

I theme of the glass  
menagerie : that



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

I have a poets weakness for symbols. So states Tom Wingfield, narrator and major character in Tennessee Williams timeless play The Glass Menagerie. Through the eyes of Tom, the viewer gets a glance into the life of his family in the pre-war depression era; his mother, a southern belle desperately clinging to the past, his sister, a young woman too fragile to function in society, and himself, a struggling young poet working at a warehouse to pay the bills.

Williams, through his remarkable use of symbols, is able to effectively express the theme of The Glass Menagerie : That of hopeful aspirations followed by inevitable disappointment, having dreams which are destroyed by the harsh realities of the world. Symbols are a major part of this play, as Tom, the narrator, is a poet, and admits he has a weakness for symbols. One major symbol presented in the story is that of the fire escape, a symbol that has a different meaning and function for each character.

For Tom, it is a means of escape from fire, not the type of fire that was considered in its building, but the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. This is especially true of Toms apartment. His mother, devastated after her daughter Lauras failure to cope in business college, becomes obsessed with finding her a gentleman caller so that she can marry and be well supported.

When this caller finally comes, and it seems like it was meant to be, as they dance and kiss, he announces he is engaged, and dashes their hopes. The ever-fragile Laura, temporarily drawn out of her dream-world shell of her glass collection and the victrola, draws further back into herself. Now a

terrible desperation fills the apartment, and Tom decides he must escape the suffocating environment to follow his own calling. The fire escape to him represents a path to the outside world. For Laura, the fire escape is exactly the opposite—a path to the safe world inside, a world in which she can hide. Especially symbolic is Lauras fall when descending the steps to do a chore for her mother, after leaving the security of the apartment.

This fall symbolizes Lauras inability to function in society and the outside world. For Amanda, the fire escape is symbolic of her hopes and dreams—hopes and dreams that a gentleman caller will arrive to marry her daughter and leave her well supported. This is the way Jim comes into the apartment, at the time when Amandas hopes have been peaked.

It is symbolic that Laura does not want to open the door when Jim arrives. It shows her reluctance to let an emissary from the world of reality, symbolized by Jim, invade the comfortable non-existence of the apartment, and her insecurity in dealing with the outside world. Another recurring symbol in the story is that of the glass menagerie itself. This represents Lauras hypersensitive nature and fragility. The first time the menagerie is mentioned in any detail in a symbolic manner is when Tom and Amanda have a heated argument near the beginning of the play.

Tom ends it by calling Amanda an ugly babbling old witch, and struggles to put his jacket on, intent on leaving. When he cannot put the coat on properly, he becomes frustrated with his clumsiness, and flings it across the room, breaking some of the glass collection. Laura cries out as if wounded.

This shows how fragile Laura really is, and how she reacts when even the small balance of her apartment is shifted.

Williams also makes the use of this symbol apparent on stage. When Amanda sits down to discuss Lauras future with Tom, the legend Laura appears on screen, and the music that begins playing is The Glass Menagerie. The most prominent use of this symbol comes at the turning point of the story, when Jim is left alone with Laura. The conversation turns to Lauras glass collection, when she remarks glass is something you have to take good care of.

, again showing her fragility. More parallels are drawn between Laura and the glass collection with the introduction of the unicorn. Jim says Poor little fellow, he must feel