

English 10H Blue

A Streetcar Named Desire Asynchronous Assignment #1

Submit your work by email by Wednesday 6/3 11:59pm.

Choose **one** of the options below.

- a) **Get started on writing a 10-minute play by writing 1-2 pages.** Those 1-2 pages could be the actual opening of your play (Look how *Streetcar* opens: character list, set description, opening dialogue and stage directions), or it could be 1-2 pages of planning/process work (plot outline, character descriptions more detailed than they'd be in the actual script, overarching vision and themes, etc.): which ever you think would most help you get started.

If you choose this option, you'll be able to work on it in pieces over the next two weeks. We haven't done exercises in playwriting per se (there is one below for you to try, if you'd like), but *Streetcar* at least gives you a model for how to format it, and much of the creative writing experience you have gained should be helpful: you've practiced locating conflict, using a variety of concrete language, channeling personal memories, referencing music, developing characters, structuring plot, establishing setting, and—probably most useful—writing dialogue (unpredictable, tense, intimate, authentic). If you'd like to use the particulars of *Streetcar* as a model, consider its use of extended metaphors (e.g. Blanche's journey, poker), motifs (light, flowers, music/sounds), allusions, or irony (there will be an option to explore this feature of the play in a critical sense later this week). Most important, have fun!

- b) **Exercise in conflict, characterization and dialogue.** If you want to do something creative, but aren't ready to start a whole play, this may be for you:

- i) Write two different versions of similar, short scenes...

Scenario #1: Two best friends are also roommates. Friend 1 has just decided to break up with a longtime significant other. Friend 2 thinks this is a great idea, and agrees with every justification offered.

Scenario #2: Same characters, and Friend 1's position is the same, but this time Friend 2 thinks this is the worst thing Friend 1 could ever do, and argues with every reason Friend 1 gives.

- ii) Write a brief reflection on your creations: Which was easier or harder to write? Which would make a better scene in a play? Why?

If you complete this and like how it goes, you could also use it as a piece of a larger 10-minute play moving forward.

- c) **Response to painting.** Spend some time looking at Thomas Benton's painting *Poker Night*: <https://whitney.org/collection/works/4174>. There is some contextual information on that webpage too, which you can read if you'd like. Write one or two paragraphs (1-2 pages) in response to the following prompts. You can either address all the prompts, or

focus on the ones that most interest you: When you look at the painting, what do you notice first? What do you notice second? What do you like about the painting? What do you dislike? In what ways is this accurate/faithful to the text? In what ways is it inaccurate/unfaithful? What's striking about the room? In what light (metaphorically speaking, but literal is okay too) does it portray each of the characters? Who does it favor? The producer of the original stage production requested that Jessica Tandy, who played Blanche, pose for a photographic reproduction of the painting to help promote the play—and she objected. Why do you think she objected? After reflecting on this, read the published letters on the subject between Williams and Tandy. Feel free to comment on the letters, too, if you'd like.

Dear Jessica:

I have been appointed intermediary in the delicate matter of persuading you to pose for a photographic duplication of the Thomas Hart Benton painting which our Lady Producer is to be surprised with at Christmas. I have seen a picture of the painting. It looks marvelous and of course Benton is a very outstanding painter. I can see how Blanche's dress, or lack of it, might offend you, but I am assured that you will not have to be so anatomical and I suppose the idea is an excellent piece of promotion. Myself I don't see it is vulgar, but I cannot swear that my sense of vulgarity is the most impeccable in the world.

Ever,
Tennessee

P.S. I believe Blanche would—after some initial protest.

Dear Tennessee,

You have the wrong impression of my objection to posing for a photographic duplicate of the Benton picture.

Eight times a week, and to progressively less sensitive audiences, I have to make clear Blanche's intricate and complex character...her background...her pathetic elegance...her indomitable spirit...her innate tenderness and honesty...her untruthfulness or manipulation of the truth...her inevitable tragedy.

My protagonist Stanley...my executioner as you put it...is comparatively simple and easy for an audience to understand.

The setting is a wonderful mixture of the quality of both these characters...decayed elegance and sheer unadulterated guts.

I share your admiration for Benton as a painter, but in this painting he has chosen to paint, it seems to me, the Stanley side of the picture. Even in the set, you are more conscious of telegraph poles than scrolled ironwork.

There has always been a part of the audience who obviously expects a sexy, salacious play. I don't want to do anything which will lead future audiences to think that they are going to see sex in the raw, as it were.

I respect Mr. Benton's right to paint any facet of the play that he sees and to exaggerate it in order to make clear his impressions.

Please believe me when I say that Blanche's lack of dress has nothing at all to do with my objection.

I suppose the idea of printing the two photographs is an excellent piece of promotion. It is bound to bring a lot of people into the theater, but we have no empty seats...

Print the Benton picture...but no duplicate photograph. If Look's interest is really in Benton's painting, they should be content.

There, Mr. Intermediator, is my initial protest. What do you say to that!

Truly affectionately,
Jessica

Dear Jessica:

Many, many thanks for your letter on the Benton picture. You are so right that it really makes me ashamed of having lent my casual support to the idea. What you say about Blanche suddenly recalls to me all of my original conception of the character and what it was to me, from which you, in your delineation, have never once drifted away... Yes, the painting is only one side of the play, and the Stanley side of it. Perhaps from the painter's point of view that was inevitable. A canvas cannot depict two worlds very easily: or the tragic division of the human spirit: at least not a painter of Benton's realistic type. Well, I am still an admirer of the painting, but, believe me, still more an admirer of yours for seeing and feeling about it more clearly than I did at first, and I should have felt the same way.

With love,
Tennessee