

A LEVEL

Delivery Guide

H474

Accredited

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (EMC)

Theme: Tennessee Williams,
A Streetcar Named Desire

A Level, Paper 2, Section B

The language of Poetry and Plays

September 2015



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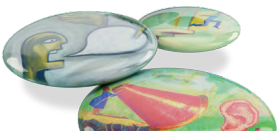
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Introduction

Delivery guides are designed to represent a body of knowledge about teaching a particular topic and contain:

- Content: A clear outline of the content covered by the delivery guide;
- Thinking Conceptually: expert guidance on the key concepts involved, common difficulties students may have, approaches to teaching that can help students understand these concepts and how this topic links conceptually to other areas of the subject;
- Thinking Contextually: A range of suggested teaching activities using a variety of themes so that different activities can be selected that best suit particular classes, learning styles or teaching approaches.

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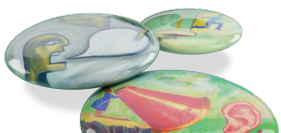
KEY



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Curriculum Content

Component 02 is entitled The Language of Poetry and Plays. It is assessed by a closed text, two hour written examination which represents 32% of the qualification. The first section deals with poetry, the second with drama. Students divide their time equally between the two sections.

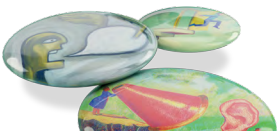
The drama question asks students to analyse the use and impact of dramatic and stylistic techniques, demonstrating how meaning and effects are created in the play they have studied. They are given a short extract from the play which is printed in the exam paper. Students must draw on their knowledge of dramatic and stylistic techniques to show knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the playwright presents a theme, idea, character or other aspect of the drama in the extract.

Students are expected to:

- Show knowledge and understanding of the play they have studied.
- Use linguistic and stylistic approaches and an understanding of dramatic techniques to develop an analysis of the text.
- Apply relevant methods for text analysis, drawing on linguistic and literary approaches.
- Explore contexts and connections between the scene and the play as a whole, as well as literary and generic contexts.

Tackling the question will involve:

- Exploration of dramatic effect, most significantly the structure of dramatic dialogue but also on-stage and off-stage action, paralinguistic features (gesture, manner of speech, facial expression), soliloquy, asides, dramatic irony.
- Analysis of the structure of the play (opening and closure, use of repetition, pattern making and breaking, parallel and contrasting characters and action, cause and effect narrative vs episodic structure).
- Identification and description of the ways in which meanings and effects are conveyed through language; very probably drawing on students' knowledge of linguistic, literary and stylistic approaches but also adding or developing material on spoken language.
- Consideration of the significance of relevant dramatic or other contexts.

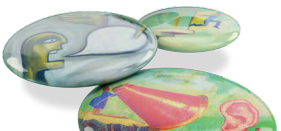


Curriculum Content

Teaching *A Streetcar Named Desire*

One of *Streetcar*'s great advantages as a text to teach is its episodic structure – the eleven scenes are roughly the same length and each can be taught in a standard lesson. It might take two lessons to set things up and cover some context and the first scene; another ten or so to explore the rest of the play; and then three or four more to do some round-up activities. Overall, teachers might spend about 21–25 teaching hours on the play.

The 1951 film version of the play starring Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh is easily available and a must for teaching. It sticks pretty closely to the text and is a fascinating reading of it. There are a couple of variations (notably at the end) which would provoke interesting discussion.



Thinking Conceptually

It is likely that the drama text will be one of the last components of the A Level course to be studied so students will come to *A Streetcar Named Desire* with a confident working knowledge of the analysis of lexico-grammatical features, semantics and pragmatics, denotation and connotation, discourse and genre from their study of the non-fiction anthology, the poetry and the novel. They will also be aware from the transcripts in the non-fiction anthology of some of the features of spoken language and its differences from the written. However, it may be a good idea to begin their study of *A Streetcar Named Desire* with an activity that contrasts the differences between spoken language and dramatic dialogue.

Teaching could start with this observation from Mick Short:

"If dramatic dialogue is both like and unlike ordinary conversation, it is important for us to see where the similarities and dissimilarities lie. We can only apply conversational analysis to drama in relation to those areas where conversation and plays are similar." Mick Short, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* (London: Longman, 1995, p.174).

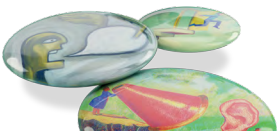
Get the group to discuss in pairs what they think the similarities and differences may be. Give as a stimulus a short transcript and a different example of dramatic dialogue to each pairing (e.g. extracts from Shakespeare, *EastEnders*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Caretaker*, *Top Girls* all work well). Students may come up with some of the following things which Mick Short identifies in chapter 6 of *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* (indispensable reading for material of this kind).

Short argues that dramatic dialogue *is* like conversation because:

- Both feature turn-taking
- Speech acts in both are context dependent
- We use schemas to make sense of conversations in drama *and* real life
- Dramatic characters often say one thing and mean another and this is true of life as well.

Short argues that dramatic dialogue is *not* like conversation because:

- Dramatic dialogue is written to be spoken whereas casual conversation is unprepared and unrehearsed.
- Drama has a 'double-discourse' structure: the overarching level of discourse is that between the playwright and the audience. Talk between characters is embedded in that higher discourse, allowing the audience to 'listen in' to what the characters say.
- Non-fluency features do not occur in dramatic or fictional dialogue (even though it is written to be spoken). If features from normal non-fluency do occur they are perceived by readers and audience as having a *meaningful* function precisely because they know that the dramatist must have included them *on purpose*.
- In well-constructed dramatic dialogue everything is meant by the playwright, even when it is apparently unintended by the character. The more realistic the dialogue, the more it should seem to be 'unaimed': unrelated to some obvious strategic or thematic purpose of the author's design.



