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Sample

Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Glass Menagerie

by Tennessee Williams

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to

1. identify the common aim of straight realistic and expressionistic drama and differentiate between the two on the basis of staging.
2. identify and discuss the rationale for the unconventional techniques of staging that Williams employs in the play.
3. trace the development of the following motifs in the play:
 - deception
 - illusions
 - light and shadow
 - escape
 - fragility
4. identify and state the significance of the following symbols:
 - the glass menagerie
 - the unicorn
 - the gentleman caller
 - the fire escape
5. identify which of the three major characters is the protagonist, and present an argument to support that selection.
6. present an argument for the position that Tom, in addition to being an individual, is also representative of the young men of that period in history.
7. demonstrate that all four characters, to varying degrees, live in a world that fluctuates between illusion and reality.
8. identify and discuss the elements that make this play an emotionally moving experience for most viewers and account for its universal appeal.
9. define and cite examples of the following literary terms:
 - symbol
 - allusion
 - irony
 - simile
 - foreshadowing
 - pun
 - flashback

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. The words *illusion* and *reality* are often juxtaposed. Can we, or should we, have just one or the other in our lives? Present a rationale for your opinion.
2. Sometimes, reality becomes overwhelming for Amanda, Tom, and Laura. At those times, how does each try to escape reality? Identify the particular aspect of reality each hopes to escape. In what ways does the act of escaping from reality eventually cause harm for each character?
3. What are some realities today that people wish to escape, and what are some of the common means of escape? What are some popular illusions?
4. What elements of staging are unconventional in this play?
5. How is expressionistic drama similar to and different from realistic drama?
6. The deception motif runs throughout the play. Provide examples in which one character purposely deceives one or more of the other characters.
7. Tom is an interesting character because he has such ambivalent feelings. Identify the two directions in which Tom is pulled, the decision he makes, and the effect that decision has on him.
8. Identify what each of the following symbols represents: the unicorn, the fire escape, and the gentleman caller.
9. In a paragraph, state why *The Glass Menagerie* is an appropriate title for the play.
10. Consider the character of Amanda over the course of the play. What impression of Amanda do you suppose Williams wanted the audience to have at the conclusion?
11. Although this could be described as a pessimistic play, there is also something one must admire about the characters. What is pessimistic about the play's ending, and what is admirable about the characters?
12. In the last scene, why does Laura not get upset when Jim breaks the unicorn while they are dancing?
13. Define and find examples of the following literary terms:
 - symbol
 - allusion
 - irony
 - simile
 - foreshadowing
 - pun

Scene One

VOCABULARY

ascends – goes up; rises
automatism – the quality of being mechanical or robotic in one's actions
beaux – boyfriends; male companions
Braille – a method of reading and writing, consisting of raised dots that stand for characters
cellular – divided into separate units or compartments
conglomerations – things made up of assorted parts; clustered masses
differentiation – the quality of being distinct or separate
doughboy – a slang term for an American infantry soldier, especially during World War I
elegiac – sad, mournful
emissary – a messenger or agent
fluidity – the quality of being flexible or changeable
gallantly – in a brave, noble, or dignified way
implacable – unable to be calmed or soothed
ineluctably – in a way that is unavoidable or inescapable; inevitably
interfused – blended or melded together
latticework – wood or metal strips forming a crisscross pattern
mastication – the process of chewing
matriculating – enrolling as a student
nimble – quick, agile
portieres – curtains that are hung from a doorway
predominantly – mainly, primarily
prominent – well-known; important
proscenium – an arch or an invisible wall that separates the audience from the stage
scrim – a curtain made of see-through fabric
symptomatic – characteristic or typical (especially of an illness or a disease)
temperament – personality, disposition
tenement – a rundown apartment building
transparent – see-through, clear

- At the opening, the fire escape and the father's picture are two objects that figure prominently in the set. Literally, what is the purpose of a fire escape? Symbolically, what may the fire escape represent?

4. Ushered in by sounds of “Ave Maria” (“Hail Mary”), Amanda explains herself to Tom. In what way does she say she must be respected?

5. In what way does Tom remind Amanda of her husband?

6. How might the letter Amanda saw foreshadow Tom’s departure?

7. What is the one thing Amanda begs of Tom?

8. Explain the meaning of Amanda’s line, “I’m not standing here blindfolded.”

3. List some references to light in the early part of the scene.

4. In what form does the deception motif appear again in this scene?

5. What can you infer from Amanda’s comment that Laura now, her figure enhanced, is “the prettiest [she] will ever be”?

6. What literary terms are used in Amanda’s comment, “It isn’t dark enough yet”?

7. What has made Laura sick?
