people over the phone
2. domestic -Having skills (cooking, cleaning, sewing) that make one a good home maker
3. spinster -an unmarried woman
4. Guernica -Painting by Pablo Picasso
5. jonquil -yellow flower similar to a daffodil
6. exaggerate -to emphasise and make bigger
7. Shakespeare -Tom's nickname at work
8. victrola -a record-playing device
9. Pleurosis -Laura suffered from this lung condition as a teenager
10. tenement -a run-down and overcrowded apartment house
11. autobiographical -Williams' plays are inspired by his own life, making his works...
12. narrator -Tom is a character and the ...of the story
13. memory -The Glass Menagerie is known as a ... play
14. unicorn -Laura's favourite figurine that got damaged in the play
15. omit -to leave something out
16. electricity -They had to light candles because Tom didn't pay the bill

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