

Summary:

- Blanche breaks out in laughter at her letter to Shep Huntleigh, encouraging Stella to ask about the contents of the letter. Blanche reads the letter aloud, in which she suggests visiting Shep in Dallas, and also announces that she and Stella have been attending society parties and visits to country homes.
- Here Blanche lies in order to establish the façade of a genteel life for herself and her sister, hoping that these lies will maintain the illusion of their aristocratic status. Blanche writing to her high school sweet heart, shows her loneliness in New Orleans and desperation as she feels that he is the only one who can help her escape.
- The conversation is interrupted by the sound of Steve and Eunice fighting in the apartment above. Eunice accuses Steve of being unfaithful, claiming she is going to the police however Stanley says he just saw Eunice at a bar around the corner. Steve later follows finding Eunice at the bar. This re-emphasises the violence and passion that permeates the lives of those in Elysian Fields, and the fact that Steve and Eunice can be overheard so clearly reflects the idea that the walls are permeable and that there are limitations to the safety and privacy that can be found in the Kowalski home. Finally the fact that Eunice did something 'practical' and went to a bar rather than to the police shows that Elysian Fields is a place where practical realities have replaced ideals. The characters in Elysian Fields cope with the ugly truths of their lives rather than trying to make them better or polishing over them like Blanche does.
- Blanche subtly insults Stanley's lower class status with superficially charming compliments. He has learnt of Blanche's past and asks her if she knows a man named Shaw. Blanche becomes evasive. Stanley says that Shaw claims Blanche was often a customer at a small hotel with a reputation for indecency. Blanche denies the accusations. Eunice and Steve come back to the apartment; Stanley goes to the bar, asking Stella to meet him there.
- Steve and Eunice's quick make-up after their argument shows that Stella and Stanley's relationship, one punctuated with violence followed by passionate intimacy, is the norm in this society. The mention of Shaw suggests Blanche's shady past and the idea that she will not be able to escape from the truths that she has left behind there and from which she is trying to run.
- Stella doesn't notice Blanche's shaken state of mind. Blanche demands to know what people have been saying of her, confessing she had behaved inappropriately during the past few years, which implies that she has been sleeping around. She criticizes herself for not being self-sufficient, describing herself as 'soft' and admits she no longer has her youthful appearance. Blanche puts alcohol into her Coke and although Blanche tries to help herself, Stella insists on pouring for her as it 'reminds her of their childhood'. Stella accidentally spills some Coke on Blanche's dress and she reacts hysterically. Blanche promises to leave soon.
- Blanche, nervous about her date with Mitch, explains she hasn't been honest with him about her age. Blanche claims she needs Mitch for protection and as an escape from Elysian Fields. Stella assures Blanche that things will work out. Stella, Eunice and Steve go to the bar.
- Blanche's desires to not reveal her past to Mitch makes us further suspicious about her past in Mississippi and her truthfulness.
- Blanche answers the door to a young man who is there to collect payment for the newspaper. Blanche flirts with him, offering him a drink, declaring that he looks like an Arabian prince, then kisses him on the lips and sends him off. Mitch later appears with a bunch of roses. This reveals Blanche's nature that she is lustful underneath her conservative façade. Blanche condemns Stanley and Stella's sexual relationship however here we see she is being hypocritical, and inappropriate, by the way she acts around the newspaper boy. The phrase 'keep my hands off children' foreshadows Stanley's revelation about why she had to leave her job as a school teacher in Laurel.

CONTEXTUAL LINK:

Williams did not have a very close relationship with his parents, with his father being more interested in his career.

His parents also had a very conflicting marriage, which involved much abuse.

Williams's father, C.C. Williams, was a traveling salesman and a heavy drinker. Williams's mother, Edwina, was a Mississippi clergyman's daughter prone to hysterical attacks. Williams' mother 'had the beauty and social inclination of a Southern belle and, if not the wealth, the status . . .'

In 1918, the Williams family moved to St. Louis, marking the start of the family's deterioration. C.C.'s drinking increased, the family moved sixteen times in ten years, and the young Williams, always shy and fragile, was ostracized and taunted at school.

Much of the pathos found in Williams's drama was mined from the playwright's own life. Alcoholism, depression, thwarted desire, loneliness, and insanity were all part of Williams's world. His experience as a known homosexual in an era unfriendly to homosexuality also informed his work.

This harsh environment that Williams grew up in is reflected in this scene. Williams appears to have put himself into Blanche's character with her trait of not feeling good enough. And, to contrast with the "feelings that we do not assume children to have", Williams' idealistic and imaginative mind is reflected in the way that Blanche wanted to 'make a little – temporary magic', which reinforces the idea that Blanche wants to escape – just like Williams wanted to escape his parents' issues.

Exam questions:

Examine how reality and fantasy is presented in the two texts studied.

Explore how lies and deceit are important in the two texts studied, and what the writers' purpose and message is.

Context – historical, cultural or social – can have an influence on the way literary works are written or received. Discuss with reference to the two works you have studied.