Thinking Conceptually

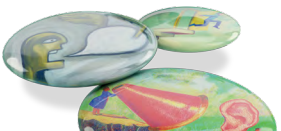
- Back-channel behaviour does not occur as frequently in scripted speech as it does in real life.

Short proposes a **scale of realism** for dramatic texts and suggests consideration of the following questions when discussing how realistic a text is:

- 1) Is the lexis formal or informal?
- 2) How complex is the grammatical structure of sentences?
Is the dominant syntactic pattern for complex sentences anticipatory or trailing?
- 3) To what extent are there graphological contractions (e.g. I'll, you'd)?
- 4) What features associated with normal non-fluency are present? How are they to be interpreted in context?

Once the first few scenes of *A Streetcar Named Desire* have been covered, returning to Short's scale of realism may be an interesting activity as different scenes offer different degrees of conversational realism.

It is also a good idea to get students thinking about the ways in which studying a drama text is different to studying prose fiction and poetry. There is an excellent activity exploring this in the English and Media Centre's book to accompany this course.



Thinking Contextually

I: Genre – *A Streetcar Named Desire* and tragedy

Thinking about *Streetcar* as a tragedy is a very useful way into the play. Although it's important to steer students away from an unthinking checklist approach to tragedy, the play lends itself to analysis from both traditional Aristotelian and more political, materialist perspectives.

Teachers could use this model, drawn from Aristotle's *Poetics*, as a starting point but one that students should be encouraged to interrogate.

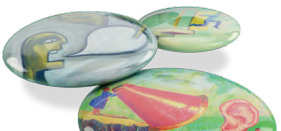
Characteristics of a tragedy:

- A tragic hero – a term treated with suspicion by some critics who prefer the more neutral 'protagonist'.
- The protagonist is basically good.
- The protagonist is usually high-born or someone of significance in society ('one who is highly renowned and prosperous', says Aristotle) so that their actions have consequences for the community and not simply for themselves.
- A plot built around a downturn in the protagonist's fortunes often triggered by a tragic flaw or error of judgement on the protagonist's part.
- A progression from order to disorder, harmony to chaos.
- The action of a tragedy seems to unfold with a horrible inevitability.
- Unhappy endings – the tragic catastrophe.
- An antagonist, a figure who stands out against the protagonist.
- The protagonist often has some moment of self-knowledge near the end of the play.
- The audience feel sorrow and pity at the end of a tragedy but leave the theatre morally enlightened and ennobled by their vicarious experience of tragic suffering.

This very simplified model begs some important questions:

Is it necessary to be rich and powerful in order to be a tragic protagonist? As Williams' great contemporary Arthur Miller puts it, 'It matters not at all whether a modern play concerns itself with a grocer or a president if the intensity of the hero's commitment to his course is less than the maximum possible.' ('Introduction' to *Plays I*, London: Methuen, 1988, p.33)

Is the catastrophe inevitable? Could matters have been different? Raymond Williams writes, 'We have to see not only that suffering is avoidable, but that it is not avoided. And not only that suffering breaks us but that it need not break us.' (*Modern Tragedy* [1960] Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966, pp.202–3)



Thinking Contextually

Is the tragedy the result of individual failing (the tragic flaw) or a mistake, or might wider social forces and conflicts be to blame? Adrian Poole argues that tragic playwrights 'stage the points of convergence at which light and darkness meet, the sacred and secular, divine power and human reason. The ages that produced their drama were not characterized by stable coherent belief. It was precisely the conflicts to which they gave expression, between old religion and new politics, between traditional faith and modern rationalism, between the sacred and the secular' (*Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: OUP, 2005, p.29)

Does the protagonist have to be morally good? Aristotle himself is ambivalent on this: 'It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear.'

Do we feel better/enlightened/uplifted after watching a tragedy? Terry Eagleton takes issue with the idea that, as he puts it, 'tragic suffering is ennobling rather than appalling': 'In this perverse vision, real-life calamities – an air crash, a famine, an outbreak of genocide – do not count as tragic, since they leave us despondent rather than delighted. Aeschylus is tragic, but Auschwitz is not. [...] Besides, in this view tragedy is a thoroughly virile affair, a matter of heroes, warriors and a very masculine nobility of spirit. It does not chime with the sensibility of a secular, sceptical, democratic age.' (Foreword to third edition of Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004, p.x)

Does tragedy ever give us hope for the future or does it portray life as meaningless and chaotic? 'Some critics find the experience of watching the end of a tragedy to be a gloomy confirmation of human powerlessness,' writes Sean McEvoy, 'others see there a pointer to a more just world which is perhaps the product of, but separate from the conflicting forces which have just destroyed the protagonist. There is death, waste and destruction at the end of a tragedy, but there is always some hope.' (*Shakespeare: The Basics*, London: Routledge, 2000, p.185)

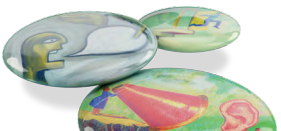
Two other viewpoints relevant to *Streetcar*:

'Tragedy always deals with toxic matter bequeathed by the past to the present. In personal terms, this often means what fathers and mothers have passed on to their children in the form of duties, loyalties, passions and injuries.'

Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2005, p.35)

'Tragedy is the art form created to confront the most difficult experiences we face: death, loss, injustice, thwarted passion, despair.'

