

# Evaluation of the first act in tennessee williams' play, a streetcar named desire...

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## **In what ways does the first scene establish a sense of the mood, style, characters and concerns of the play?**

In the opening scene, Tennessee Williams sets the scene of a run-down residential area in New Orleans. Williams uses explicit terms such as “weathered” and “rickety” to imply a homely sense amongst the slightly negative atmosphere of his description. The obvious evidence to suggest that this is a run-down area is supported by more implicit evidence, such as the presence of black people in the area. This is because, at the time of the plays publishing in 1957, it is unlikely that there would have been any black people in the richer parts of cities on account of the racial inequality of the time. Williams’ description of the background music furthers the negative angle against black people. Williams describes the music as being almost inevitable and unavoidable and it seems to be an inconvenience as he writes in the stage directions, “overlapping”, which suggests a struggle from the characters to overcome the noise of the music. In this first scene, Williams aims to highlight the role and position of each character in society, and give some insight into the nature of the society being described.

The audience is further lead to suspect that this will be rather a racist play by the fact that the negro woman is not given a name. This, combined with her tendency to do things for her white peers without complaint or question implies that there is still a social gap between black and white people in that society. When Eunice says, “You hush, now!” the audience is made certain of the nature of her relationship with the negro woman, and it is one of dominance and most likely, abuse. However, the society seems not only to be racist, but also sexist. In Stanley’s first moments on stage, he throws a <https://assignbuster.com/evaluation-of-the-first-act-in-tennessee-williams-play-a-streetcar-named-desire/>

bloody package from the butcher at Stella. This is both uncouth in its nature, but also implies that he, having “brought home the meat”, expects her to prepare it for him.

Another reason to suggest that the setting of the play is run-down is the fact that the characters are shouting at each other across the street. This lack of decorum seems a part of the culture of the place as Williams has a sailor, a vendor and the negro woman all shouting at the same time. Williams confirms his aim to achieve this shouting atmosphere when he writes as a stage direction for Stanley, “bellowing.”

Williams immediately sets the style of the play by using colloquial, American sounding language. We see this when he writes words such as “clip joint” and “blocks”. This tells the audience that the perspective of the play is that of the characters in the society themselves and not a narrator with a premeditated opinion on their situation. In fact, the external voice is that of Blanche, who, upon arrival, looks down at Stella’s way of living as she has come from a far richer place. Blanche’s comments encompass several aspects of the society in which Stella is living, such as a potential lack of care for self-preservation as she points out that Stella has gained weight.

The main concern raised from the opening scene of the play is the differences between the characters. The atmosphere already seems tense between Stella and Blanche and the outspoken, confident character of Stanley seems likely to clash with the quiet and reserved character of Stella. In the same way, the difference in wealth seems likely to cause problems.