

## Worksheet 2 – Scene One

### Review: Lecture 1

In the previous lecture of the unit, Prof McRae discussed some of the context for the play and existing critical interpretations.

- ✓ What did Williams originally title the play? Why do you think he changed it to *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

### Recall: Lecture 2

**Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember. You can also take the “Module Quiz” online.**

1. What is the name of the area Stanley and Blanche live in?  
a) Belle Reve    c) Bleecker Street  
b) Cemeteries     d) Elysian Fields
  
2. What does Stella’s name mean in Latin?  
a) Asteroid     c) Excellent  
b) Star    d) Sun
  
3. What is the weather like when Blanche arrives?  
a) Wintry    c) Hot  
b) Raining    d) Thundering
  
4. What is the name of Blanche’s former home?  
a) Belle Reve     c) Bel Air  
b) New Orleans    d) Elysian Fields

### Analysis

5. Prof. McRae discusses the symbolism of names in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Below are some of the characters and locations mentioned in the play. Make a mind map for each one, exploring the etymology and connotations of the name and what attributes they imply.

*Make sure you give reasons on your mind map for why you have made these inferences. The first one has been done for you.*

- a) Belle Reve
- b) Stella Kowalski
- c) Blanche DuBois
- d) Elysian Fields

Stanley Kowalski

*Stanley – comes from the Old English for ‘stan’ meaning stony and ‘leigh’ meaning meadow. This name might symbolise both his strength and virility as a character.*

*Kowalski is a common Polish surname, equivalent to “Smith” in English. It makes Stanley a kind of “everyman” character who represents something wider about American society. In this case it is a new capitalist America founded on the labour of immigrant families who are now American citizens.*

6. Rewatch McRae’s lecture from 5:35 to 6:33. Using McRae’s commentary and your own analysis of key words in **bold**, write an analytical paragraph answering the following question:

What is the significance of Williams’s description of Stella’s appearance in the stage directions?

*Blanche comes around the corner, carrying a valise. She looks at a slip of paper, then at the building, then again at the slip and again at the building. Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. **Her appearance is incongruous to this setting.** She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. She is about five years older than Stella. **Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light.** There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that **suggests a moth.***

Challenge:

Read the following article from the *Guardian* on different representations of Blanche on stage:

<https://tinyurl.com/2p8ccjpx>

- Which actor do you think most closely fits the description of Blanche in the stage directions?
- Do you think this likeness would be an important consideration when casting the play? Why/why not?
- If you were directing a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which actor would you cast as Blanche? Why? (*Note: this choice can involve your interpretation of the character, beyond what is suggested by Williams’s stage directions.*)

**Evaluation**

7. McRae suggests that Scene 1 of the play demonstrates how its events are symbolic of a “whole society”, not just the lives of individual characters [1:35]. With this in mind, choose one of the stage directions below to research, making notes on the historical context of New Orleans as a city.

- a) Plantations and trade in New Orleans: <https://tinyurl.com/33v56sww> [Louisiana State Museum]

You can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with their faint redolences of bananas and coffee.

- b) Blues music in New Orleans: <https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2017/02/birth-of-blues-and-jazz/> [Library of Congress]

In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played

- c) Multiculturalism in New Orleans: <https://www.neworleans.com/things-to-do/multicultural/cultures/african-american/> [New Orleans Tourist Board]

New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city where there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old part of town

8. Based on your research, to what extent do you agree with McRae that the play might explore wider changes within American society, rather than just the lives of individual characters? Answer in two analytical paragraphs. Include some of your historical research in your answer.

### Glossary

- **Elysian** – (adj.) relating to or characteristic of heaven or paradise; coming from an ancient Greek conception of the afterlife, the Elysian Fields were a realm of the afterworld where only heroes and gods were admitted.
- **Incongruous** – (adj.) not in harmony or keeping with the surroundings or other aspects of something.  
*e.g. The plastic flowers seemed incongruous within the otherwise tasteful décor.*
- **Louisiana Purchase** – (n.) the acquisition of the territory of Louisiana by the United States from Napoleonic France in 1803.
- **Multivocal** – (adj.) having many meanings or interpretations.  
*e.g. The novel is multivocal and can be read in many different ways.*
- **Stasis** – (n.) motionlessness; a period or state of inactivity or balance.  
*e.g. The country is experiencing political stasis, as citizens are too fearful to vote for change.*