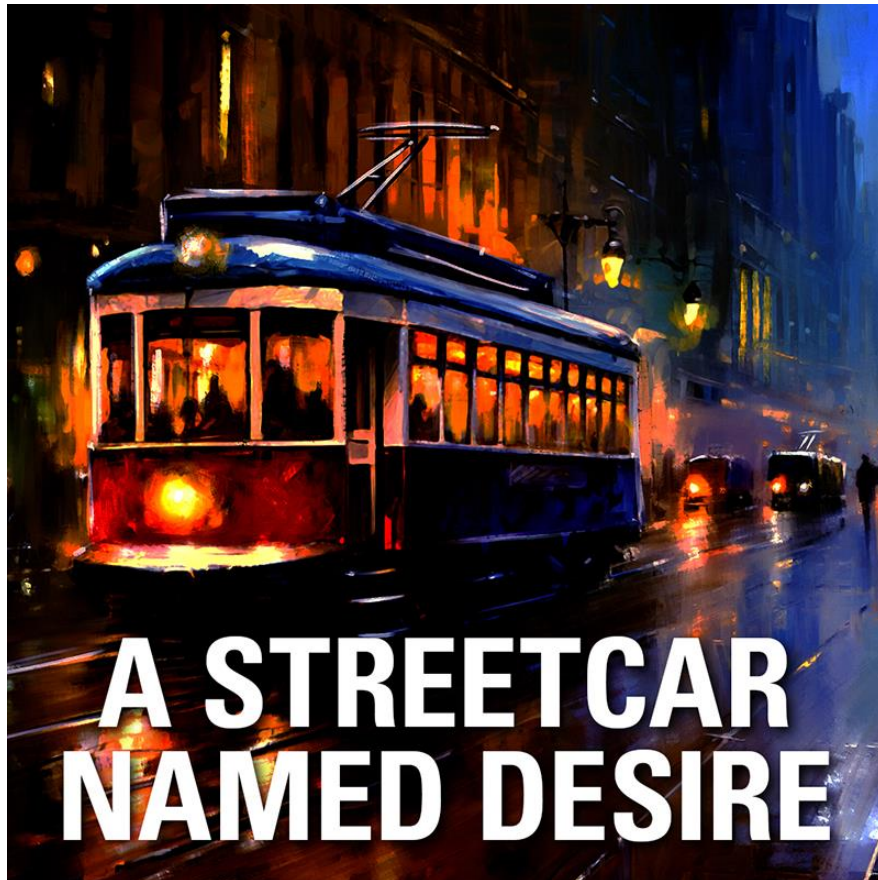


## ***A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE***

ENRICHMENT GUIDE



**By Tennessee Williams  
Directed by Daryl Cloran**

**Produced in Association with Theatre Calgary**

***A Streetcar Named Desire* is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. [www.concordtheatricals.com](http://www.concordtheatricals.com)**

***A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* is presented by special arrangement with the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee**

We wish to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is Treaty No. 6 territory and a traditional meeting ground and home of the First Nations, including both the treaty signatories – Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stony and Cree-Iroquois – as well as other Indigenous peoples, such as the Blackfoot and Métis, who occupied this land. We extend our appreciation for the opportunity to live, create and perform on this territory.

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## **THEATRE ETIQUETTE**

Going to the theatre is an engaging and interactive experience. We want you to be an active participant when you see our shows: laugh when it's funny, cry when it's sad, gasp when it's shocking, and enjoy the experience as much as possible. But we want you to do this in the most respectful way possible, for both the performers and your fellow audience members. To ensure the most positive experience, please review the following information prior to arriving.

### **THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ARE NOT ALLOWED IN THE THEATRE:**

- Outside food or beverages. Only beverages purchased in the lobby and placed in a Citadel Sippy and bottled water will be allowed in the theatre. Unwrapped ice cream bars may be taken into the theatre. Please enjoy all other snacks in the lobby.
- Cameras and other recording devices (please note that taking photographs or other recordings in the theatre is strictly prohibited by law).

