

Dysfunctional families

Family



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Dysfunctional families are common to both the world of *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens and *The Glass Menagerie*, by Tennessee Williams.

A family is a basic social unit consisting of more than one human being.

Functional families co-operate with one another to sustain a happy and nurturing home life that is comforting and a pleasure to be in. Members of a functional family genuinely care for one another's safety and wellbeing. A dysfunctional family is the opposite of a functional family.

In *Great Expectations* there are two dysfunctional families, Joe Gargery's family - including Miss Joe, Pip and Joe himself; and Miss Havesham's family, which consists of her and her adopted daughter, Estella. Technically, the escaped convict, known as Magwitch, his wife and daughter could be considered as dysfunctional too. Their family is not as predominant as the other two families. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom, Laura, Amanda and Amanda's absent husband are also a dysfunctional family. Family is important to the main characters in each of these texts, as it is the source of their values, morals and beliefs.

Tom Wingfield, from *The Glass Menagerie*, is a young man who wants to explore the world and go on breathtaking adventures. His father left his mother, Amanda, for this reason when Tom was a young boy. Tom has been the man of the house ever since. *The Glass Menagerie* is set in St Louis, USA, in a time where women did not have much power in men's business.

Amanda has a job selling magazines over the phone, which does not earn her enough money for the family to live off. Tom, therefore, works in a shoe factory, which is not the most exciting job in the world, and this is the main source of income for the family.

Laura Wingfield is Tom's older sister - she is 26, crippled and lives in her own world full of tiny fragile glass animals, along with an old victrola. Laura is the main source of conflict for the family because she aimlessly wanders through life with no purpose. During Tom's time at home, there are many conflicts between him and his mother. This affects Tom, as he works long hours in the warehouse doing the same thing everyday. He then comes home to a mother who is constantly telling him what to and what no to do, as well as a sister who isn't pulling her own weight.

Amanda often criticises Tom's behaviour. In the first scene nearly everything Amanda says to Tom is a command – for example, such as “ Don't push with your fingers, chew chew! ... Human beings are supposed to chew”, “ You're not excused from the table” and “ You smoke too much”. These constant commands from Amanda's point of view are caring, however, Tom only thinks of them as her trying to control his every move; he is at the end of his wick. In Scene Three, Tom lets Amanda know once and for all what he thinks of the situation. Amanda: “ What right do you have to jeopardize your job?

Jeopardize the security of us all? How do you think we'd manage if you were...”. Tom interrupts: “ I'd rather somebody battered my brains out than go back (the warehouse) every morning ... and you say self is all I think of. Why, listen, if self is what I thought of, Mother, I'd be where he is (points to father's portrait) - GONE! ” In the end it is all too much for Tom and he leaves his helpless sister and commanding mother. He ventures off into the world; like father like son! Belonging to a dysfunctional family has deeply affected Tom and has eventually made him leave.

Laura Wingfield, from *The Glass Menagerie*, is shy, unconfident, crippled and she often withdraws from reality. This is because she belongs to a dysfunctional family. Her mother has tried to help her by sending her to business school and finding her a gentlemen caller. Unfortunately, these are not Laura's visions for herself, they're Amanda's. Although Amanda truly loves Laura, she cannot see that her bossy and overpowering personality is making Laura withdraw herself from reality even further. Laura stopped going to business school because it made her sick and she didn't tell her mother, as she knew it would upset her.

A mature young adult, firstly, would not become unwell because they attended a business school; secondly, they would tell their mother they didn't want to attend the school anymore, and quit. Laura, on the other hand, pretends for weeks that she still attends the school; leaving and arriving home when appropriate, to make her mother believe she is still attending the school. When Amanda finally finds out Laura stopped going because it made her a little unwell, it broke her heart. Amanda: " So what are we going to do the rest of our lives? ... Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling?

Eternally play those worn-out phonograph records your father left as a painful reminder of him? " Laura's response to this painful truth is silence and the twisting of her hands - hopeless! With her mother and brother constantly bickering, she doesn't seem to get the chance to speak her thoughts and feelings. Her mother tells her what she is going to do with her life, and because she loves her mother, she just does as she is told. Over

time this has affected Laura; it is the reason she lost her personality and become a ghost-like figure living in a world of glass animals!

Most of the time Laura doesn't have her own thoughts, this is another side effect of having a dysfunctional family. One night her mother asks her to stop washing the dishes and to come outside and adore the moon Amanda: "... Laura, come here and make a wish on the moon! ... Look over your left shoulder, Laura, and make a wish! (Laura looks faintly puzzled as if called out of sleep. Amanda seizes her shoulders and turns her at an angle by the door) Now, now, darling, wish! Laura: What should I wish for, Mother? " Here the moon is a symbol of hope.

Amanda has found the moon because she has found hope; hope that her children will be okay in this cruel world. Laura can't find the moon; her mother has to point it out to her and physically move her so she can see it. This is symbolic of the fact that there is no hope for Laura as she can't and won't help herself in this life. As Tom says " She lives in a world of her own – a world of – little glass ornaments, Mother ... She plays old phonograph records and – that's about all". Amanda has to tell Laura what to wish for – a grown woman being told what to wish for!

This shows us how feeble and unsure Laura is of her actions. It is yet another problem Laura has developed because she is a part of a dysfunctional family. Pip, Joe Gargery and Mrs Joe Gargery are a dysfunctional family from the novel, *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens. The first half of the novel is set in England, in the country, a place of innocence. The second half is set in

the sinful and backstabbing streets of grotty old London. Pip is an orphan; his parents and five of his other siblings died when he was very little.

