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The Glass Menagerie
BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS


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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Historical Context**

Objectives: Researching the historical context of a work
 Evaluating the importance of setting

Activity

The Glass Menagerie is set in St. Louis, Missouri, near the end of the Great Depression in the late 1930s. It was a time of severe hardship and change for many Americans. In 1929, the U.S. experienced the stock market crash, an economic disaster that led to the Great Depression. Furthermore, unbeknownst to most Americans in the late 1930s, the country was about to become involved in one of the world's deadliest conflicts—World War II. To understand some of the pressures on the Wingfield family, you will need to be aware of the economic conditions and the country's mood at that time.

Your teacher will break you into groups and assign your group one of the following subjects, along with the associated questions. Your group will research the topic using the Internet and/or other reliable resources and answer the questions. During your research, you will also need to find two or three photographs that best illustrate your topic.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Allusion Chart****Objective:** Identifying and analyzing allusion in the play**Activity**

Tennessee Williams uses allusions throughout *The Glass Menagerie* to convey themes and motifs. An allusion is a reference to a person, place, thing, event, or idea drawn from history, mythology, the Bible, literature, or works of art. Allusion is used to deepen the reader's understanding of concepts, characters, setting, and conflict. It can be used to imply a tone or to illustrate a comparison or contrast.

Allusion can be a powerful literary device if the reader can make the connection between the reference and the story. The key to interpreting allusion is identifying the reference and then understanding how the reference supports an idea in the story.

As you read the play, identify as many allusions as you can, and list them on the following chart. Write the allusion in the left column. Include the scene in which you find the allusion. In the middle column, identify what or who is being referenced in the allusion. If you are not familiar with the reference, you may consult the Internet or other sources. Determine the possible significance of the allusion to the story, and write it in the last column. The first one has been done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading

Character Diagram

Objective: Inferring character traits from the text

Activity

Authors often reveal their characters' traits, such as trustworthiness, naiveté, or stubbornness, as well as their characters' motivations and values through how the characters view themselves, how they view others, and how others view them. In some instances, one or more of these perceptions is flawed. By comparing each of these viewpoints with our own opinions of the characters, we can evaluate to what extent these assessments are accurate.

For example, in *The Glass Menagerie*, the father abandoned the family long ago. Tom is resentful that his father left him responsible for Amanda and Laura. Most of us would consider it appalling for a man to leave his wife and two young children without any resources so he could travel and live a life free of responsibilities. Therefore, Tom's resentment is viewed as justifiable. Through Tom's reaction, it can be inferred that not only was the father a despicable man, but also that Tom can see the reality of a situation.

Tennessee Williams is noted for his complex and conflicted characters. To help you develop a comprehensive understanding of the characters' traits in *The Glass Menagerie*, you will complete a character diagram for Tom, Amanda, Laura, or Jim as you read the play. Your diagram should include the following:

- your first impressions of the character
- the character's view of him or herself
- what the character thinks of others
- what others think of the character
- the character's problems or concerns, if they were resolved, and how they were resolved

The Character Diagram for the father, Mr. Wingfield, has been done for you as an example.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scene Two**Costume Change****Objective:** Inferring character through costuming**Activity**

In addition to dialogue, actors reveal their characters' personalities and convey emotion through facial expressions and body language. Similarly, costume designers can convey a lot about characters through the characters' clothing and accessories.

In Scene Two, Tennessee Williams describes the facial expressions of Laura and Amanda, how they are dressed, and how they interact. Review the stage directions that begin Scene Two, and examine the clothing Laura and Amanda wear and what Tennessee Williams notes about their actions and facial expressions.

It's common for kids who have disobeyed their parents to try to cover it up, as Laura does. Rewrite the passage, substituting a modern day situation. List what kind of clothes you imagine Laura and Amanda would be wearing today, what their non-verbal communication would be like, and write what thoughts are going through each character's mind. Be as descriptive as possible to convey a clear image of the scene.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scene Three**The American Dream****Objective:** Understanding the concept of the American Dream**Activity**

The term the “American Dream” was coined by historian James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*, written in 1931, two years into the Great Depression. He explains this concept as the unique situation in America in which citizens have the opportunity and freedom to seek, as the Declaration of Independence states, “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” According to Adams, this freedom makes it possible for anyone to achieve a better, more satisfying and richer life, regardless of one’s social status, gender, race, or parentage.

In the 1930s, the country was economically depressed, and many people were out of work. Having a job that provided a stable income and offered the possibility for advancement was very important. The goal for most was not to become incredibly wealthy, but to have a nice home and be financially secure enough to provide for a family.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scenes Three – Seven**Symbolism****Objective:** Identifying and analyzing symbols**Activity**

Writers sometimes use objects, people, or places to represent something more abstract such as a concept or idea. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom says that Jim is a symbol for “the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for.” On the Symbolism Chart, identify the symbol listed with a character or characters in the play, and record your analysis in the last column. Explain the concept, idea, emotion, or other element that this symbol might represent.

The first one has been done for you as an example.