

Name: KENZIE, ANGIE, SARAH, NATE

**Author:** Tennessee Williams      **Title:** A Streetcar Named Desire

**When was the work written?** late 1940s in New Orleans

**When does the work take place?** during the 1940s in New Orleans

**How is the work organized?** Work is arranged in the format of a play (drama). Much of the pathos found in the drama was reflected from the playwright's own life. Alcoholism, depression, thwarted desire, loneliness, and insanity were all part of Williams's world. Stanley Kowalski is likely modeled on Williams's own father and other males who tormented Williams during his childhood. The play is also connected with the new American taste for realism that emerged following the Depression and World War II. The characters in A Streetcar Named Desire are trying to rebuild their lives in postwar America: Stanley and Mitch served in the military, while Blanche had affairs with young soldiers based near her home. Williams uses realism in this work in an ironic and sympathetic tone.

**Characters** (descriptions, minor characters' significance, names): **Blanche DuBois**-Stella Kowalski's older sister, who was a high school English teacher in Laurel, Mississippi, until she was forced to leave her job. After losing Belle Reve, the DuBois family home, Blanche arrives in New Orleans to live with Stella and her husband Stanley. Blanche appears confident and had many lovers; however, she also avoids reality, preferring to live in her own imagination which can be seen through her terror of the paper lantern. As the play progresses, Blanche's instability grows. Stanley seeks to find out the details of her past and destroys her relationship with his friend Mitch. Stanley also destroys what's left of Blanche by raping her and then having her committed to an insane asylum. **Stella Kowalski**-Blanche's younger sister who left Mississippi for New Orleans some time before Blanche. She married lower-class Stanley, with whom she shares a strong sexual relationship. Stella's union with Stanley is both animal and spiritual. After Blanche's arrival, Stella is torn between her sister and her husband. Eventually, she stands by Stanley, perhaps in part because she gives birth to his child near the play's end. She seems to love and pity Blanche; however, she cannot bring herself to believe Blanche's accusations that Stanley dislikes Blanche, and she eventually dismisses Blanche's claim that Stanley raped her. Stella's denial of reality at the play's end shows that she has more in common with her sister than she thinks. **Stanley Kowalski**-The husband of Stella and believer in physical force. He is loyal to his friends, passionate to Stella, and heartlessly cruel to Blanche. With his Polish ancestry, he represents the new, heterogeneous America. After he fought in World War II, he works as an auto-parts salesman. A huge believer in practicality, he has no patience for Blanche's distortions of the truth. He lacks ideals and imagination. Character begins to disintegrate as he beats Stella and rapes Blanche. Horrifyingly, he shows no remorse. Yet, Blanche is an outcast from society, while Stanley is the proud family man. **Harold "Mitch"**

**Mitchell**-Stanley's army friend, co worker, and poker buddy, who courts Blanche until he finds out that she lied to him about her sordid past. Mitch is more sensitive and more gentlemanly than Stanley and his other friends, perhaps because he lives with his mother, who is slowly dying. He and Blanche connected through the bond over their lost loves. When the doctor takes Blanche away against her will, Mitch is the only person present besides Stella who despairs over the tragedy. **Eunice**-Stella's friend, upstairs neighbor, and landlady. Eunice and her husband, Steve, represent the low-class, carnal life that Stella has chosen for herself. Like Stella, Eunice accepts her husband's affections despite his physical abuse of her. Eunice forbids Stella to question her decision over Blanche during end of play as she implies wives remain loyal to their spouses. **Allan Grey**-The young man Blanche fell in love with and married as a teenager. One afternoon, she discovered Allan in bed with an older male friend, paralleling to Williams's sexuality. That evening at a ball, after she announced her disgust at his homosexuality, he ran outside and shot himself in the head. Allan's death, which marked the end of Blanche's sexual innocence, has haunted her ever since. **A Young Collector**-A teenager who comes to the Kowalskis' door to collect for the newspaper when Blanche is home alone. The boy leaves bewildered after Blanche hits on him and gives him a passionate farewell kiss. Blanche's flirtation with the newspaper collector also displays her unhealthy sexual preoccupation with teenage boys, which we learn of later in the play. **Shep**

**Huntleigh**-A former suitor of Blanche's whom she met again a year before her arrival in New Orleans while vacationing in Miami. Blanche hopes he will provide the financial support for her and Stella to escape from Stanley. As Blanche's mental stability deteriorates, her fantasy that Shep is coming to sweep her away becomes more and more real to her. **Steve** - Stanley's poker buddy who lives upstairs with his wife, Eunice. He is a brutish, hot-blooded, physically fit male and an abusive husband. **Pablo**-Stanley's poker buddy. His hispanic ethnicity emphasizes the culturally diverse nature of their neighborhood. **A Doctor**-At the play's finale, the doctor arrives to whisk Blanche off to an asylum. The doctor ironically conforms to Blanche's notions of the chivalric Southern gentleman who will offer her salvation. **A Mexican Woman**-A vendor of Mexican funeral decorations who frightens Blanche by issuing the plaintive call "*Flores para los muertos*," which means "Flowers for the dead."

