AUDIENCE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The success of any performance depends on the actors on the stage as well as the people in the seats. Here a brief ETIQUETTE and PARTICIPATION REMINDER ….

* The audience’s noise level and behavior are heard and noticed by the actors of a live performance and have an immediate effect on the performance. This might be a positive or negative effect-- if the audience laughs at funny lines or interested in the action, this encourages the actors to give an energetic performance; if the audience is restless, talkative or distracting during the performance, the actors may find it difficult to give their best performance.

* The special effects in the theatre rely on the audience’s imagination to help create them. The audience must be willing to “suspend their disbelief” and use their imagination to provide part of the setting. Unlike a movie….everything happens in front of your eyes….there are no re-takes.

* Because each performance can be affected by audience response, an audience member will never see a duplication of a performance. Though the meaning is the same, each performance has its own underlying interpretations. The audience’s role is to form a connection with the actors and to appropriately respond to the performance. This response may be laughter, gasps, applause, or quiet attention as well as silence. Audience noises such cell phone ringing or talking can distract the actors. It also keeps those around you from maintaining their connection with the actors.

THE ACTOR’S GOAL IS TO BRING YOU IN TO THE WORLD THE ARE CREATING ONSTAGE.
Tom “Tennessee” Williams

Thomas Lanier Williams, the second of his parents' three children, was born March 26, 1911, at his maternal grandparents' home in Columbus, Mississippi. While his father was a traveling salesman for the International Shoe Company young Tom, his older sister Rose and their mother lived with Mother's parents in a number of parsonages (Grandfather was a minister) in both Mississippi and Tennessee. At one such home Tom contracted diphtheria and a kidney infection which left him bedridden for some time. Like many other authors, his love of literature and the life of the mind may be traced to this episode. When Tom was eight his father was promoted to sales manager of his company's St. Louis branch, to which the family moved.

Compared to his blissful rural existence with his grandparents Tom recalled his childhood in St. Louis as miserable and lonely because the local boys tormented him over his southern accent and interest in writing rather than athletics. His father took notice of these traits too and would call his son Miss Nancy Williams. Occasionally Tom wrote pieces for his schools' newspapers and in 1927 won third prize for an essay he submitted to the national magazine Smart Set; the following year his short story The Vengeance of Nitocris appeared in the sci-fi magazine Weird Tales. He also saw his first Broadway production in 1928 (the legendary musical Show Boat) and toured Europe with his grandfather and a party of people.

In 1929 Williams entered the University of Missouri but was forced to leave at the end of his junior year for having failed ROTC. Rather than send Tom to college again (it was 1932) his father found him a job at his company's warehouse, where he worked for three years until he was diagnosed with a heart condition that necessitated his recovery with his grandparents near Memphis, Tennessee (which nickname he soon adopted). While recuperating Williams submitted his play Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay! to a Memphis theatre group, which experience led to his drama studies at Washington University (St. Louis) beginning in 1936. The local Mummers subsequently produced his plays Candles in the Sun and The Fugitive Kind, which drew notice to his talent.

Transferring to the University of Iowa he enrolled in playwrighting classes, emerging with a BA in English in August 1938. Thereafter Williams begins his life-long travels around the US, stopping in different cities like New Orleans for a few months at a time, subsisting on low-paying jobs, loans from friends, his mother and grandmother and advances from his literary agent Audrey Wood. In 1939 the New York-based Theatre Guild awarded him $100 for several one acts submitted to their contest; he then received a Rockefeller grant that enabled him to move to New York City where he supported himself through a series of odd jobs (he also received an award from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts). Williams sat in on an advanced playwrighting seminar at the New School for Social Research there, which staged his Long Goodbye in 1940 and This Property is Condemned in 1942, bringing him to the attention of New York critics.
His sister Rose, who had been institutionalized as per their mother six years previously, underwent a prefrontal lobotomy in an effort to regulate her behavior. As early as 1932 Rose had shocked people, her mother in particular, by speaking to young men about sexual interludes; Mrs. Williams was upset enough to first send Rose to a mental hospital where she underwent insulin shock therapy to no avail before agreeing to try the experimental surgical procedure. Because of the close relationship between Rose and Tennessee their mother did not tell her son about the operation until it was completed, for which he never really forgave her.