### **BASIC COURTESY:**

- Please turn OFF and put away all electronic devices such as cell phones, gaming systems, etc. prior to entering the theatre.
- Do not place your feet on the seat in front of you.
- The actors onstage can see and hear the audience during the performance – it is important that audience members not talk or move around during the performance, as this can be distracting for the actors and fellow audience members.
- There is no dress code at the Citadel Theatre, but we respectfully request that patrons refrain from wearing hats in the theatre.
- For the safety of those with allergies, please refrain from using perfumes or scented products before coming to the theatre.
- Please do not place backpacks or other bags in the aisle in front of your feet, as this may impair the ability of persons to exit the row in an emergency.

### **INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR:**

Citadel Theatre representatives watch carefully during performances for inappropriate behaviour, especially behaviour that could endanger an actor or audience member.

Inappropriate behaviour includes, but is not limited to:

- Talking in the audience
- The use of laser pointers or other light or sound-emitting devices
- Interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.)

Audience members identified as engaging in this type of behaviour will be removed from the theatre during the performance or at intermission.

## CHARACTERS

**BLACHE DUBOIS:** Stella's older sister, who was a high school English teacher in Laurel, Mississippi, until she was forced to leave her post.

**STELLA KOWALSKI:** Blanche's younger sister, about twenty-five years old and of a mild disposition that visibly sets her apart from her more vulgar neighbors.

**STANLEY KOWALSKI:** The husband of Stella. Stanley is the epitome of vital force. He is loyal to his friends, passionate to his wife, and heartlessly cruel to Blanche.

**HAROLD "MITCH" MITCHELL:** Stanley's army friend, coworker, and poker buddy.

**EUNICE:** Stella's friend, upstairs neighbor, and landlady.

**STEVE:** Stanley's poker buddy who lives upstairs with his wife, Eunice.

**PABLO:** Stanley's poker buddy.

**DOCTOR:** At the play's finale, the doctor arrives to whisk Blanche off to an institution.

**NURSE:** She accompanies the doctor to collect Blanche and bring her to an institution.

**YOUNG COLLECTOR:** A teenager who comes to the Kowalski's door to collect for the newspaper when Blanche is home alone.

**FLOWER SELLER:** A vendor of Mexican funeral decorations who frightens Blanche by issuing the plaintive call "Flores para los muertos," which means "Flowers for the dead."

## SYNOPSIS

After losing her Mississippi home to creditors, Blanche duBois relocates to the New Orleans home of her younger sister and brother-in-law, Stella and Stanley Kowalski. Undermined by romantic illusions, Blanche is unable to cope with life's harsh realities. While Blanche's world collapses, Stanley stalks closer to discovering the truth of her past and exposing her secrets.

## TERMS AT A GLANCE

*This section defines and offers context for some of the vocabulary used throughout the Production.*

**Attenuates:** lessens the amount, force, magnitude or value of; weakens

**Bobby-soxer:** an adolescent girl, especially in the 1940s

**Colloquy:** a conversational exchange, dialog

**Coquettish:** flirtatious

**Cosmopolitan:** of worldwide scope or applicability; worldly; familiar with a variety of people and places

**Effeminate:** having traits generally considered feminine

**Elysian Fields:** (Greek mythology) the abode of the blessed after death.

**Gallantry:** heroic, courtly attention to women

**Gossamer:** something extremely light, flimsy, or delicate

**Heterogenous:** consisting of dissimilar parts

**Hoity toity:** assuming airs, pretentious, haughty

**Hypocritical:** pretending to have virtues, morals or principles that one does not actually possess

**Incongruous:** lacking in harmony; incompatible

**Kibitz:** to look on and offer advice

**Neurasthenic:** a person suffering from a psychological disorder characterized by chronic fatigue and weakness, loss of memory, and generalized aches and pains, formerly thought to result from exhaustion of the nervous system. No longer in scientific use.

**Pinion:** to restrain or immobilize a person by holding their arms

**Raffish:** cheaply vulgar in appearance or nature; tawdry; disreputable, marked by a carefree unconventionality or disreputableness.

**Redolence:** Odours, fragrances

**Seven card stud:** a variety of poker in which each player is dealt one card face down in each of the first two rounds, one card face up in each of the next four rounds, and one card face down in the last round, each of the last five rounds being followed by a betting interval.

