

Lesson Name : 9

Lesson Title : The Glass Menagerie Summary

Course Name : English 2 Part 3 [Honors]

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Read a thorough summary of the play *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, which has seven scenes.

[Scene 1](#)

[Scene 2](#)

[Scene 3](#)

[Scene 4](#)

[Scene 5](#)

[Scene 6](#)

[Scene 7](#)

Use your digital notebook to keep notes on new vocabulary and definitions that you may need to reference later.

Reading and Literary Skills

Today, let's continue our discussion of drama by focusing on a celebrated American play, "The Glass Menagerie," by Tennessee Williams. This play was first published in 1944, so it is still protected by copyright laws and not available to read online. However, based on the summary you read for today, you should have a good understanding of the play's plot, characters, setting and symbolism.

Let's start by discussing the dramatic structure of this play. As a reminder, dramatic structure refers to the five-step plot mountain of **exposition**, **rising action**, **climax**, **falling action**, and **conclusion**.

In this play, the **exposition** includes a speech from Tom, the narrator, explaining what the audience is about to see. Tom then switches from the role of narrator to the role of character, and we get a sense for the manner in which the family members interact with one another.

The **rising action** of the play involves Amanda. Tom and Laura's mother, and her growing concern for Laura's future. She sets into motion the main action of the play by asking Tom to invite his co-workers for dinner, hoping that one of them will marry Laura. Eventually, Tom invites Jim, who happens to be Laura's old high-

school crush.

The **climax** of the play occurs when Jim and Laura are alone together after dinner. Jim breaks Laura's glass unicorn and kisses her soon after that.

During the **falling action** of the play, Jim confesses that he is engaged to another woman and flees the apartment. The family members are then left to pick up the pieces of their hopes and dreams. The **resolution** occurs in Tom's final speech when he explains that he left the family soon afterward but has never been able to shake off the guilt of abandoning his beloved sister.

"The Glass Menagerie" is an intensely autobiographical play with Tom Wingfield representing Tennessee Williams (whose real name was Thomas). Amanda Wingfield, the faded Southern belle and single mother, is similar in many ways to Williams' own mother. In addition, Tom's sister Laura is a tribute to Williams' own sister, Rose, who suffered from mental illness and was eventually institutionalized.

Because "The Glass Menagerie" is so obviously influenced by Williams' life, critics have disagreed about how to interpret its ending. Should we be happy that Tom managed to escape his toxic family and build his own life, or should we be ashamed of his abandonment of his family? How does Tom feel about it? As with most literary questions, the answers are open to debate.

Vocabulary

Because the vocabulary of "The Glass Menagerie" does not offer too many unfamiliar words, we're not going to focus on specific vocabulary words from the play. Instead, let's build our vocabulary skills by briefly discussing the history of the English language and exploring the vocabulary of the drama as a genre.

The first version of our language, Old English, was based on a mix of languages brought to England by Germanic tribes and Roman soldiers (who primarily spoke Latin). The language changed and expanded as other groups settled in and sometimes conquered England, which is why we have so many "borrowed" words from other languages.

Old English was quite different from our modern language, and you probably wouldn't understand much of it if you heard it spoken today. The famous Old English epic "Beowulf" must be "translated" into Modern English before we can read it.

After the Norman conquest of England in 1066, the language shifted to what we now call Middle English. During this three-hundred-year period, the English language incorporated many words from the Normans' native French language. You can experience Middle English today if you read Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," but it can make for some challenging reading.

Modern English emerged in the 1400s as printing presses and a centralized government made the language uniform. By the time William Shakespeare began writing his plays in the late 1500s, the English language wasn't much different from the version we speak today. (In other words, don't complain to your English teachers about having to read Shakespeare's "Old" English!)

The first English dictionary was published in the mid-1700s, but the rules of spelling and grammar weren't really finalized until about a hundred years afterward. This delay explains why you'll sometimes notice grammar "mistakes" in the works of early English writers. It's not that the writers didn't know the rules of grammar; it's that the rules of grammar hadn't yet been finalized!

The vocabulary words for today are all related to the drama. After you have read the definitions for the vocabulary words, choose five words and research the etymology of each word. Etymology is the historical background of a word and its meaning; it tells us where a word comes from and how it has changed over the years. Post your etymologies to the forum for discussion, and review the etymologies that your peers researched.

Comedy – (n) a drama with light and amusing characters that ends happily (i.e. with a marriage or a birth)

Tragedy – (n) a serious drama usually about a conflict between a protagonist and an outside force, ends sadly (usually with a death) and evokes pity and/or fear

Dialogue (n) the conversational portion of a drama

Genre – (n) a category of literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content

Monologue (n) – a long speech

Aside – (n) an actor's speech heard by the audience but seemingly not heard by the other actors

Epilogue – (n) a speech addressed to the audience at the end of the play

Fourth wall – (n) an imaginary barrier that keeps the actors from noticing or addressing the audience

Thespian – (n) an actor

Match the following modern English words with their Latin, Old French, or Old English roots.

animate	halo – Latin – breathe
excavation	sunu – Old English – male child
exhale	surgien – Old French – doctor
fault	wifmann – Old English – female person
son	laefdige – Old English – wife of a lord
surgeon	anima – Latin – breath, life
ink	enque – Old French – dark liquid used for writing
either	faute – Old French – mistake
woman	hwaether – Old English – which of two
lady	cavus – Latin – hollow

Check you answers with this [answer key](#).