

# [The relationship of blanche and stella to the dramatic effect of ‘a streetcar nam...](https://assignbuster.com/the-relationship-of-blanche-and-stella-to-the-dramatic-effect-of-a-streetcar-named-desire/)

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Since the focal theme of “ A Streetcar Named Desire” is that of integration and adaptation, the relationship between Blanche and Stella is important and its function evident: Williams establishes a contrast between them. For example, when Stella says, in Scene One, that ‘ the best I could do was make my own living, Blanche’, Williams invites his audience to interpret the social transformation which Stella has undergone. This very base image of having to earn a living contrasts significantly with the image of ‘ columns’, which Stanley introduces in Scene Eight. Stella has been forced to adapt her lifestyle in order to integrate in this modern, male-dominated society. Blanche, on the other hand, is self-immersed in a world of fantasy – or ‘ make-believe’ as she suggests herself in Scene Seven – where she clings on to her past of wealth and comfort. Consequently, Blanche cannot integrate: she does not understand this society, in which she cannot fit, for she is ‘ incongruous’, an adjectival choice by Williams which enhances this sense of disconnection from the brutal real world. Slight tension is visible in the relationship because of this contrast, for example in Scene Four, where Blanche appeals to her sister that she must have ‘ sufficient memory’ of their dreamy (‘ Reve’) past in order to find ‘ these poker players impossible to live with’. The adjective ‘ impossible’ is forceful here, and enhances this sense of incongruity which characterises Blanche; her sister does indeed remember her past, and demonstrates a slight flicker of hope to return to it when she says that waiting on Blanche feels ‘ more like home’. However, she has moved-on from it in order to become a working member of her new community. This conflict of ideals creates dramatic tension and irony almost, since the audience knows well that Blanche cannot and never will be a welcomed, and understood, figure in society. Nonetheless, Stella has a privileged access to her sister’s personal heritage: she can sympathise with Blanche’s past and thus makes allowances for her, as she encourages Stanley to do, also. This is important in dramatic terms as Williams encourages his audience to take comfort in this sympathetic relationship, which is tested and shattered by the end of the play. For example, in response to Stanley’s revelation of Blanche’s somewhat shameful past, Stella is quick to defend her. Blanche, Stella argues, ‘ had an experience that – killed her illusions’. The violent verb ‘ killed’ is suggestive of the devastating ordeal which Blanche went through and therefore conveys Stella’s knowledge of it. Her affection for Blanche is also communicated through her reaction to the birthday party, to which Mitch does not come. Stella describes how upsetting she found ‘ looking at the girl’s face and the empty chair’. The noun ‘ girl’ serves as a reminder of Blanche’s child-like innocence, but also suggests a motherly understanding and connection. However, Williams sets-up room for Stella’s betrayal, when she says to Stanley, ‘ there are things about my sister I don’t approve of’. The verb ‘ approve’ sounds vague and ambiguous, suggesting an uncertain, almost unstable, quality to their relationship. The dramatic effect of this is that Stella is presented as a character who does not always understand or sympathise with Blanche. This, if the ending of this play can be seen as tragic, renders Stella’s choice to side with Stanley over Blanche regarding the rape more predictable and, in a sense, more shocking for the audience. Williams presents Stella as a platform on which the conflict between Blanche and Stanley takes place. This is effective dramatically because Stella appears not only as a character in the narrative of the play, but also as a symbol of tension and fighting: As Blanche and Stanley’s battleground of sorts, Stella becomes the person on whom they both rely and depend. For example, Stanley’s expression in Scene One, ‘ not in my territory’, suggests that Stella is currently in his possession, as though she were the prize of the competitive power-struggle between him and Blanche. This assertion on Stanley’s part poses an initial threat to the relationship between Stella and Blanche, since Stanley phrases it in such a way that intimidates Blanche. He forces her to feel that her sister is, in fact, not so much her sister as Stanley’s wife, to the whole arrangement of which Blanche is quite unaccustomed, thus highlighting her isolation. Later on, Williams shifts the balance of power: in Scene Three, the stage direction ‘ Blanche guides her’ suggests that Blanche is now winning the figurative competition against Stanley. The verb ‘ guides’ connotes kindness and sisterly support; the visual image on-stage, presumably with Blanche wrapping her arms around Stella, would depict closeness and human intimacy, which contrasts with the image of the much more bestial nature of Stanley’s relationship with Stella, vivified theatrically by their coming together ‘ with low, animal moans’. The end of the play leaves the outcome of this power-struggle questionable, with Stella holding her ‘ sobbingly…crying now that her sister is gone’. She appears to finally show remorse for her act of betrayal against Blanche, and so the fact that she is crying places her figuratively back in Blanche’s possession. However, the play ends ironically with Stanley embracing her again, murmuring ‘ now love’, where ‘ love’ sounds possessive and territorial, as well as comforting. This is effective dramatically because any impact which Blanche has had on their relationship seems to have disappeared and this modern society which Blanche has temporarily invaded returns to its dysfunctional state.