Later in 1943, from May to November, Williams worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter though none of his writing was produced. He did, however, complete a screenplay titled The Gentleman Caller, which became The Glass Menagerie, his second professionally produced play. It earned the 1945 New York Drama Critics. Circle prize for best play, in addition to other local awards. During Menagerie’s run Williams began work on a play variously entitled The Poker Night and Blanche’s Chair in the Moon, which was produced in 1947 as A Streetcar Named Desire. The play earned that year’s Pulitzer Prize as well as the New York Critics. Circle award, and ran for 885 performances, the longest Broadway run of any of his plays. In 1948, the year his battling parents finally separated. Williams, full-length plays Summer and Smoke (revised as Eccentricities of a Nightingale), The Rose Tattoo, Camino Real, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (which won the 1955 Pulitzer Prize), Orpheus Descending (the revised Battle of Angels), Sweet Bird of Youth, Period of Adjustment (his only comedy) and The Night of the Iguana bring his view and his characters to Broadway and the world; his novel The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone is filmed, as is The Glass Menagerie, Streetcar, The Rose Tattoo, Baby Doll, Cat; and several other plays.

Williams continued to write one-act plays, short stories, essays and poems throughout his career. Tennessee was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1952 (they granted him their Gold Medal for Drama in 1969) and the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1962. He was presented with the President’s Medal of Freedom for a lifetime of achievements in 1980, and the prestigious Common Wealth Award in 1981; Harvard conferred an honorary doctorate on him in 1982. Tennessee Williams died in 1983 and was buried in St. Louis.

**Williams’ Work**

1940 Battle of Angels
1944 Stairs to the Roof; The Glass Menagerie: NY Drama Critics’ Circle Award
1945 You Touched Me (Co-authored with Donald Windham)
1945 “This Property is Condemned”; Portrait of a Madonna
1947 Summer and Smoke (Later retitled Eccentricities of a Nightingale); A Streetcar Named Desire: NY Drama Critics’ Circle Award, Pulitzer Prize
1948 American Blues: Five Short Plays
1951 The Rose Tattoo: Tony Award: Best Play
1953 Camino Real; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; NY Drama Critics’ Circle Award;
1955 Orpheus Descending (Revision of Battle of Angels)
1957 Garden District (incl. Something Unspoken and Suddenly Last Summer); Talk to Me Like the Rain
1958 Sweet Bird of Youth; I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix; Period of Adjustment
1961 The Night of the Iguana: NY Drama Critics’ Circle Award
1962 The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore
1966 Slapstick Tragedy (incl. The Mutilated and GnadiesFraulein)
1967 The Two Characters Play (later revised as Outcry); The Seven Descents of Myrtle
1969 In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel; Dragon Country: A Book of Plays
1971 "I Can't Imagine Tomorrow" and "Confessional"
1972 Small Craft Warnings
1973 A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot
1975 The Red Devil Battery Sign; The Putrification
1976 This Is (An Entertainment)
1977 Vieux Carré
1978 Creve Coeur (revised as A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur)
1979 Kirche, Kuchen Und Kinder
1980 Clothes for a Summer Hotel; Will Mr. Meriwether Return from Memphis?; Williams’ name was added to the Theatre Hall of Fame.
1981 Something Cloudy, Something Clear
1982 A House Not Meant to Stand

Setting, Synopsis, Characters

Setting: The scene is the interior and exterior of the two-room Kowalski apartment in New Orleans. French Quarter. The action of the play takes place in the spring, summer and early fall one year in the late 1940s.

