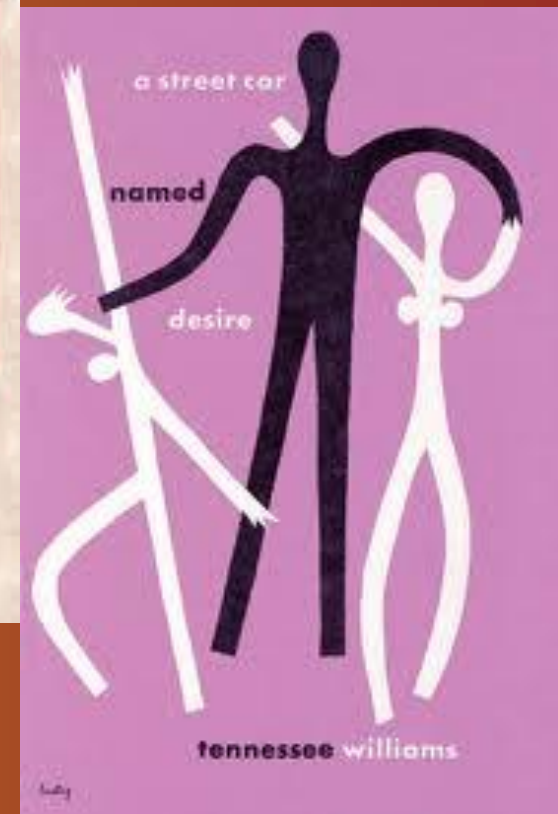
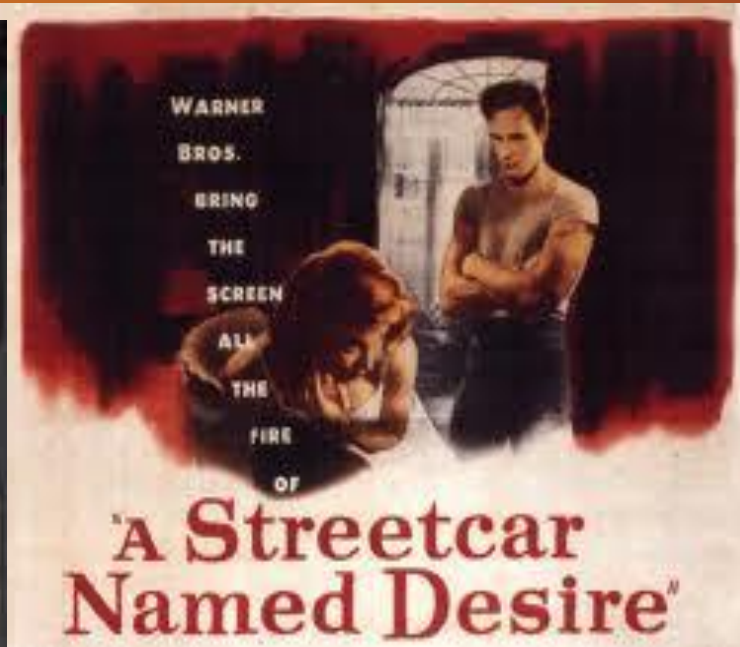
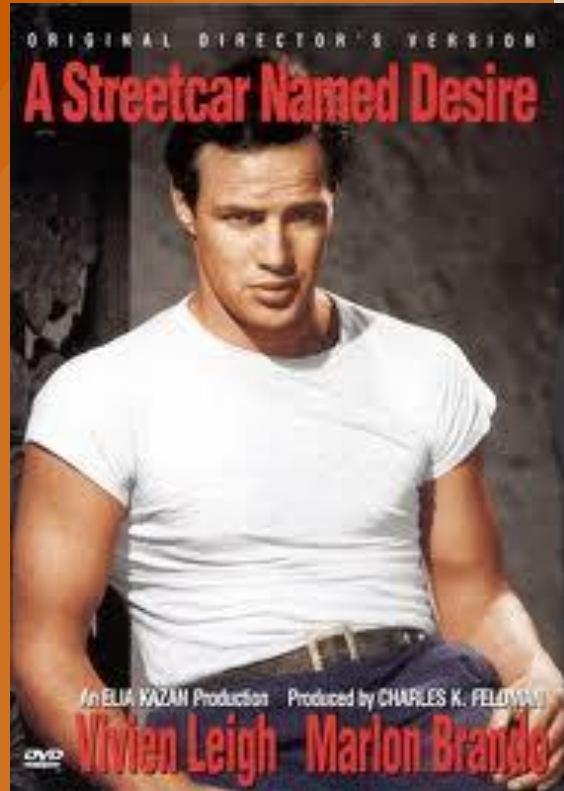


A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams



Uh, so what's this play about?