Jennifer Wallace, *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007, p.1)



Thinking Contextually

II: *A Streetcar Named Desire* and ideas of the American South

'I write out of love for the South,' wrote Williams, 'But I can't expect Southerners to realise that my writing about them is an expression of love. It is out of regret for a South that no longer exists that I write of the forces that destroyed it.' (quoted by his mother in Edwina Dakin Williams and Lucy Freeman, *Remember Me to Tom* (New York: Putnam, 1963).

Ideas of the South are very important to *Streetcar*; here are some things the students should know:

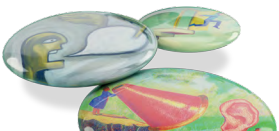
The prosperous economy of the southern states, founded on cotton plantations worked by Negro slaves, was ruined after defeat in the American Civil War (1861–65) which killed millions and almost broke a nation, leaving deep scars and the guilt and trauma of slavery. The South's recovery was further held back by inadequate educational provision, poverty, racial conflict and what Rod Horton and Herbert Edwards call 'a paralyzing obsession with the largely imaginary glories of the past'.

The southern states have a very distinct regional identity. Southerners are supposed to have a particularly romantic temperament; according to this archetype, their key characteristics include:

- Individualism
- Sensitivity to criticism
- A highly developed code of personal honour
- Pride in race and the family
- A chivalric attitude to women
- Formal patterns of behaviour
- A fondness for rhetoric
- A lack of intellectual stature
- A romantic and nostalgic conservatism.

A character in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* (1936) tells a Northerner, 'You cant [sic] understand the South. You would have to be born there.' It would be helpful, perhaps after the play has been taught, to see how many of these bullet points inform the play and especially Williams' characterisation of Blanche.

[References: Malcolm Bradbury (ed.), *The Atlas of Literature* (London and New York: De Agostini, 1996, pp.122–126); Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, third edition (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974, p.374)]

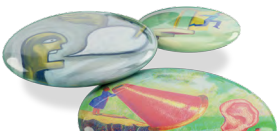


Thinking Contextually

III: Production background

- *A Streetcar Named Desire* was first produced in America on Broadway in 1947, directed by Elia Kazan, and in Great Britain in 1949 in a production directed by Laurence Olivier.
- The Broadway production ran for two years and 855 performances and won Williams the New York Drama Critics' Circle Best Play award and the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1948.
- *Streetcar*, according to Thomas Powers, 'was the play that set Williams apart for life. Few lines outside of Shakespeare are as widely recognised as Blanche's final words – "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." Blanche and Stanley are among the great characters of American literature.'
- Other key plays by Williams include *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959) and *Night of the Iguana* (1961).
- Other key American plays of this period include: Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1946).
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* has been filmed twice: the 1951 adaptation was directed by Elia Kazan and starred Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh, Kim Hunter and Karl Malden. A further version made for American television was screened in 1984 and starred Ann-Margret and Treat Williams.
- The play has been frequently revived since with Glenn Close, Jessica Lange, Natasha Richardson, Rachel Weisz, and Gillian Anderson all playing the role of Blanche.
- Compared to other 'serious' plays from that period in the American theatre, it has an astonishingly wide cultural influence and provides the basis for one of the greatest episodes of *The Simpsons*, 'A Streetcar Called Marge'.

[Source: Thomas Powers, 'One Great Good True Thing', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 36, No. 22, 20 November 2014, pp.13–15]



Thinking Contextually

IV: Theatrical styles

One of the most interesting aspects of *Streetcar* is its combination of realist and expressionist features.

As a round-up activity, students could identify which features they find in *Streetcar*. Use the following lists of features of these theatrical styles.

Realism	Expressionism
Characters are believable, everyday types; actors wear costumes and make-up appropriate to the character played. Often the protagonist will rise up and assert themselves against injustice of some kind.	Characters are mostly nameless and impersonal; they represent some general class or attitude; their characteristics are emphasized by costumes, masks or make-up.
Stage settings and props are often indoors and believable. A 'box set' is normally used, consisting of three walls and an invisible 'fourth wall' facing the audience.	Setting avoids reproducing the detail of realist drama, preferring starkly simplified images called for by the play. Sets could also be virtually abstract and unlocalised, often appearing angular and distorted as in a bad dream. Props are few and symbolic.
Acting style is realistic (following Stanislavski's 'method').	Acting style departs from realism, producing aspects of human behaviour in the broadest of strokes. Acting could be intense and violent and express tormented emotions. Speech is rapid, breathless and staccato with gesture and movement urgent and energetic.
Dialogue is not heightened for effect, but is that of everyday speech (vernacular).	Dialogue moves away from everyday conversation and is poetical, febrile, rhapsodic, often clipped and fragmented.
Action is linear, based on cause and effect, and is psychologically driven and plausible.	Action is episodic; these episodes may represent stages of the protagonist's life or a sequence of visions as seen through their subconscious mind as in a dream play.
Audience can identify with the everyday situations and characters on stage; lighting complements time and situation.	Atmosphere is often vivid, dream-like and nightmarish, aided by unrealistic lighting and visual distortions in set.
The whole effect is of transparency; nothing draws attention to the act of making theatre.	Self-conscious; the separate elements of the production are obvious and undisguised.