Synopsis: The DuBois sisters are the last members of an impoverished Southern plantation family. Stella left the estate, Belle Reve, a long time ago and married an army sergeant, Stanley. She happily serves him and his sweaty, swearing, poker-playing friends. Into this small, heat-oppressed apartment in New Orleans arrives Stella’s sister, Blanche. She claims to have taken a leave of absence from her school teacher’s position but is actually running away from her past. Putting on airs of refinement and Southern gentility, Blanche tries to impress her brother-in-law, and his gentle, good-natured friend, Mitch. Seeking to escape from reality, and an emblem of a lost traditional South, Blanche becomes a victim of the harsh present. When Blanche DuBois visits her younger married sister Stella following the loss of their ancestral home, Blanche’s frail mental health fails under husband Stanley’s unremitting scrutiny.

Characters in A Streetcar Named Desire

A Neighbor (Valerie Aro and Elise Sledge) who shares a laugh with Eunice over Stanley and Stella and lets Stella know that Blanche has arrived is one of the first people we see. Eunice Hubbell (Harley Pace-Rodriguez and Heather McBride) Stanley and Stella’s upstairs neighbor, to whom Stella turns for comfort when Stanley mistreats her. She is married to Steve Hubbell (see below). Stanley Kowalski (Matthew Lopes and Christopher Alvarado) a brash young man in his twenties who earns his living as a traveling salesman. He is prone to react physically when angered. He and Stella have not been married long, and so are quite comfortable in their 2-room apartment. Stella Kowalski (Nicole Williams and Liza Lysakova) Blanche’s younger sister, who left their home, Belle Reve, some time ago. She likes Stanley’s energy and strength, but not the violence. She stands up to him in her way, but has not told him that Blanche is coming to visit.
Steve Hubbell (Javan Zapata and Steven Williams) a poker-night and bowling buddy of Stanley’s who lives upstairs from the Kowalskis with his wife Eunice.
Harold (Mitch) Mitchell (Thomas Gonzales and Bledar Maqellara) a bachelor poker-night buddy of Stanley’s who lives with his aged mother. He is fascinated by Blanche and wants to protect her.
Blanche DuBois (Dorothy Ladyzhensky and Sarah Smith) Stella’s older sister, who lived at Belle Reve as the elderly relatives passed away, holding onto their ancestral home until she could no long support it on her teacher’s salary. She tells Stella that she just needs a bit of rest from all she’s been through but there is an air about her that suggests she may be looking for a more permanent haven.
Pablo Gonzales (Kelvin Ortega) a poker-night buddy of Stanley’s.
The Collector (Kelvin Ortega) a teenage boy collecting for the local paper. Something in his face or voice so reminds Blanche of a former beau from her Belle Reve days that she returns to that time and flirts with him.
A Doctor (Thomas Gonzalez and Bledar Magellara) and Nurse (Jean Schatz and Lianne Hikind) from the sanitarium. Flower seller (Linda Caban) reminds Blanche of her younger days.

Vocabulary and Phrases

Belle Reve - French, beautiful dream. This is the name of Blanche and Stella’s family home in Laurel, Mississippi.
Elysian Fields - The name of the apartment building the Kowalskis live in. In Greek mythology this was where the blessed spent eternity. The phrase has come to mean a place or condition of ideal happiness.
gaudy - tasteless and showy.
Heterogeneous - a whole consisting of unlike parts, for example, a community of people from different backgrounds.
implicit - implied.
incongruous - out of place.
the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir - A weir is a barrier placed in or across a stream of river to either create a pool or otherwise divert the stream’s flow; to redirect the water (a turn. see the end of the quote is a small lake). Blanche’s reference is a quote of Edgar Allen Poe’s poem.
indulgence - something granted as a favor or privilege.
por nada- Spanish: Don’t mention it, it was nothing.
Napoleonic Code - a civil code of law carried over into Louisiana from its French origins. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica Online, the Napoleonic Civil Code, an ambitious work of legal codification, consolidated certain basic principles established in 1789: civil equality and equality before the law; the abolition of feudalism in favor of modern contractual forms of property; and the secularization of civil relations. Codification also made it easier to export those principles beyond the borders of France. In the area of family relations, however, the Napoleonic Code was less a codification of revolutionary innovations than a reaction against them. By reverting to patriarchal standards that strengthened the prerogatives of the husband and father, it wiped out important gains that women had made during the Revolution. The code’s spirit on this subject was summed up in its statement that a husband owes protection to his wife; a wife owes obedience to her husband. Wives were barred from signing contracts without their husbands’ consent, and a wife’s portion of the family’s community property fell completely under her husband’s control during his lifetime...
Cut the rebop. Stanley is telling Blanche to stop buttering him up and say what she really thinks about him (during their scene together before the poker game).