**Sotto voce:** without the voice, whispered

**Swindle:** to cheat out of money or other assets

**Transitory:** fleeting, short-lived, non-permanent

**Vivacity:** liveliness, animation, sprightliness

## THEMES

### THE ANTI-HERO

"I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." *Blanche Dubois, A Streetcar Named Desire*

An anti-hero is a main character in a narrative who may lack some conventional heroic qualities and attributes.

In Tennessee Williams' classic play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche Dubois is an example of an anti-hero. Blanche is also a reflection of a 1940s woman who does whatever it takes to survive in a world that was not meant for her.

Blanche DuBois appears in the first scene dressed in white, the symbol of purity and innocence. She is seen as a moth-like creature. She is delicate, refined, and sensitive. She is cultured and intelligent. She can't stand a vulgar remark or a vulgar action. She would never willingly hurt someone. She doesn't want realism; she prefers magic. She doesn't always tell the truth, but she tells "what ought to be truth." Yet, in contrast to that, she has lived a life that could be perceived as sordid at the time of the play's premiere. She is, in general, one of Williams' characters who does not belong in the world they are born into. It is thought of by many that Williams is commenting on the misogyny of the time in his creation of the iconic character of Blanche Dubois, *A Streetcar Named Desire's* anti-hero. As the play begins, Blanche is already a fallen woman in society's eyes. Her family fortune and estate are gone, she lost her young husband to suicide years earlier, and she is a social pariah due to her indiscrete sexual behavior. She also has a dependence on alcohol, which she attempts to cover up to little success. Behind her veneer of social snobbery and sexual propriety, Blanche is an insecure and dislocated individual. She is an aging Southern belle who lives in a state of perpetual panic about her fading beauty. Her manner is dainty and frail, and she sports a wardrobe of showy evening clothes. Stanley quickly sees through Blanche's act and seeks out information about her past.

In the Kowalski household, Blanche pretends to be a woman who has never known indignity. Her false propriety is not simply snobbery, however; it constitutes a calculated attempt to make herself appear attractive to new male suitors. Blanche depends on male sexual admiration for her sense of self-esteem, which means that she has often succumbed to passion. By marrying, Blanche hopes to escape poverty and the bad reputation that haunts her. But because the chivalric Southern gentleman saviour and caretaker (represented by Shep Huntleigh) she hopes will rescue her is extinct, Blanche is left with no realistic possibility of future happiness. As Blanche sees it, Mitch is her only chance for contentment, even though he is not her ideal.

The other characters in the play, representative of the era's misogynistic society, choose to disregard Blanche's plight in accordance with what society expects, and because of Williams's sympathy as a playwright to his anti-hero, Blanche becomes a tragic protagonist in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and transforms the play into a sort of allegory: Williams uses her plight to criticize the social circumstances that have both shaped her flawed persona and led to her demise.



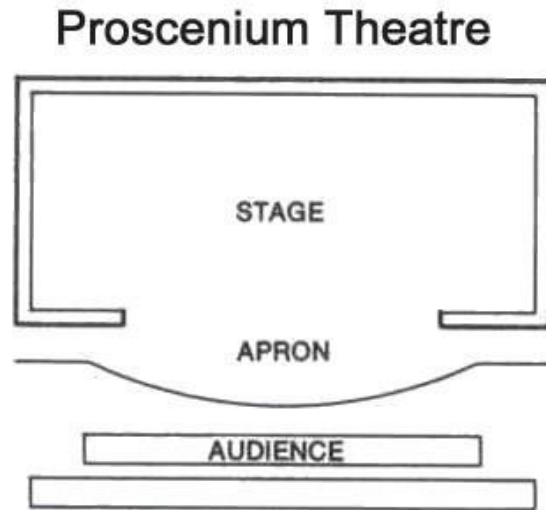
Vivian Leigh in *A Streetcar Named Desire* Oil Painting  
Image credit: Unknown

## PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

### PROSCENIUM STAGE

A proscenium theatre is a specific style of theatre. Several features define a proscenium theatre, and this particular theatre layout is extremely common; if you have ever been to see a live performance, especially in a high school auditorium, chances are high that you have seen a proscenium theatre. In addition to proscenium style theatres, it is also possible to find black box theatres, theatres with thrust stages, theatres in the round, and numerous other configurations of stage and audience.