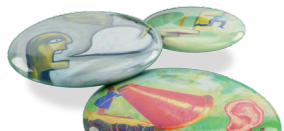
Material in this grid draws largely on the following:

<http://www.thedramateacher.com/expressionism-in-the-theatre/>

<http://www.thedramateacher.com/realism-and-naturalism-theatre-conventions/>

▶ Click here

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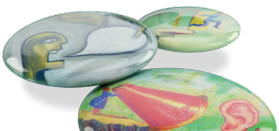


Thinking Contextually

V: Narrative context

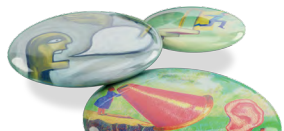
Pre-action timeline:

C17-C19	DuBois family established at Belle Reve, Laurel, Mississippi (Blanche tells Stanley, 'There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve.'). Thanks to the 'epic fornications' of Blanche and Stella's 'improvident grandfathers and fathers and uncles and brothers', everything is lost.
1917	September, Blanche born (she is 30 as the play begins).
1922	Stella born.
1933	Blanche elopes with and marries Allan Gray; he commits suicide.
1937	Stella leaves Belle Reve for New Orleans. Stella and Blanche's father dies.
Late 30s/early 40s	Blanche left to care for everything. Mother, Margaret, and Cousin Jessie die. Blanche teaches English at Laurel High School. All that's left of the estate is the house, 20 acres of ground and the graveyard. Stella marries Stanley (he's still in uniform at the time).
1946	Christmas Eve, Blanche meets Shep Huntleigh in Miami (assuming this isn't a figment of Blanche's imagination).
1947	Spring term, Blanche is fired from her job after an affair with one of her students; Belle Reve is finally lost; Blanche moves to the Hotel Flamingo. End of April, Blanche is asked to leave the Hotel Flamingo. Early May, Blanche arrives in New Orleans.



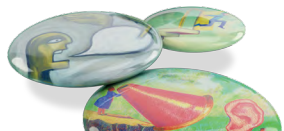
Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
<p>Activity 1: The opening stage direction and first few lines (to Stanley's entrance).</p> <p>Find some pictures of <i>Streetcar</i> sets (just type 'A Streetcar Named Desire set design' into the image search of a well known search engine; the set for the recent Young Vic production is especially interesting). Have these displayed.</p> <p>Read out the opening stage direction and the first few lines of dialogue up to and including the Negro woman's third line. Ask the students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• identify the significance of the things Williams describes; what sort of play might this be?• suggest some problems the stage direction might pose for designers and directors. <p>Students might come up with some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The name Elysian Fields is interesting; Elysian to do with heaven/paradise especially in classical culture, fields connoting pastoral. Irony therefore as the name is at odds with the down-at-heel, modern American urban setting.• The neighbourhood is poor but not unappealing – 'raffish charm'.• The 'white frame' houses point back to a French colonial past.• Several of the details might reflect the way Williams is to characterise Blanche: 'quaintly ornamented', 'a kind of lyricism [which] gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay'.• A sense of the in-between – it's early May and we're in 'the first dark of an evening'.• How does a designer render the 'faint redolences of bananas and coffee'? Note the appeal to the senses: sights, sounds, smells, touch.• The idea of life expressed through Afro-American culture, especially the music (the 'blue piano' becomes a key motif through the play) – is this at odds with the 'atmosphere of decay'?• The play begins <i>in medias res</i> (in the middle of things).• The negro woman's first line is probably a dirty joke which builds on the idea of sexuality as key theme, also developed by the sailor's date. The open references to sex and alcohol (the 'Blue Moon' cocktail) add to both the 'raffishness' Williams specifies in the stage direction and 'the spirit of life which goes on here'.• Slight hint that the Four Deuces may be a brothel; certainly you might be expected to get ripped off there ('that clip joint').• The vendor's cry 'Red hot!' suggests ideas of desire and hell fire, so both a complement to and an opposite of the spirit of life.	

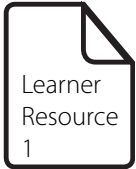


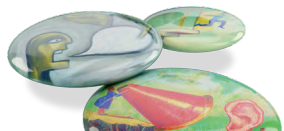
Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
<p>Activity 2: Mapping the central characters</p> <p>When beginning to teach the play, give students the following ten questions and allocate to each student one of the four central characters – Blanche, Stanley, Stella and Mitch.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) How is your character introduced into the play?2) What clues do the stage directions give about costume and physical appearance?3) What does your character do? How does she or he behave? Are his or her actions consistent?4) What do other characters say about him/her?5) What is your character's position/state of mind at the start of the play?6) In what ways does your character change during the drama?7) How does your character end up?8) How does your character use language?9) What key themes and ideas are developed through your character?10) What things are associated with your character? E.g. the blue piano and Stanley. <p>Get students to answer these questions as you work through the play, updating answers where necessary. This could work well as an out-of-class activity and, if done electronically, results could be shared through the teacher's VLE so everyone has a 'map' of the major characters.</p>	



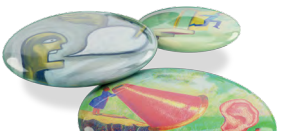
Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
<p>Activity 3: Minor and unseen characters</p> <p><i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> is structured around the interaction of the four key characters – Blanche, Stanley, Stella and Mitch; however, the minor characters have great significance too, and Williams’s use of two unseen characters from Blanche’s past (her dead husband and, assuming he actually exists, Shep Huntleigh) is also important to the play’s narrative and themes.</p> <p>Get students into pairs or small groups and allocate them one of the following characters or groups of characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eunice • Pablo and Steve • Shep Huntleigh • Allan Grey • The <i>Evening Star</i> boy • The doctor and matron • The Negro woman, the Mexican woman and the tamale vendor <p>with the following prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In which parts of the play do your character or characters appear? If you’re dealing with unseen characters, when are they mentioned? • What light do they shed on the central characters? • In what ways do they further the plot? • Which themes do they help to develop? 	
<p>Activity 4: Blanche and Stanley’s modes of speech</p> <p>Give students the list of 20 features of spoken language in Learner Resource 1.</p> <p>Working in pairs, students should decide which are features of Stanley’s language and which of Blanche’s; several (unmitigated face threatening acts, irony, racist epithets, for example) are common to both. Then, get them to find examples of each feature, or select a section of an exchange between Stanley and Blanche which they consider an especially good illustration of the characters’ modes of speech, exploring how Williams uses these elements of dramatic dialogue to develop characterisation.</p>	 <p>Learner Resource 1</p>