fornication - sex between a man and woman not married to each other. Blanche simply means that the men in her family practically gave away their property over foolish whims (which may have included payments to mistresses but may have been gambling debts, for example.).

improvident - wasteful.

Run to the drugstore and get me a lemon Coke. At this time many drugstores featured soda fountains from which you could get milk shakes and other fountain drinks, including flavored sodas; that's where cherry Coke came from, before it was bottled. Lemon and vanilla Coke were other popular flavors preen - adorn oneself carefully; primp.

smoldering - to exist in a suppressed state that suggests emotional heat.

toilette. French: dressing or grooming.

Luckies. Lucky Strikes, a popular brand of cigarette in the Forties and Fifties.

Mrs. Browning. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, British 19th century poet who had to overcome her father’s disapproval to marry Robert Browning, an equally famous poet. Mitch owns a silver cigarette case given to him by a former lover. The inscription reads: And if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death.. This quote, as Blancherecalls, comes from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnet 43.: 

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day’s  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,.I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!.and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

 extraction - descent; lineage.  
 Gallantry- formal courtesies a man pays a woman.  
 superficial - concerned with only what is apparent or obvious; not a deep thinker.  
 Xavier Cugat - Latin American musician known as .King of the Rumba. (a rhythmical dance that originated in Cuba) who introduced Latin American rhythms into the US.  
 It’s always a powderkeg- a barrel of gunpowder, therefore, a very combustible object. Stella is explaining to Blanche that tempers can flare during a poker game as money changes hands and alcohol is consumed (especially when Stanley is playing, one would guess).  
 Is this some Chinese philosophy you’ve cultivated- Blanche wonders if Stella has developed an esoteric acceptance of Stanley’s behavior enabling her to rise above it.  
 bestial - Blanche.s opinion of Stanley, that he is like a beast or wild animal.  
 anthropological studies - scientific explorations of mankind.s origins, especially, in this case, the search for our common humanoid ancestor.  
 morbid - characterized by concern with unwholesome matters such as death.  
 The Arabian Nights - Blanche is referring to the Middle Eastern fables told by  
 Scheherazadé-she means that the paper carrier has an exotic, romantic look to him.
My Rosenkavalier - Blanche romanticizes Mitch by casting him as the hero of Strauss’s waltz opera of the same name, which character is an archetypal chivalrous object of desire of several of the women.

**delusion** - a false belief.

**Pleiades** - cluster of seven stars (also known as the Seven Sisters, esp. among Native Americans) in the constellation Taurus historically thought to symbolically represent sweet influences..

**joie de vivre** - French: literally, *joy of life*; figuratively, to enjoy life, to live in a spirited way.

**Bohemian** - not the ancient Eastern European province but referring to a *loose* lifestyle usually attributed to artists and freethinkers, in which people freely put out, for example.

*Je suis la Dame aux Camélias! Vous êtes—Armand!* Blanche refers to *Camille*, the popular 19th century French melodrama of a high-class prostitute and her lover Armand, who remains true to her despite the fact that his family forbids the relationship. She ultimately dies of tuberculosis.

**Huey Long** takes the oath of office

*Voulez-vous couches avec moi ce soir? Vous ne comprenez pas? Ah! Quel dommage!* In this remarkable passage Blanche asks an uncomprehending Mitch if he’d like to go to bed with her (shades of Patti LaBelle), whether he understands her or not (he does not) and then sighs, *What a shame!* She is certainly at the end of her rope psychologically and financially, and has probably had too much to drink, allowing her desperation to show through albeit in a foreign language.

