

The Glass Menagerie and Vocabulary

Section Objectives:

- Reading skills: Paraphrase speeches; synthesize information from several sources on a single topic.
- Literary skills: Analyze elements of drama, including dramatic structure, tragedy, comedy, scene design, dialogue and stage directions.
- Vocabulary: Understand word origins and archaic language; understand the history of the English language; understand word denotations and connotations; and understand multiple-meaning words.

The Glass Menagerie



Explanation Of American Drama

Definition:

The word **drama** comes from the Greek word, **dran**, which means **to do** or **to act**. **Play** is another word for **drama**.

Playwrights write for actors and actresses. Unlike other writers, they have to rely on others for their message or work to be fully realized.

They also realize the limitations of their medium. They really have to concentrate on word choice and basic structure.

Structure:

Like most fiction, a play will contain the following:

- Planned Action
- Outer Conflict
- Inner Conflict
- Imitation of Life
- Plot
- Spirit of Humanity of the Times
- Response by Audience rather than Individuals

Types of Drama:

Tragedy: Unhappy Ending

- Emphasis is the individual, one character, the protagonist.
- A protagonist is heroic in his actions.
- Struggle is the main character against impossible odds, forces larger than himself.
- Fate plays a large part.
- Protagonist cannot change some situations even if he wants to change.
- It usually ends in death.

Comedy: Happy Ending

- The group is the emphasis, not the individual.
- It focuses on the welfare of society and of the human race.
- Antagonists are filled with vices and follies of human nature, but are able to redeem themselves for the sake of the group.
- Usually ends with a wedding, feast, dance, etc. to affirm life.

Two Major Parts of Drama:

1. Dialogue: To learn what the play is about
2. Staging:
 - Scenery
 - Costumes
 - Gestures and Movement
 - Lighting

Development of American Drama:

19th Century:

Melodrama: Drama that uses stereotyped characters, exaggerated actions, and a conflict that involves an all-good hero against an all-evil villain. The good guys always win.

Farce: A kind of comedy that uses silly antics and stereotyped characters.

20th Century:

Realism: In this kind of drama, the playwright gives a person a situation as it actually is. It focuses on details from everyday life while avoiding sentimentality and idealizing ideas.

Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright, represents this group. He wanted his audience to experience “a slice of life.” His plays are called “problem plays” because they deal with problems common to modern society: corruption, hypocrisy, and greed.

Expressionism: This drama will emphasize the life of the mind and feelings to show how the human beings perceive life.

The Swedish playwright, August Strindberg, represents this group. His plays explore the mind and feelings – the psychological and spiritual aspects of reality.

American Playwrights:

Eugene O’Neill:	reintroduced the Greek chorus and masks
Elmer Rice:	more exploring for different techniques
Maxwell Anderson:	brought back dramatic verse for the stage
Thornton Wilder	just used a basic stage – not much scenery
Tennessee Williams	used both realistic and unrealistic staging and techniques
Arthur Miller	



Tennessee Williams (1911-1983)

Tennessee Williams was born in Columbus, Mississippi. His given name was Tom Lanier Williams, III. His grandfather squandered the family fortune. His father was a traveling salesman and a heavy drinker, while his mother prone to hysterical outbursts. Williams was shy and fragile. He stayed close to his older sister, Rose.

In high school, he turned to movies and writing for comfort. He won some awards in high school for his writing. He entered the University of Missouri as a journalism major. When he failed ROTC, his father made him quit college and take a job in shoe company.

After several years at the shoe factory, Williams suffered a nervous breakdown. When he recovered, he attended several universities and wrote. He traveled around taking menial jobs and writing. During World War II, he was script writer in Hollywood.

Did You Know...?

The Glass Menagerie was originally a screenplay Tennessee Williams was hired to write. He used one of his short stories as a source and the original title of the screenplay was *The Gentleman Caller*.

The Glass Menagerie is considered an autobiographical since it has so many parallels to Williams' own life. This play earned him fame, fortune, critical respect, and a Drama Critics' Circle Award. He won that prize and the Pulitzer Prize for his plays, *Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*.



The Glass Menagerie Tennessee Williams

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams creates what would be called a memory play with tragic tones. We wonder from the reality of the situation to the wonderings of the character's minds.

Elements of Drama

Setting: Winter and spring / Apartment in St. Louis, Missouri

Time: 1937

Characters: Amanda Wingfield, the mother
Laura Wingfield, the daughter
Tom Wingfield, the son
Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller
Mr Wingfield, father who abandoned his family

Plot:

Conflict: Man versus Man
Tom (Laura) against his mother

A normal plot line involves these **eight elements**:

1. Exposition: oor apartment

Tensions and anxieties with Tom and his mother and sister.

Tom hates his job and stays away from his mother and job by supposedly going to the movies even though he comes home drunk.

Amanda discovers she paid for Laura to go to school, but Laura cannot go. She gets sick because she is so shy.

2. Narrative Hook: Sister is crippled and needs to plan for her future. She needs a husband.

- 3. Rising Action:** Fights with Tom to get him to ask one of his nice friends home for dinner so that Laura could meet some boys to have as suitors.

Finally, Tom agreed.

He brought home Jim, but Laura knew him from high school, and she did not want to talk to him because she was embarrassed about being crippled.

Jim arrives, and Laura has to rest in the living room while they have dinner.

Eventually, Laura and Jim talk leisurely, danced, and kissed (friendly).

- 4. Technical Climax:** Jim is engaged and is about to be married.

- 5. Dramatic Climax:** Laura received Jim's kiss.

- 6. Falling Action:** Laura is disappointed, but still smiling.

Amanda is truly mad that Tom did not know about Jim being engaged.

She yells at him. He goes to the movie.

- 7. Resolution:** Tom got fired for writing poetry on his job at the factory.

He leaves his mother and sister to wander.

- 8. Denouement:** Although he is away from his Mom, he cannot forget his sister, and imagines seeing her in different places as he travels.

Theme: If one cannot confront reality and act on it, he will be condemned to suffer in a dream world.

Amanda, Laura, and Tom have problems facing reality and finding wholesome actions to realize their goals and desires.

Tone: Tragic – family at odds – alone and alienated Tense

Mood: Tense with all the fighting

Dramatic Structure

Williams uses lighting to a great degree to highlight the mental struggles of each main character. He employs screens that become lighted with different images to fit the action, plus music is added for the daydreaming-memory visions.

Example: “On the dark stage the screen is lighted with the image of blue roses.

Gradually Laura's figure becomes apparent and the screen goes out.

The music subsides.

Laura is seated in the delicate ivory chair at the small claw-foot table.”

Another technique he uses is narration by Tom. Though Tom's long narrations at particular places, especially at the beginning and the end, the reader understands some of the deeper psychological thoughts, especially for Tom.

Example: “**Tom:** Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage musician. He gives you the illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.”

Practice

Give other examples of stage directions and narration.

Vocabulary Archaic Language

Archaic language refers to words and phrases that have become outdated in the English language. When a person reads older literature, be prepared to look up ancient expressions so that you can fully understand an older piece of literature.

Practice Archaic Words

Directions: Look up these words to find out what they mean, even though they are now considered archaic.

Example: afore before

1. anon
2. aright
3. belike
4. eyne
5. fain
6. nary
7. nigh
8. sith
9. twain
10. verily

Growth Activities

1. Research on the Internet for more personal details about Tennessee Williams.
2. Read another play by Tennessee Williams.