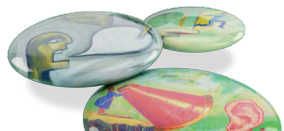
Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
<p>Activity 5: Blanche and rhetoric</p> <p>Choose some of Blanche's longer speeches:</p> <p>Scene One: (I, I, I took the blows ... In bed with your – Polack!)</p> <p>Scene Four (He acts like an animal ... <i>don't hang back with the brutes.</i>)</p> <p>Scene Five (I never was hard or self-sufficient enough ... And I – I'm fading now.)</p> <p>Scene Six (He was a boy ... stronger than this – kitchen – candle ...)</p> <p>Scene Ten (It won't be the sort of thing ... And let there be no hard feelings.)</p> <p>Supply students with the following list of rhetorical devices (if preferred, omitting the complicated Greek words) and ask students to identify as many devices as they can, commenting on what each tells us about Blanche.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhortation• Hyperbole• Antithesis• Repetition• Metaphor• Parenthesis• A sudden outcry (ecphonesis)• Construction of a climax (a linked series A-B, B-C, C-D)• Verbal scene-painting (pragmatographia). <p>This exercise might lead to a discussion of realism (Do people actually talk like this? Is the highly rhetorical nature of Blanche's language an example of the tension in the play's style between realism and expressionism?). It reminds us of Blanche's pronounced tendency to self-dramatisation, her literary education, her artifice. Blanche may claim to disdain 'evasions and ambiguities' but they are fundamental to the construction of her persona and her highly artificial manner of speech is a crucial part of this.</p>	

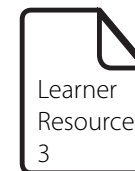
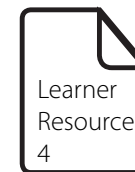
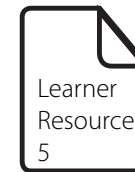
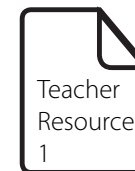


Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
<p>Activity 6: Face threatening acts</p> <p>Brown and Levinson's concept of the face threatening act is incredibly useful to the close analysis of a play like <i>Streetcar</i> in which antagonism between characters is such a significant part of the narrative. The clearest explanation of their idea is found in Mick Short's <i>Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose</i> (pp.113–114), on which the following summary is based:</p> <p>Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) developed a framework around the concept of face, which they define as 'your public self-image'. Face is built around two components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive face: the need for our actions and wants to be desirable to other people as well as ourselves (e.g. being told 'well done'). • Negative face: the wish that our actions should be unimpeded by others; e.g. our negative face is threatened when someone interrupts us because it impedes our desire to speak. <p>Politeness involves speakers showing an awareness of others' face needs. When actions or speech acts threaten someone's face, we denote these as face threatening acts (FTAs). It is virtually impossible to avoid FTAs so speakers minimise or mitigate the amount of threat by the way they say or do things. When visiting someone, people open the door gently not abruptly; they ask rather than order someone to do the washing up. Asking gives the interlocutor the option of saying 'no' without social disruption, but ordering makes saying 'no' much more difficult.</p> <p>For example, the phrase, 'I know you're really pushed for time, but could you help me with my homework, please?', mitigates the FTA by a) taking account of the other person's face needs in the first clause, b) apparently asking a question about his or her ability to offer help, and c) adding the politeness marker 'please'.</p> <p>Similarly, if trying to mitigate the threat to someone's positive face, a speaker might need to take a more indirect tack (similar to Leech's approbation maxim). When marking, a teacher might write, 'There was a complete lack of detail in your essay', which obviously threatens the essay-writer's positive face. This could be mitigated by writing, 'Perhaps interesting ideas might have been improved by a more detailed use of quotation.'</p> <p>In <i>Streetcar</i>, the different ways the characters threaten each other's positive and negative faces and the degree to which they try to mitigate their FTAs reveal a lot about Williams' characterisation and the attitudes and values of the play. Stanley, 'simple, straightforward and honest', tends to be direct and rarely bothers with mitigation; Stella, an altogether more emollient character, takes great care of the face needs of others; Blanche can be just as direct and tactless as Stanley but, remembering the formalities of her aristocratic upbringing, is at other times much more polite and mitigates her FTAs with greater sensitivity.</p> <p>The grid in Learner Resource 2 could work as a classroom exercise exploring these ideas.</p>	<div data-bbox="1727 1209 1872 1382" data-label="Image"> </div>



Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
<p>Activity 7: Dramatic effect in Scene 6</p> <p>This activity is designed to get students focusing on the exam question and the need to analyse the dramatic effect of features of spoken language and literary devices they identify. The grid in Learner Resource 3 could be given to students in several ways: a) with the first column left blank so they have to identify key quotations; b) with the second column left blank so they have to identify features of language and literary devices; or c) with the third column left blank so they have to think about the dramatic effect; or d) a combination of all three (which is probably the best method).</p> <p>A similar grid could be used for other scenes or students could be given blank grids and asked to choose an extract and then fill in each box.</p> <p>This exercise assumes familiarity with Grice's maxims and his notion of conversational implicature; Leech's maxims of politeness or Lakoff's politeness principle; and Howard Giles' theory of accommodation. Anything with which students are unfamiliar can be deleted or the scene can be used to teach these theoretical ideas.</p>	 <p>Learner Resource 3</p>
<p>Activity 8: Critical responses</p> <p>Learner Resource 4 cites extracts from reviews of two major recent productions of the play. Students should work in groups on the quotations, deciding whether or not they agree with the views expressed or with the staging choices described (for example, updating to the present day in the case of the Young Vic production, physicalising Blanche's dead husband in the Donmar production) and finding evidence from the play to support their opinions.</p>	 <p>Learner Resource 4</p>
<p>Activity 9: Approaching the exam question</p> <p>Students should be given the five questions in Learner Resource 5.</p> <p>Students should work in groups with the following prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative context • What does this extract tell you about the specified theme? • Characterisation • Dialogue/features of spoken language/features of literary language/politeness • Other aspects of theatrical meaning-making: lighting, sound, proxemics, costume. <p>Teacher Resource 1 contains a commentary on the extract specified in question 5.</p>	 <p>Learner Resource 5</p>  <p>Teacher Resource 1</p>

Learner Resource 1 Blanche and Stanley's modes of speech



- 1) Use of colloquialisms
- 2) Tendency to flout Grice's maxim of manner
- 3) Use of literary allusion/quotation
- 4) Use of Bernstein's restricted code/high frequency lexis
- 5) Non-standard grammar
- 6) Irony
- 7) Tendency to flout Grice's maxim of quality
- 8) Unmitigated face threatening acts
- 9) Complex, multi-claused sentence structures
- 10) Prolonged speaking turns
- 11) Insistence on the importance of politeness/tact/chivalry
- 12) Use of Bernstein's elaborated code/low frequency lexis
- 13) Reliance on conversational implicature
- 14) Deliberate refusal to pay compliments (mistrust of chivalry)
- 15) Use of racist epithets
- 16) Sarcasm
- 17) Vivid, foregrounded language full of similes and metaphors
- 18) Frequent use of suprasegmental features (especially volume)
- 19) Tendency to melodramatic language
- 20) Simple or minor sentences

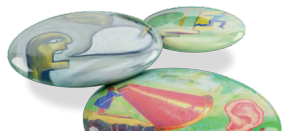


Learner Resource 2 Face threatening acts



All the lines quoted come from the first three scenes; page references are to the Heinemann edition. The first row has been completed as an example.

Page	Line	Speaker	Positive/ Negative Face?	Mitigated Y/N? How?	Dramatic effect/attitudes and values
6	If you will excuse me, I'm about to drop.	Blanche	Negative	Yes. Polite subordinate clause; use of implicature to suggest her need to be alone without stating it directly.	Blanche's nervousness and emotional exhaustion; her rather condescending attitude to Eunice.
9	You messy child, you, you've spilt something on that pretty white lace collar.				
10	The summer Dad died and you left us ...				
14	Where were <i>you</i> ? In bed with your – Polack!				
19	I'm going to try to keep Blanche out till the party breaks up because I don't know how she would take it. So we'll go to one of the little places in the Quarter afterwards and you'd better give me some money.				
22	May I have a drag on your cig?				
27	The touch of your hands insults them!				
32	Aw, for God's sake, go home then.				
33	Why don't you women go up and sit with Eunice?				
33	Couldn't you call it quits after one more hand?				
43	You can't beat up on a woman an'then call 'er back! She won't come! And her goin't' have a baby! ... You stinker! You whelp of a Polack!				

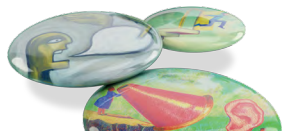


Learner Resource 3 Dramatic effect in Scene 6



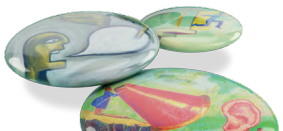
Page references are to the Heinemann edition of the play but quotations appear in chronological order so shouldn't be hard to find.

Line from the play	Features of spoken language/literary devices	Dramatic effect
Is that streetcar named Desire still grinding along the tracks at this hour? (67)	Key symbol of the play.	Shows Blanche's cynicism about desire and its mechanical nature.
Good boy! I guess you – want to go now. (68)	Condescending endearment + scripted non-fluency + conversational implicature	Shows Blanche's condescension, her lack of desire for Mitch, and her indirect efforts to persuade him to leave
It was the other little familiarity – that I – felt obliged to – discourage. (68)	Euphemism, scripted non-fluency.	Shows Blanche's well-bred sense of social tact; is the hesitation genuine? Is she really discouraging him or playing hard to get?
I guess you are used to girls that like to be lost. The kind that get lost immediately on the first date! (69)	Conversational implicature, euphemism, Blanche flouts Grice's maxim of manner.	Again, Blanche implies her awareness of Mitch's desire for her and of the courtship rituals they are going through. The word 'lost' is interesting – lost in the sense of socially compromised - but also more literally – lost in an alienating world.
<i>Voulez-vous couches avec moi ce soir? Vous ne comprenez pas? Ah, quell dommage!</i> (70)	Blanche diverges upwards by using a phrase in a foreign language she knows Mitch won't understand. She also flouts Grice's maxim of manner.	Shows her education, the social gulf between them, and undermines her apparent reluctance to respond to Mitch's 'little familiarity'.
Oh. Light weight alpaca. (70)	Polite back channel behaviour.	Shows how dull Blanche finds Mitch.
Well, you're a tall man and you can carry a good deal of weight without looking awkward. (71)	Blanche conforms to Leech's approbation maxim.	Shows Blanche flattering and indulging Mitch, but she's playing a role.
I said unhand me, sir. (72)	Use of an elaborated code. Anachronistic language.	Reinforces the sense of role-playing; Blanche as a damsel in distress. The literary, archaic language connects her to equally archaic codes of Southern chivalry.
B: Has he talked to you about me? M: Oh – not very much. B: The way you say that I suspect that he has. M: No, he hasn't said much. (73)	Adjacency pairs in the form of question and answer. Scripted non-fluency. Conversational implicature.	Pragmatics more important than semantics. Blanche tries to find out if Stanley has shared Shaw's revelations with Mitch, and, if he has, whether this has influenced his attitude to her. Mitch's hesitation betrays his embarrassment.