The classically defining feature of a proscenium theatre is the proscenium arch, which frames the stage for the audience. In addition, the audience faces the stage directly, with no audience on the sides of the stage, and the stage in a proscenium theatre is typically raised, allowing the audience to see more clearly. Modern proscenium theatres sometimes lack the proscenium arch, but they are still called “proscenium theatres” because they retain the other characteristics of this style of theatre.



Proscenium theatres originated in the 1600s and became immensely popular by the 1700s. There are certain advantages of a proscenium theatre, such as the fact that the stage doesn't have to be as open, allowing people to conceal props, sets, and orchestras in the wings or near the stage without having these things visible to the audience. A proscenium theatre also creates a sense of staged grandeur, with the proscenium arch acting almost like a picture frame, giving the audience the sense that they are looking into a scene.

## INTERVIEW WITH A *STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* CAST MEMBER, ERIC WIGSTON

*As part of your track in this production, you have some "Understudy" roles. What is an Understudy and what is your process for working as an Understudy?*

The role of an "Understudy" is to learn, memorize, and rehearse another performer's role. In case of sickness, injury, or any other reason that the performer cannot do the show, the understudy will step in their place and perform for that show. Understudies spend the majority of rehearsals watching the performers they are understudying and writing down blocking (movements on the stage), entrances and exits, fights, choreography, costume changes, and anything else they will have to do if they have to go on. Understudies generally work with an Assistant or Associate Director and/or Stage Management throughout the process for any text work or clarification on direction. I personally enjoy discussing character arc and world of the play with the actors I understudy, as it gives me a better understanding of that specific performers embodiment of their character.



Eric Wigston

*You have worked as an Understudy at other times in your career. Have you ever had to go on for any of the roles you have Understudied for?*

I have had the opportunity to understudy five professional theatre shows covering up to five characters, and I have never had to go on stage once to cover a role.

*What role does music and the live band play in this production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*?*

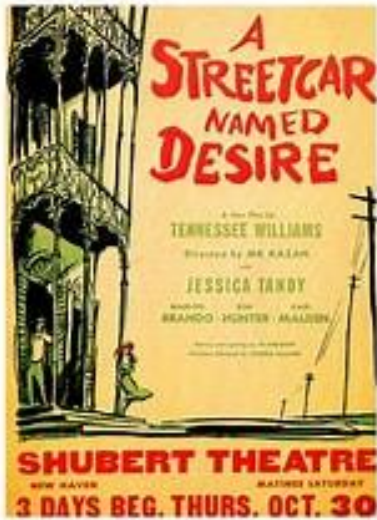
In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, music plays such a crucial part setting up the world of the play. Characters talk about "the jazz band down the block" and characters also have memories of music, and they sing songs in the play. To have a live band on stage for the production, I believe it sets the mood and transports the audience directly into 1940's New Orleans. The band plays 1940's jazz standards as well as many original compositions by Joelysa Pankanea (Sound Designer/Composer). The band also underscores scene changes and transitions throughout the production.



## HISTORY & CONTEXT

### AMERICAN SOCIAL REALISM AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Depicting a gritty, highly detailed slice of New Orleans life, *A Streetcar Named Desire* demonstrates the influence of the social realism movement in literature and the performing arts. Social realist dramas are naturalistic works set in actual places and recognizable milieus whose characters are not just individuals but cultural archetypes—that is, they represent social classes, cultures, nationalities, or races. The action of social realist dramas covers how characters co-exist (or don't) and dramatizes a clash between them. Typically, one character or group of characters rises and another falls, symbolizing a shift in society or civilization.



