

A streetcar named
desire socratic
seminar questions



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1. Blanche who is homeless, comes to her sister's house at the beginning. Blanche had been a schoolteacher, married Allan, a man she later discovered to be gay. Her reactions to his sexual orientation caused him to commit suicide. Lonely, she becomes a prostitute, who loses her teaching career when her sexual relationship with a teenager is found out. After the family plantation Belle Reve is lost, she turns to her little sister Stella, who lives in with her husband Stanley in a poor area of New Orleans.

She is a very deluded character; She hides her past and fragility behind her Southern aristocrat clothes and manners and is very harsh and mean to Stanley, calling him "bestial" (71). When her past is revealed, she loses a guy named Mitch's love and the possibility of getting married to him. At the end of the play, she is raped by Stanley (Stella's husband), goes crazy, and is taken to the state mental asylum. Blanche is the main focus of the play. She is a complex character.

"If a single character in contemporary American stage literature approaches the classical Aristotelian tragic figure, it must surely be Blanche DuBois. Deceptive, dishonest, fraudulent, permanently flawed, unable to face reality, Blanche is for all that thoroughly capable of commanding audience compassion, for her struggle and the crushing defeat she endures have the magnitude of tragedy. The inevitability of her doom, her refusal to back down in the face of it, and the essential humanity of the forces that drive her to it are the very heart of tragedy.

No matter what evils she may have done, nor what villainies practiced, she is a human being trapped by the fates, making a human fight to escape and to

survive with some shred of human dignity, in full recognition of her own fatal human weaknesses and the increasing absence of hope" (Miller 11). Stanley is a static character. He loves his wife Stella, as is shown when he fears that she has left him after he has thrown a radio through a window and then attacked her.

His famous cry, " Stella! My baby doll's left me! . . . Stell-ahhhhh!" (59), makes clear both his love for her and how his being violent is pure nature. Because of him hitting her, it reveals his harsh and uncontrollable side. Early in the play he says to Blanche, " I'm afraid I'll strike you as being the unrefined type" (31). When he hears her describe him as " an animal," " ape-like," and " bestial" (71-72), they both become enemies towards each other. His violence is not aimed just at Blanche or Stella; he fights with his friends while playing poker. " Stanley, as brute force incarnate, has no poetry or sensitivity or nobility in him.

His intelligence is mostly animal cunning and his power of speech limited to expressing basic desires" (Brustein 10). After acting violent, and touching Blanches clothing, jewelry, and love poems from her dead husband, his final act is to rape her. Before he does it he says " We've had this date with each other from the beginning! " (130). This shows that Stanley is a static character because he is always violent, and never has any change to him. Stella is happily married throughout the play, in spite Of how violent and aggressive Stanley is towards her.

She is content, adjusted to a life that is very different from her years on Belle Reve. She has many friends, most of whom reflect the neighborhood in

which she lives. Stella a normal, happy, and an average woman. When Blanche gets to New Orleans, Stella is a bit hesitant but she does want to help Blanche. Stella is the real hero of the play, " for she alone is prepared to offer the necessary comfort and understanding. She discovers a genuine fulfillment based on sexuality but, more significantly, she thereby stumbles on the urgent need for that tenderness and compassion which. is the key to human predicament" (Bigsby 107-108).

At the end of the play, as she holds her baby and cries as Blanche is led away by the doctor and nurse, she is held " voluptuously, soothingly" by Stanley who " kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse" (142). Stella is a static character because she still chooses Stanley over her sister. It has always been Stanley, and it always will be Stanley. Even when Blanche claims that Stanley raped her, she still does not believe her own flesh and blood. 2. Blanche is the protagonist, had a great tragedy in her early life. She fell in love young and married, and discovered her husband was gay.

Shortly after, her husband died and left her a young widow. " And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle. "(scene6) After her sister left, she had to take care of family members. Their deaths resulted in the loss of her familys Belle Reve, and Blanche being displaced and thrown into a society she did not understand. After all this tragedy, Blanche preferred to live in her own made up reality of denial where she is still the belle of the party; and life is full of small talk and manners.