Learner Resource 3

Line from the play	Features of spoken language/literary devices	Dramatic effect
I didn't have a penny last year and so I had to come here for the summer. That's why I have to put up with my sister's husband. (73)	Much simpler and direct language. Shorter sentences. No use of figurative or elaborate language.	Shows greater honesty on Blanche's part, her contempt for Stanley, and the precariousness of her financial position.
Of course there is such a thing as the hostility of – perhaps in some perverse kind of way he – No! To think of it makes me ... (74)	Scripted non-fluency + conversational implicature	Shows Blanche's latent attraction to Stanley which here is literally unvoiced. The dramatic contrast between her indifference towards Mitch and the seeming intensity of her feelings for Stanley is crucial.
You talked to your mother about me? (74)	Blanche flouts Grice's maxim of relevance.	Blanche keeps up the pretence; playing a role again.
I think you have a great capacity for devotion. You will be lonely when she passes on, won't you? (75)	Blanche conforms to Leech's approbation maxim/Lakoff's politeness principle.	Shows Blanche's self-conscious attempts to engage with Mitch's emotional situation.



Learner Resource 4 Critical responses



On the Young Vic production, starring Gillian Anderson, 2013

Andrews [the director] honours Williams in not making it easy to take sides. There is no mistaking Williams's identification with his heroine. Yet there is no totally liking her either. And no denying the dramatist's bedazzlement by the brutal Stanley Kowalski. Gore Vidal thought that the character of Kowalski 'changed the concept of sex in America. Before him, no male was considered erotic.'

Susannah Clapp, *Observer*

Magda Willi's in-the-round design makes it clear that no one has a monopoly on the truth. [...] This is a tipsy arena which no single account can pin down. It is also a place in which the more characters tell, the more they conceal. The rectangular space – an apartment without walls – looks open but is actually made up of hiding places. The audience eavesdrop on characters who are themselves eavesdroppers.

It is part of the brilliance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* that while everyone fibs away, everyone delivers some truth.

Susannah Clapp, *Observer*

However, the real test of any production of Williams's play is whether it allows you to see each character's point of view. If Blanche is simply played as a cracked Southern belle and Stanley as a coarse brute, the play descends into melodrama.

Michael Billington, *Guardian*

The action is set in present day New Orleans, with great blasts of tumultuous rock music by the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Chris Isaak. [...] All this might sound like a tricky directorial ego trip but the effect is to make us see a familiar play with fresh eyes, as if we are experiencing it for the first time. We often stage Shakespeare in modern dress, Andrews seems to be saying. Why not Tennessee Williams too?

Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*

The updating to the present sits oddly with a play that talks of period bandleaders like Xavier Cugat and where the feel is of an America on the verge of postwar economic expansion. In the urge to make the play seem urgent and immediate some of Williams's poetry and humour gets lost.

Michael Billington, *Guardian*

When Stanley is on top her, passed out on the bed, he scrabbles furiously through the multiple layers of skirt in her pink princess-dress like a dog digging for a bone [...] Stanley's cruelty to Blanche is horribly crystallised by the fact that in this production he offers to return her precious Chinese lantern by contemptuously upending the pedal bin in which it has been dumped and dirtily desecrated.

Paul Taylor, *Independent*

The play is written on this borderline between the real and illusion: the fundamentals of theatre. The mythic is one space of theatre, and the tangible is another – and Stanley might represent that more animal presence and Blanche the more illusory presence.

Benedict Andrews, director of Young Vic production, quoted in *Independent*



Learner Resource 4

On the Donmar Warehouse production, starring Rachel Weisz, 2009

Stunningly, the young boy who comes collecting for charity, whom she kisses full on the mouth, is played by the same actor (Jack Ashton) who materialises as her dead husband. You suddenly realise that in these episodes, Williams is really writing about homosexual promiscuity, and Blanche is much less of a woman than a sexual butterfly with severely clipped wings.

Paul Taylor, *Independent*

Ashford's production over-externalises Blanche's dreams and memories: we see not once but many times the husband whom she discovered with another man and who subsequently shot himself. This strikes me as gratuitous since it spells out Blanche's inner tensions.

Michael Billington, *Guardian*

At the end, each of the characters is differently undone by Blanche's departure – Mitch stares vacantly into what was once her bedroom; Stella, agonised, clutches her baby; Stanley embraces Stella as if he could hug his way to a new start. Blanche has changed them all with her turbulence.