**alpaca** - the South American llama’s wool coat was very prized in the 1950s, so Mitch is wearing a fine jacket.

**Varsouviana** - a waltz playing in the background at the casino where Blanche’s husband committed suicide after she admitted to him that she had seen him with his lover. This music haunts Blanche during the play.

**contemptible** - despicable; worthy of hate.

**Huey (the Kingfish.) Long**. Louisiana senator and governor whose motto, *Every man a king,* was the emblem of his wealth distribution program, Share Our Wealth, which many scholars view as the impetus behind FDR’s New Deal programs (Social Security, etc.). As Governor Long (1928-1930), a position he achieved through intense personal lobbying among the people rather than the politicians, he made good on his election promises. Long saw to it that the poor received free medical care, made Louisiana State University a first rate school and established its medical center in New Orleans. Still, the power and good works associated with Long’s name and political machine was such that his brother Earl became Louisiana’s governor in 1948. (see also New Orleans Politics, below)

**Are you boxed out of your mind?** Mitch isn’t sure if Blanche is drunk or nuts.

**Flores para los muertos**. Spanish: *Flowers for the dead.* The woman is selling flowers for people to place on their loved ones’ graves.

**legacies** - something handed down from an ancestor or past history. Blanche’s legacy is dying old women remembering their dead men..

**boucle** - French; a type of yarn that, when woven, creates a rough-textured cloth.
DRAMATIC CRITICISM

The following is taken from a chapter in Katherine Anne Ommanney’s Book, The Stage and the School. Though her book was written in 1939, the information she imparts is still valid today. The questions that follow are designed to help students focus on the areas she discusses.

To appreciate fully any type of drama and judge it fairly, you must consider the play itself, the interpretation by the actors, its staging by the director, and its reception by the audience. Your judgment is naturally colored by your personal preferences, immediate state of mind, social background, and technical theatrical knowledge. Often the company you are in can make or break the joy of a performance.

There are four considerations to be kept in mind as you judge the play-- the type, the theme, the plot and dialogue and characterization:

[1] **The Type**—and purpose must color your attitude toward it—a light comedy cannot be judged by the same standards as a romantic drama in though both may be worthy of discussion and analysis.

[2] **The Theme**—the theme of the play will receive your first consideration. It is the theme which holds the attention of the audience. Determine for yourself what you consider to be the theme of the play, and be prepared to justify your belief by adequate reasons. You might follow and ask: What did the author try to do (story to tell)? Did he or she do it? Was it worth doing?

[3] **The Plot**— If the play is any good at all, you will be asking yourself, What is going to happen next and be really eager for each act. At the same time, you should consider whether the events could really happen and whether the people and places are presented convincingly.

[4] **Dialogue and Characterization**—it is the dialogue through which the plot is developed and the characters portrayed. The characterization gives the actors a chance to interpret the play and you will often find that you have forgotten who is playing the parts in your interest in watching the characters in the play meet and solve their problems. The people should be very real to you, and you should feel that you are meeting new acquaintances and accepting or rejecting them as the play progresses.

[a] **Judging the Acting**—It is the acting of the play which arouses the keenest response from the audience. If actors create living people for us, losing themselves in the art of assuming other individualities by utilizing training you should appreciate their ability and applaud their success.

[b] **The Direction**—The most important factor in the ultimate success or failure of a play is the director. They are personally responsible for every phase of the production: the adaptation of the play, the casting of the parts, the interpretation of the characters, the effectiveness of the staging, the length of the rehearsal period, and the total effect of the production. You may notice how directors have developed contrast in casting, costuming and interpretation; worked out interesting stage pictures and emphasized their center of interest, and how they have created the proper atmosphere to bring out the author’s meaning with all their tools--actors, lights, setting, sound and costumes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE - THE CLIFF NOTES STUDY GUIDE....