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She tries to display herself as innocent. Stanley is the antagonist, he is violent and an enemy to the Protagonist, Blanche. " He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! "(scene 4) He hits Stella, and rapes Blanche. " We've had this date with each other from the beginning! " (scene10). It is also found that Stanley also reveals " the survival of the fittest," in regards to the Darwinian Theory. Because he acts out and displays aggression and dominance, he is the survivor of this story, and refuses to be anything lower than such.

He is stubborn and hard-headed, and always has to be in control. He can never be weak, and that is usually his downfall- such as when he attacks Stella and she runs away from him. 3. Williams uses conflict as a dramatic device throughout the play. When Stanley isn't around, they are no outbursts, no arguments, ect. Blanche arrives she tells her sister, Stella, the location where she lives in is " horrible", insulting both her and her husband preference of lifestyle; it's as though she believes she is superior to them and lives in far better house conditions.

However what really disturbs the ' peace' between Blanche and Stanley in this scene, is when she confesses that she ' lost' Belle Reve, Stanley has his suspicions and believes Blanche spent the money on herself, the story of revenge and dispute begins from their. Moving on to scenes 3 and 4 (Pg 31-55), Stella and Blanche return to the apartment, where Stanley is having a drunken poker game. Instantly Stanley is rude and inconsiderate towards Blanche he says " You could not play.... " when she politely asks if she can. Stanley obviously does not want Blanche to be around.

Stella and Stanley then have an argument over the radio, Stanley wishes it to be off whilst Stella would like it to be switched on. This petty argument develops and results in Stanley giving a blow to her. The men are then forced to pin him down, like a vicious beast and calm Stanley, until he comes back to his senses. During scenes 5 and 6 (Pg 56-77) Stanley does not appear in the scenes and there are no dramatic points of conflict. This shows that the only real reason there are disputes and conflicts is because of Stanley and without him the characters are seen as peaceful individuals.

The last and without a doubt biggest conflict in the play is the rape of Blanche, scenes 10 and 11(104-124). By the end of the play Stanley has had enough of Blanche. The jungle voices swell as Stanley slowly advances towards Blanche, ignoring her cries that he stay away. She grabs a bottle and smashes its end on the table, threatening to smash the remaining fragment on Stanley's face. He jumps at her, grabs her arm when she swings at him, and forces her to drop the bottle. " We've had this date from the beginning," he says, and she sinks to her knees.

He picks her up and carries her to the bed. The pulsing music indicates that Stanley rapes Blanche. 4. The ending of the book fits more with the story than the ending of the movie because Stella always ran back to Stanley. No matter how many outlashes he had on her, she still ran back to him. For the movie, Stella runs away with the baby and doesn't return back to Stanley. This does not fit with the play because Stella would never have the courage to leave Stanley, and this is revealed when she chooses Stanley over believing her sister blanche that she claims that he raped her.

Part 2: Death of a Salesman 1. Willy is obsessed with popularity. He believes that if a person is popular, he has everything. Since Willy was never popular himself, he adores the fact that his sons, and Biff in particular, are. In a sense, Willy idolizes his children more than they idolize him. Because Willy sees that his boys have attained what he deems as important, he forgets to teach them moral values. When Biff steals the football from school, Willy rationalizes the theft, saying that it is alright because he is popular (30). Willy also doesn't take any stock in education.

When Bernard chastises Biff for not studying, Willy tries to justify it by saying that a person doesn't need intelligence in the real world if he has good looks. " Bernard can get the best marks in school, . . . but when he gets out into the business world . . . you are going to be five times ahead of him. . . . The man who makes an appearance in the business world . . . is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want" (33). Willy is wrong because popularity is not everything, popularity will only get someone so far. If people no longer enjoy your company, what more do you have to live for?

Miller creates the character of Willy as the embodiment of the failure within the American Dream. Willy is presented as a prototypical American male of the post World War II era who was taught that if he works hard, plays by the rules, and believes in the authenticity of his dreams, success will be evident. The reality is that this is not the case in that there are obstacles that inhibit the realization of a dream . Willy's philosophy is to believe in his dreams and within this notion of " big dreams," he will succeed. The reality is far different because of the matrix of inhibitions that prevent this dream from becoming a reality.