Susannah Clapp, *Observer*

Streetcar is one of those unrelentingly claustrophobic 20th century U.S. plays, so out of keeping with that country's outward optimism yet suggestive of the efforts some Americans have to make simply to stay afloat.

Quentin Letts, *Daily Mail*

Someone once defined tragedy as being when both sides are wrong. And I would say that's absolutely true in this case. There's no good guy; everyone is human and everyone is flawed, but there are some that have more tenderness than others. [...] I have never come across a female character that is written with Blanche's level of complexity, in that she's vulnerable, she's pathetic, she's a monster, she's nasty, she's tender, she's kind – she's so many things that you never know quite what she's going to do next.

Rachel Weisz, quoted in *Daily Telegraph*



Learner Resource 5 Approaching the exam question



1. Scene III, from Stella: 'The game is still going on.' to Stella: 'Stanley's the only one of his crowd that's likely to get anywhere.'

Explore how Williams presents ideas about social class and difference in this extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

2. Start of Scene IV to Blanche: 'You're married to a madman.'

Explore how Williams presents Stella and Stanley's relationship in this extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

3. Scene V, from SD 'STEVE and EUNICE come around the corner.' to Blanche: 'I have to admit I love to be waited on.'

Explore how Williams presents ideas about femininity in this extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

4. Scene VII, from Blanche: 'What happened while I was bathing?' to Stanley: '... so don't ever call me a Polack.'

Explore how Williams presents ideas about relationships in this extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

5. Scene IX, from Mitch: 'You lied to me, Blanche.' to Mitch: 'You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother.'

Explore how Williams presents ideas about sexuality and death in this extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire*.



Teacher Resource 1 Approaching the exam question

See
page 20

- The passage comes near the climax of the play. Stella has gone into labour and Stanley has taken her to hospital, leaving Blanche alone in their apartment. Having failed to attend her birthday celebration that afternoon, Mitch has arrived to see Blanche who is pathetically pleased to see him.
- The first four lines of the extract are all simple or minor sentences; Blanche and Mitch are communicating honestly for perhaps the first time in the play and this is reflected in the direct simplicity of their language. The word 'lie' is repeated six times in varying forms in just these four lines, emphasizing the significance to both characters of honesty or avoiding it.
- Blanche's line 'I didn't lie in my heart' recalls her earlier insistence that 'I don't tell the truth. I tell what *ought* to be the truth.' Sexuality is an area of Blanche's life about which she's least honest, knowing as she does that the truth would jeopardise completely her chances of a life with Mitch.
- The appearance of the blind Mexican woman crying in Spanish 'flowers for the dead' develops the equivocal relationship in the play between death and sexuality. Is sexual desire the opposite of death or the impulse that takes us towards it?
- The Mexican woman's cries trigger in Blanche memories of the 'grim reaper [putting] up his tent on our doorstep' and, as often in the final scenes, she retreats into the past, almost oblivious of Mitch. At this point, the Varsouviana returns, reminding the audience of Allan's death (also associated with sexual desires considered unacceptable) which ironically Blanche narrated to Mitch earlier in the play.
- Blanche's memory of an argument she has had in the past is vocalised: "If you'd done this, it wouldn't've cost me that!" It crystallises the state of her relationship with Mitch: her past indiscretions have cost her any chance of marriage.
- Her exclamatory minor sentence 'Legacies!' points towards the play's insistence on the past and its importance to Blanche's tragedy. As Adrian Poole notes, 'Tragedy always deals with toxic matter bequeathed by the past to the present.'
- Blanche returns here to horrors of death ('the struggle for breath and bleeding') which she outlined to Stella earlier in the play. Her speech is fragmented, with several ellipses and plenty of scripted non-fluency. Mitch is entirely silent in this passage, considerations of the present subordinate entirely to the past.
- Blanche's memories turn again to desire and her encounters with trainee soldiers on the lawn of Belle Reve. She makes the point explicitly that desire is the opposite of death but she says little of her own desires, recalling instead the desire of the soldiers *for* her. Sexual expression is encoded as a transgressive gesture towards the older generation as Blanche recalls slipping outside, past the 'deaf old lady' who 'suspected nothing'; this anticipates Mitch's reference to his mother later in the scene.
- It's interesting that her simile to describe the soldiers ('like daisies') extends the play's flower motif; Stella tells Blanche she looks 'fresh as a daisy', only for Blanche to retort, 'One that's been picked a few days'; Mitch brings Blanche roses at the end of Scene V; Blanche refers to herself as 'La Dame aux Camellias' in Scene VI; Stanley twice denies sarcastically that Blanche is like a lily in Scene VII; and obviously there is the cry of the Mexican flower seller in this scene.
- The focus returns to the present as the flower seller exits and the polka music fades out. Mitch becomes active, making the sort of physical advances on Blanche which on their earlier date she had 'felt obliged to discourage'. Mitch's sexual aggression anticipates Stanley's in the following scene and reveals his true desire for Blanche which has thus far been belied by his chivalrous behaviour (another example of a character performing a role).
- For Blanche, her sexual availability is contingent on marriage; earlier in the play, she tells Stella, 'I want his respect. And men don't want anything they get too easy.' There are several interesting ironies of her imperative 'Then marry me, Mitch!': it comes after her revelation of her sexual encounters with the soldiers, but it also reverses the expectation of Southern women of the time that it would be men that propose marriage – an indication of Blanche's desperation.
- Mitch's sexual double standards are revealed; he'll sleep with Blanche but, aware of her sexual past, no longer considers her marriage material. His cruelly direct threat to Blanche's positive face ('You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother.') is ironic given Blanche's incessant bathing during the play.





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