Major Themes/Universal Ideas to Consider:

- Victory of the Apes
- Inventing a Beautiful Past
- Destruction of the “Old South”
- Reality vs. Illusion



Victory of the Apes:

- ❖ You will see something animal-like in Stanley. (You will see his primitive qualities from the first moment in the play when he comes home lugging a package of bloody meat.)
- ❖ Stay alert through the play for many allusions to this subhuman quality of life in Elysian Fields
- ❖ Sometimes the play is described as a jungle: shrieks and groans pierce the hot, humid jungle, the women are referred to as “hens”, Mitch is described as a “bear”, and Stanley and Stella emit “low, animal moans”



Inventing a Beautiful Past:

- ❖ Almost all the characters have visions of a beautiful past when they think of memories.
- ❖ When the present is bleak, the past appears even rosier.
- ❖ There are major clues that Blanche and Stella live in an illusion.
- ❖ As you come across stories of the characters' past lives, think about why invention is used or needed.
- ❖ Majority of the inventing is associated with Blanche, but also think about the effect Blanche's inventions have on the other characters.



Destruction of the Old South

● Old South vs. New South

● Old Southern values stem from a genteel, romantic, idyllic time of plantations, culture, and etiquette/propriety – of aristocracy.

● New Southern values stem from a “survival of the fittest” rather than the inheritance of power and class.

● New Southern values come at a time where immigrants are becoming the backbone of American culture and the elegant lineage of the Old South is becoming extinct or muddled with the melting pot and industrialized working class.

● Stella, Blanche, Mitch, and Stanley represent different parts of the change/evolution of the southern tradition.

● “The Napoleonic Code” is an important concept in the evolution

● Similar to the concept of past vs. present → think a “tug of war” between new and old...eventually one side weakens

Reality vs. Illusion

- ❖ The conflict is founded on reality against illusion
- ❖ To some characters in Streetcar, reality is what you can touch and see. Since a human is an animal, to deny one's instincts, to hide one's feelings– those are dishonest acts.
- ❖ Conversely, some characters find refuge in dreams and illusions, playing a perpetual game of “pretend”. These characters say what OUGHT to be true, not what IS true.
- ❖ These two different types of people will not mesh. The instinctual type cannot stand the idealist



Motifs to Consider:

- Loneliness
- Desire [as it leads to] Death or Destruction
- Light vs. Dark
- Ceremonial Games
- Language
- Abuse/Violence
- Sound Effects



Loneliness:

- ❖ Anything with Blanche's past = loneliness or emptiness
- ❖ The pain of loneliness brings some characters together
- ❖ View loneliness as a motivator and driving force to create bonds, disregard truth, and blur reality
- ❖ Analyze how characters deal with their loneliness- do they handle it in similar ways or different ways? What do they turn to to ease their loneliness?



Desire [as it leads to] Death

- ❖ Death and Desire go hand-in-hand in this story
 - ❖ Think about the names of the Streetcars that are in the story
- ❖ Each character has his/her own relationship with the concept of desire
- ❖ Each character's reaction to desire leads to a different result, however, they link back to a death [physical, metaphorical] in some way
- ❖ Desire and Death are both natural and raw states of human nature/existence, however, they are not generally paired together
- ❖ Analyze Williams's message that permeates from the repetition and coupling of these two large and seemingly opposing concepts

Light vs. Dark

- ❖ Note references to colors – pay attention to the meaning behind those colors
- ❖ Consider the ways the truth and falsities fit into these categories of light and dark
- ❖ Generally, one finds comfort in the light and uneasiness in the dark, however, in what situations might that not be the case?
- ❖ Think of light and darkness as a means to link to the present/past
- ❖ Analyze how Williams represents light and darkness in connection to characters' motivations, ambitions, and weaknesses/flaws
- ❖ How can light serve as a method for “blinding” rather than bringing out truth? How can it be seen as a burden or thing to fear rather than something that brings comfort and ease?