Playbill for *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the Shubert Theatre  
Image credit: Unknown

In the world of theatre, social realism developed in the 1870s with the plays of Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Anton Chekhov and, slightly later, George Bernard Shaw. By the 1930s, it had become the dominant style of American theatre. Given the intense events transforming the world at the time, including economic depression and the rising threat of war, it seemed almost mandatory to examine people within the context of the social order and as representatives of its different aspects. In the 1940s, rising playwrights like Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller slightly altered the form. These playwrights grounded their plots, settings and characters in real life but often used expressionistic theatrical devices, such as flashbacks or juxtaposed actions, in their storytelling. For example, to convey Blanche's deteriorating mental state, *A Streetcar Named Desire* departs from realistic jazz music to feature incoherent sounds that only she sees and hears. The stage directions also specify the symbolic use of color in costume: Stanley wears brightly colored shirts and pajamas as befits his identity as a "gaudy seed-bearer."

With its colorful, lower-class urban setting, *A Streetcar Named Desire* influenced a new generation of socially realistic work. Williams' plays are often seen as a bridge between realism and expressionism, and his work is credited with introducing a new level of psychological complexity to American theatre. Williams' works often explore the human condition, focusing on issues such as mental illness, sexuality, and loneliness.

Tennessee Williams' legacy on American theatre is undeniable. His works have inspired countless playwrights and filmmakers, and his influence can be seen in the works of many contemporary playwrights. His characters are often outsiders, struggling to find their place in a world that does not understand them. Williams' works are often seen as a reflection of his own struggles with depression and his homosexuality. His plays continue to be performed around the world, and his influence will continue to be felt for generations to come.

## CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

*Participation as an audience member at the Citadel Theatre aligns with the Alberta Education Curriculum.*

### **Drama (Junior High)**

**GOAL I-** To acquire knowledge of self and others through participation in and reflection on dramatic experience.

**Objectives-** The Student will:

- Strengthen their powers of concentration.
- Extend the ability to think imaginatively and creatively.
- Extend the ability to explore, control and express emotions.
- Extend the ability to explore meaning through abstract concepts.
- Develop the ability to offer and accept constructive criticism.

**GOAL II-** To develop an appreciation for drama and theatre as a process and art form.

**Objectives-** The Student will:

- Develop awareness of various conventions of theatre.
- Develop awareness of drama and theatre by viewing as great a variety of theatrical presentations as possible.
- Develop the ability to analyze and assess the process and the art.
- Develop recognition of and respect for excellence in drama and theatre.

### **Drama (10-20-30)**

**GOAL I-** To acquire knowledge of self and others through participation in and reflection on dramatic experience.

**Objectives-** The Student will:

- Extend their ability to concentrate.
- Extend understanding of, acceptance of, and empathy for others.
- Demonstrate respect for others — their rights, ideas, abilities and differences.
- Demonstrate the ability to offer, accept, and reflect upon constructive criticism.

**GOAL II-** To develop competency in communication skills through participation in and exploration of various dramatic disciplines.

**Objectives-** The Student will:

- Demonstrate understanding of integration of disciplines to enrich a theatrical presentation.

**GOAL III-** To develop an appreciation of drama and theatre as a process and art form.

**Objectives-** The Student will:

- Explore various conventions and traditions of theatre.
- Broaden knowledge of theatre by viewing as great a variety of theatrical presentations as possible.
- Demonstrate the ability to critically assess the process of art.
- Demonstrate recognition of and respect for excellence in drama and theatre.
- Develop an awareness of aesthetics in visual and performing arts.

## REFERENCES

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<[Examining Tennessee Williams' Lasting Influence on American Theatre - MetaMuu Hub](#)>

Cliffnotes.com, accessed on September 8, 2024

<[Character Analysis Blanche Dubois](#)>

Bu.edu.com, accessed on September 8, 2024

<[Blanche Dubois: An Anti-Hero](#)>

Sparknotes.com, accessed on August 27, 2024

<[A Streetcar Named Desire Character List](#)>

Gradesaver.com, accessed on August 27, 2024

<[A Streetcar Named Desire Glossary of Terms](#)>

## FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

[Relationships in \*A Streetcar Named Desire\*](#)

[Post World War II New Orleans](#)

[Tennessee Williams](#)

[A Streetcar Named Desire Plot Summary: Schooling Online](#)

[Tennessee Williams: Truth, Illusion, and the Grotesque South](#)

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## GOVERNMENT AND FOUNDATION FUNDERS