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Willy's philosophy of dreams involve "making it big," which is a strictly economic notion of the good. This challenges him to find success in a vision where the finality of money determines success or failure. The constant denial of the realization of this conception of dreams compel him to commit suicide for a monetary payoff. In this philosophy of life, one's value is directly tied to money. Miller creates this in a deliberate manner in his desire to provide a more complex notion of the "American Dream" philosophy that enveloped so much of American society.

2. In a sense, Bernard and Biff's relationship parallels Charley and Willy's relationship. Bernard helps Biff academically with his Maths, as his father helps or tries to help Willy financially, by giving him money and then offering him a job. Both Bernard and Charley try to make Biff and Willy respectively face the realities of life. Bernard is always encouraging Biff to study harder and plays almost a father-like role, telling him he shouldn't drive without a license. Equally, Charley tries to get Willy to face the realities of working life.

Ironically, in spite of the way that Willy talks about Charley and Bernard, because of their "unmasculine" traits, it is Charley and Bernard that are the success stories, with Bernard becoming an incredibly successful lawyer.

Another central difference that is reinforced through the comparison of these two father-son relationships is how Charley never dwells on misfortune - he is a very down-to-earth and decent individual who is intensely realistic and practical. Willy, on the other hand, is always talking about what could have been rather than facing the reality of what has actually happened.

According to Charley, he owes his success to the fact that " I never took any interest in anything. " Bernard and Charley both fail to understand the importance of dreams to Biff and Willy and how their dreams sustain them and give them hope. Unfortunately, it is only Biff who at the end of the play is forced to become more like Bernard and face reality for what it is, rather than living a life deferred waiting for dreams to become substantial. 3. Top of Form There are aspects of Willy's death that are both tragic and ironic such as the attendance of Willy's funeral.

Before Willy's death he had a conversation with a vision of his older brother Ben in which Willy described the motives behind his suicide. Willy wanted to prove to his son Biff how well known and respected he was. " Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from ME, MA, VT, and NH... that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized - I am known! " Willy envisioned his final triumph where he could finally prove his worth to his family, and the only way that he could do that would be by taking his own life.

Ironically, no one attends his funeral except for his family and Charley. Instead of his funeral being his final triumph it is his final humiliation. The absence of people at the funeral validates to the Loman's and the audience that Willy's entire life was an illusion. Sadly, even Willy himself did not realize the fallacy in his proclamations of fame and success. Another ironic twist on the death of Willy Loman is the fact that he took his own life because he thought that he would be more financially beneficial to his family if he was dead.

Willy foreshadows his suicide during his final conversation with Charley when he says, " After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive. " Willy truly believes that he is doing what is best for his family by taking his own life, in his eyes his twenty thousand dollar insurance policy will be worth more to his family than his own life.

He envisions that the money will go to his son Biff and he will be able to become the successful man that Willy always knew that he would be, " imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket. " Ironically in the requiem the audience realizes that Willy's death was in vain because his son, Biff, not get the insurance money because suicide was not covered in his policy. His death also convinces his other son, Happy, to follow in his father's footsteps toward an unrealistic dream of unattainable goals. . Linda takes a moment alone with Willy's grave telling him, " I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home.

" Ironically Willy kills himself just before he is " free and clear" of debt. There is also another ironic piece to Linda's final words to her husband. She says to him, " Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. " This is ironic because throughout the play Linda is the only person that loves Willy unconditionally for who he is, but in reality she has no idea who he is at all. Linda never let herself understand Willy's psychological problems, therefore the only thing she can think to blame for his suicide is their financial burden.

The requiem serves as the final chapter of Willy's life where, for the first time, the harsh realities of his life are revealed. Sympathy is pulled from the audience and reasons for Willy's behavior are given. Willy cannot be blamed for his actions because he was merely a salesman that was so far sold on the idea of the American Dream that was incapable of seeing his life for what it really was, even in his final moments. The requiem shows that Willy died just as deluded as he lived.