Ceremonial Games

- ❖ Pay attention to games played amongst men collaboratively (yet individually):
 - ❖ The references to poker and bowling
 - ❖ The type of game played, rules, behaviors, and attitudes of the players
 - ❖ The goal of the game and how that game's attributes are symbolically representative of themes in the play
- ❖ During times when games are being played, pay special attention to the setting and the personalities/demeanor of the characters. Think about:
 - ❖ How the games affect the characters' relationship with one another
 - ❖ How the games create a specific atmosphere and ambiance
- Consider the concept of ceremony and ceremonious activities in relationship to those playing
- Find a connection between ceremonial games with sexual violence /dominance.

Language:

- ❖ Note Tennessee Williams's use of language as a way to segregate characters:
 - ❖ In particular compare Stanley's diction, sentence structure, pronunciation, and grammar when speaking to that of Blanche's
 - ❖ Blanche's use of French language as a means to "communicate"
 - ❖ What do the differences suggest?
 - ❖ When/under what circumstances do characters embody each others' speech patterns?
- ❖ Notice Tennessee Williams's use of names:
 - ❖ Of Characters and Places
 - ❖ Belle Reve = "Beautiful Dream"
 - ❖ Elysian Field's = Greek Mythology



Abuse/Violence:

- ❖ Sexual hostilities rage throughout the play
- ❖ Physical violence, verbal battles and mental trauma are also present as a tactic to overpower and conquer the human body/spirit
- ❖ Violence has many forms in this play; analyze the various types and evaluate it's root, cause, and effect
- ❖ On one side you have characters who are veterans at luring others in (a vampire perhaps?).
- ❖ On the other side, you have characters who are “unconquerable” who need to demonstrate he/she is the winner and still champion.



Sound Effects

- ❖ The sound effects in *Streetcar* create more than ambiance/atmosphere
- ❖ Help build the setting- especially that of the Kowalski apartment
- ❖ Add to the tension and the symbolic battlefield the characters fight on
- ❖ They are: +noises of past & present +old and new
 +never comforting +most often keep the tension ongoing
- ❖ There are two specific types of music referenced throughout the play:
 + The Blue Piano and The Varsouviana (a polka tune)
- ❖ The Blue Piano
 +Williams describes the sound as a *'tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This 'blue piano' expresses the spirit of life'* (stage directions, scene one)
- ❖ The Varsouviana tune = always accompanied by a gunshot
- ❖ Each piece of music also represents life and death in some way.
- ❖ Think of that in each instant that either music plays. What is happening in that moment and why does the music play?

The Setting:

- ❖ Think of the story unfolding from May to September of any year
- ❖ Single-set: a transparent front wall of a shabby two-story structure, Stanley and Stella's flat (two rooms separated by a curtain), and behind the curtain you see the French Quarter of New Orleans.



The Setting:

- ❖ Outside = railroads, a water tank, empty lots, and river docks – in short, nothing pretty or natural
- ❖ Throughout the play, you hear sounds of the city and the tinny music of a “Blue Piano”
- ❖ French Quarter = Historic section of New Orleans- a hive of narrow streets, alleyways, markets, coffee-houses, honky-tonks, and shops of all kinds.
- ❖ Some of the residents live in squalor, but they put up a pretty good front.



A Streetcar Named Desire

Your main concerns when reading this play:

- 1.) Annotate for the shift/contrast and literal vs. figurative devices: Symbolism, Metaphor (including simile), Conceit (extending metaphor), Imagery, Allusion, & Motif. (Use your HTRL skills!)
- 2.) Think about how these devices help to achieve the themes/universal ideas in this novel. (You will have to write an essay on it...)
- 3.) Annotate any significant lines or parts in the play you think are related to the themes/universal ideas.