His older sister and her husband (Mr and Mrs Joe Gargery) adopted Pip (who says): “ My Sister ... had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbourhood because she had brought me up ‘ by hand. ’ ... Knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me. I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand. ” Pip tells the reader that his older sister often hit him and Joe. This of course was never done when a neighbour was in earshot because, as Pip said, the villagers respected her because she brought him up “ by hand”. She also never did or said anything nice to him; he can remember this from a young age. “ My sister’s bringing up had made me sensitive. ... I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me. ” She spoke harshly to him, hit him with the “ tickler” (which was a stick used only for beating up Pip and Joe) and force-fed him tar water (a very nasty medicine) to serve as punishments, for acts that did not deserve punishment.

Because of this, he is often unsure of his actions and easily persuaded to think and do things that, deep down, he may not feel are right. This is similar to Laura, from *The Glass Menagerie*. Unfortunately Laura didn’t have a caring, patient and extremely loving blacksmith in her life, unlike Pip, who has Joe. If Joe was not in Pip’s life, I am sure he would have turned out much like Laura. Joe loves Pip and genuinely cares for him, he is pure and shows many acts of kindness towards Pip, most of which Pip doesn’t acknowledge or notice.

Towards the end of the novel Pip becomes extremely sick whilst in London. Joe finds out that Pip is sick, leaves his beloved town in the country and heads into London. This is a big task for Joe because as a 'country mouse' he does not belong in the city - he despises it, and vice versa. Joe then stays by Pip's side for the many months it takes for Pip to recover. After Pip finally acknowledges Joe's true love for him, Pip says "O Joe, you break my heart! Look angry at me, Joe. Strike me, Joe. Tell me of my ingratitude. Don't be so good to me! Joe just hugs Pip because he is relieved that Pip has recovered. Joe is the most important character for Pip's health, safety and wellbeing. Without Joe, Pip would be in prison with a sickness that only love could cure and a debt to his name that he would never be able to repay. Joe is his guardian angel. Estella and Miss Haversham, from the novel Great Expectations, are yet another dysfunctional family. The cause of this dysfunctional family is Miss Haversham's desired revenge on the world because her husband-to-be left her at their wedding, breaking her heart.

Miss Haversham adopted Estella as a young girl, not out of love, rather so she can mould her into a cold-hearted witch like herself. Miss Haversham is rich and belongs to the upper middle class. Her house is a manor, and she is a well respected resident in Pip's village. Miss Haversham invites Pip to her house a few times. Pip thinks she is his benefactor, the cause of his great expectations and the reason she asks him to go over. She really only invites him over to let Estella practice her cruel, cold-blooded personality on him.

The first time Pip goes over to Miss Haversham's, on her command, she gets him to play cards with Estella. Estella doesn't want to play with "a common

labouring-boy! ", so Miss Havesham tempts her to play with him by saying " Well? You can break his heart. " Here we can see the effects of Miss Havesham's cold, broken heart on Estella. Instead of wanting to make friends with Pip like a normal young girl, she wants to break his heart. This child would not have thought of this naturally, her mind has been trained to believe that in making peoples lives a living hell, you arouse a sense of satisfaction.

Estella's family has had a big impression on her values, morals and beliefs. " You are to wait here, you boy! ... the tears started to my eyes. ... the girl looked at me with a quick delight in having been the cause of them. " Estella makes Pip believe his clothes, hands and the way he speaks is peculiar and shameful. The family life Miss Havesham has made for Estella is not physically or mentally healthy for her. To add to this, Miss Havesham wears a mouldy bride dress, her house stinks of gone-off food and human body odour and it is dark and depressing.

She doesn't shower because she wears her wedding clothes year after year. This gives Estella a bad impression as her home life is not normal, her " mother" is deranged and losing her mind. Miss Havesham does such a great job of teaching Estella to become a witch that Estella leaves her for good. This breaks Miss Havesham's already broken heart and she kills herself. This doesn't bother Estella - how inhumane! In both *The Glass Menagerie* and *Great Expectations*, the main characters have lost a loved one.

Pip and Estella never knew their biological parents, Miss Haversham's husband-to-be never showed up at their wedding, Joe loses Mrs Joe Gargery, Laura and Tom's dad leaves them and Amanda's husband leaves her with a crippled daughter and a son. Losing a loved one or someone who is a close relative adversely affects you. All of these characters can be compared to one another because they all know what it feels like to lose a loved one and belong to a dysfunctional family. In each case, dysfunctional families affect the main characters.

Tom leaves his family, Laura makes herself belong to a world of her own, Pip yearns for a justice that was always present and Estella follows the footsteps of a heartless witch. It is apparent that dysfunctional families can be the cause of losing a family member or one leaving. To me family is very important. Fortunately I have a functional family. We sometimes fight and argue, however it is always over issues that are forgotten and easily forgiven. I know that if a member of my family was to leave us it would definitely affect me. I am glad that every family member in my family is happy and healthy.

In both of the texts, the main cause of a dysfunctional family is having lost a family member. This is true for some families I know. Lots of parents divorce and their kids are forever living in two houses. Sometimes it is for the better, as the kids don't have to listen to the parents fighting. Sometimes it tears the kids' hearts and they are too young to understand that their parents simply can't be together anymore. The kids find a way into their own world, like Laura, or they take it out on others, like Estella, or they

are blessed and in their reality is a Joe, who loves them and sees a way out for them to escape.