

# [The glass menagerie](https://assignbuster.com/the-glass-menagerie-4/)

In ??? The Glass Menagerie???, Tennessee Williams uses symbolism to developcharacterization. The various symbols that appear throughout the story generallyemerge as objects or imagery, and allow the reader to gain insight into the charactersinternal personalities and struggles. One of the more predominant symbols Williamsuses is the glass menagerie, which consists of small, fragile glass animals. As a whole, the glass menagerie represents the fragility of the Wingfields, but is more directlyrelevant to its caretaker, Laura. Williams uses one specific member of the glassmenagerie, the unicorn, to embody the fragility of Laura and the world she lives in. Williams chose the unicorn, which sits on a shelf among horses, to epitomizeLaura??™s character. A unicorn closely resembles an otherwise ordinary horse with theunique characteristic of a horn, and in much the same way, Laura is an average girl withthe unique characteristic of a leg brace. In high school, Laura was a unicorn in a schoolfull of horses, and as a result, ??? never??¦ had much luck at ??“ making friends??? (672).

Instead, Laura escapes her reality by living an introverted lifestyle, free from outsideinteractions. Williams delves into Laura??™s character in the final scene during herinteraction with the horse she had a crush on in high school, Jim. As Jim and Laura become more closely acquainted, Laura changes and beginsto let down her guard. Midway though the final scene, Laura places the unicorn, herfavorite piece from the glass menagerie, in the palm of Jim??™s hand. This symbolicgesture signifies she has lowered her defenses and now trusts Jim. Jim takes the timeto admire its beauty and points out that unicorns are ??? extinct in the modern world??? andthat ??? he must feel sort of lonesome??? as a result of being different from other horses onthe shelf (676). This is his way of telling Laura that he understands her situation.

Laura has Jim set the unicorn down on the table instead of the shelf where it cameStafford 3from, because ???[t]hey all like a change of scenery once in a while???, indicating that she isenjoying Jims company and feeling more ordinary (676). Jim and Laura waltz around the room as if the song and dance were acelebration of Laura??™s new beginning. Suddenly, the horn on the glass unicorn breaksoff when Jim dances Laura into the coffee table and knocks the unicorn onto the floor.

Although the glass unicorn meant a great deal to her, Laura dismissed the loss of thehorn when she says, ??? I??™ll just pretend he had an operation. The horn was removed tomake him feel less ??“ freakish! Now he will feel more at home with the other horses, theones that don??™t have horns??? (677). When the unicorn??™s horn breaks off, it loses itsuniqueness and becomes like the rest of the animals in the glass menagerie. Likewise, Laura gains confidence through Jim and realizes that she is not that different fromeveryone else, which in turn leads to a new perspective on life. Unfortunately, the symbolism of the broken horn has a dual meaning. As Lauraand Jim have polar opposite characteristics, so do the meanings.

After Jim kissesLaura, the ultimate show of affection to her, he immediately shatters her hopes by tellingher that he is engaged. Both Laura and the glass menagerie break when they areexposed to Jim. When Laura gives Jim her broken unicorn, it symbolizes her brokenheart. Jim takes this ??? souvenir??? and leaves behind a broken girl. In mythology, the unicorn is unique and frequently aligned with innocence andpurity. Tennessee Williams effectively coveys Laura??™s loss of these characteristics withthe symbolism of the unicorn.

The unicorn??™s part in this play is crucial in gaining acomplete understanding of Laura??™s character, and foreshadows her inevitabledigression back into her detached world.