**Shaw**-A supply man who is Stanley's co worker and his source for stories of Blanche's disreputable past in Laurel, Mississippi. Shaw travels regularly through Laurel.

**Plot summary:** Blanche comes to live with Stella and Stanley. Blanche is clearly disdainful of their social class, and looks down upon their living habits. Blanche explains that Belle Reve has been lost, and thus she will be staying with Stella for a while. It is immediately clear that Stanley and Blanche do not like each other. During the game of poker, Stanley erupts into a rage, throwing a radio out a window and beating Stella; the other men have to restrain him to prevent more damage. Despite this, Stella returns to Stanley and loves him just as much as always. Blanche attempts to get Stella to see that Stanley is an animal, but she is blinded by her love. Blanche begins a relationship with Mitch, however, this is cut short when Stanley digs into her past and unveils why she left. Her relations with strangers gave her a bad reputation. Knowing this, Mitch determines that she is not worthy to be married, but still tries to get her to sleep with him. After driving Mitch off with cries of "fire" Blanche quickly begins descending into delusions. Stanley eventually rapes Blanche, who is then sent to a mental institution due to her delusional behavior.

**Point of view/narrator:** As a drama, there is no explicit point of view from which the story is told, characters all reveal themselves through dialogue and stage directions. However, Blanche is the main focus of the play and multiple aspects of it focus specifically on her, such as the polka music.

**Themes:** fantasy vs. reality, relationship between sex and death, dependence on men, truth's inevitability

**Literary Devices:**

1. Symbolism - "you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me" (6.120).

The shift from light to dark in the play makes it more obvious to the audience that the situation is not as it appears or that the truth is not being told.

The symbolism in the play enhances that theme that darkness hides imperfections. Blanche clearly has a plethora of imperfections to hide, ranging from her increasing age, to her scandal in Laurel. When she is out of the light, Blanche is more easily able to live in her make-believe world.

2. Music - "It's a Barnum and Bailey world, Just as phony as it can be." (9.30-45)

The different types of music allow the audience to feel as if they are sharing the experience with Blanche. Oftentimes, the music that Blanche hears is all in her head, emphasizing the idea that she is an unstable character.

The music used illuminates the theme that Blanche's fantasy cannot overcome reality. The music is clearly Blanche's attempt to distract herself from whatever traumatic experience she is going through or retelling. Even with the music as a distraction, her sorrow is evident.

**Quotes:**

1. Title

Right from the beginning of the drama, Blanche reveals the metaphorical value of the title when discussing with Eunice and the Negro woman in Scene 1. *"They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!"* The journey of transportation that Blanche makes to reach her sister's home represents Blanche's life at this certain point. Elysian Fields, the Kowalskis' street, is named for the land of the dead in Greek mythology. While desire represents her own sexual urges. Her pursuit of her sexual "desires" led to her social death and expulsion from her hometown of Laurel, Mississippi. Now having no choice but to go to New Orleans, Blanche is living in the consequence of her actions.

2. Character

The character of Stanley Kowalski is shown to be brute, masculine, and highly sexual. Throughout the drama, Stanley continues to focus on the sexual life he has with his wife and shows anger to events or people who get in the way of that. When discussing the desire for Blanche to leave in Scene 8, Stanley states to Stella, *"God, honey, it's gonna be sweet when we can make noise in the night the way that we used to and get the colored lights going with nobody's sister behind the curtains to hear us!"* Despite the fact that Stella is upset and conflicted between Blanche and her husband, Stanley attempts to comfort her through means of sex. This shows that physical nature Stanley is revolved around as well as foreshadowing Stanley raping Blanche after being so male dominant and angrily frustrated with Stella that he continues to abuse her.

3. Theme

Blanche clearly shows a dependence on men through her any means of lovers. After the death of her husband due to his homosexuality, Blanche pursues many physical relationships with men in order to comfort herself and forget her past. After

Mitch refuses to be with Blanche and Stanley is having her sent to a mental institution, Blanche tells the doctor taking her in Scene 11, "*Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers*". Blanche's final remark indicates her total detachment from reality and her decision to see life only as she wishes to perceive it. Blanche's final comment is ironic because the doctor is not the chivalric Shep Huntleigh type of gentleman Blanche thinks he is and Blanche's dependence "on the kindness of strangers" rather than on herself is the reason why she has not had a very successful life. In truth, strangers have been kind only in exchange for sex.