

# Social conflict in the glass menagerie

Literature



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## **Independent Reading Quarter Two: The Glass Menagerie**

The Glass Menagerie depicts the life of Amanda and her adult children Tom and Laura, as a small family trying to find their way in life. Playwright Tennessee Williams uses the symbol of the fire escape, the theme of memory, and stage directions all to guide his audience's responses to the central characters and their actions.

The Glass Menagerie, told from the perspective of Tom, is based solely off of his memory. Tennessee Williams uses the theme of memory throughout the play to show how strong of an impact it had on the characters' demeanors. Plagued with the memory of her failed marriage and abandonment by her husband, Amanda is overtaken with the idea that her children must not suffer the same fate that she did. This is why she was constantly pushing for Laura to go to business school and to get married and settle down with a husband that was far better than Laura's father. It is also why she pushed Tom to get a good paying job so that he could provide for the family instead of going out to the movies every night which she viewed as being selfish, which was also how she viewed the actions of her husband by abandoning the family. As the play is told from Tom's memories, a lot of what he recalls has the possibility of being melodramatic, therefore skewing the events that actually happened in his favor, while making his mother Amanda to be seen as the root of the family's problems. Laura's memories from her childhood in high school of feeling out of place and extremely self conscious, had never left her mind and continued to torment her with fear and anxiety throughout her life such as when she dropped out of business school, or was afraid to

talk to Jim. All of the characters' memories hold them back from seizing on the present, as they are constantly reliving the past.

The fire escape is used as a symbol to give the audience a deeper look into the nature of the conflict between the characters in the family. The fire escape is frequently used throughout the play whenever a character wanted to literally escape from the madness going on inside of the house. Tom often would be on the fire escape during one of his many monologues, describing the new drama that had occurred in his family's life. Tom's eventual abandonment of Amanda and Laura to pursue his own dreams by leaving from the fire escape further highlights the literal escape that it offered. For Laura however, even though the fire escape was free for her to use to escape from the drama as well, her overwhelming anxiety and timidity never allowed her to use it as an escape from her situation as symbolically shown by her slipping and falling on the fire escape. The main cause for both of these characters to want to use the fire escape is because of the overbearing nature of their mother, Amanda. Contrary to this, Amanda does not use the fire escape to get away from her kids. She may become frustrated at times with them when they don't follow her direction, but she still want to the best for them and wants to be there to support them, so the fire escape is of no use to her.

The stage directions provided by Tennessee Williams gives further insight to Tom and Amanda's wants, and to Laura's outward demeanor. Tom frequently spoke of wanting to live life to the fullest but not being able to because of his mother. The stage direction when he is leaning over the fire escape talking to Jim tells that he looks like a voyager. This suggests the <https://assignbuster.com/social-conflict-in-the-glass-menagerie/>

notion that Tom wishes to live adventurously and not under the confines of his mother's house. For Amanda, the stage directions suggest that she is trying to recapture her youth especially during the dinner with Jim as it described her coyly smiling, shaking her girlish ringlets, wearing a girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash, and carrying a bunch of jonquils. The fact that she's carrying jonquils which she was obsessed with when she was younger, only further supports the idea. Lastly, the stage directions give the audience insight to just how frail and timid Laura is through the mannerisms it suggest that she have such as "...darts through the portieres like a frightened deer", " in a tone of frightened apology", and " looks down" when being questioned by others.

Tennessee Williams used the techniques that he did to explain Tom's wanderlust, Laura's succumbing to her anxiety, Amanda's overbearing nature, and the interaction between the characters. This greatly helps the audience to grasp the type of people and conflict Tennessee Williams was trying to convey in The Glass Menagerie