

"The Glass Menagerie" Study Guide Questions

Answer each question in complete sentences on your own paper.

Scenes One and Two

1. Tom's opening speech sketches the social background of the play and introduces the main characters. What basic information does Tom provide in this speech about his family? About the gentleman caller? About the nature of the play itself?
2. In Scene One, what indications are there that there is tension in the family? Who seems to cause the tension?
3. A play is put in motion by some element that upsets the situation at the beginning of the story. The element that sets this play in motion arrives in Scene Two. What is it? How does it upset the opening situation, and how does it set the play in motion?
4. In Scene Two, what does Laura say and do to reveal that she is "set apart" from the real world?
5. What is the significance of the "blue roses" that appear on the screen at the start of Scene Two?
6. At this point in the play, does Amanda seem to be a weak or a strong character? Does she arouse your sympathy, or do you think Williams wants you to dislike her? Explain.
7. How is it shown that the boy in the yearbook was important to Laura? Why doesn't Amanda seem particularly interested in this young man?
8. In "The Glass Menagerie," Tennessee Williams has created "theater Poetry" by using various arts besides language. For example, he uses the two transparencies at the beginning of the play to enhance the idea that this is a memory play. Check through the stage directions and dialogue to find other uses of visual and sound effects, which, combined with words, help to create "theater poetry." Do any of these effects add a touch of humor to the play?
9. Few people have Laura's specific physical handicap. Do you think most people can identify with her? Why or why not?

Scenes Three and Four

10. In Scene Two, Amanda is in conflict with Laura. Who is in conflict in Scene Three? What starts the conflict, and what is it about?
11. Each of the Wingfields escapes from unpleasant reality into a comforting, private world. In Scene One, Amanda escapes from her present circumstances by remembering and talking about her past youth, her beauty, and her romantic successes. How does Laura escape from the real world? What does Tom do to escape from his unhappiness?
12. What part does Laura play in the angry argument between Tom and Amanda?
13. What does Amanda ask Tom to do?
14. In the conflict between Tom and Amanda in Scene Three, which character do you sympathize with, and why? What do you think Williams wants you to feel about Amanda?
15. How is Laura's relationship with Tom different from her relationship with Amanda? How can you tell that Tom is truly fond of Laura?
16. Amanda often refers to her absent husband, and his grinning picture is highlighted at various times during the play. What does the photograph represent to Amanda? To Tom? How is the photograph a constant threat to Amanda and Laura's survival?
17. The outburst of anger that ends Scene Three marks the emotional peak of the play so far. How has the playwright prepared you for Tom's anger and Amanda's accusations?

Scenes Four, Five, and Six

18. In Scenes Four and Five, Tom displays an attitude toward his mother that he has not shown before. Describe that attitude, and find the lines of dialogue that reveal it. Cite two lines of dialogue that show that Amanda is also trying to behave differently toward Tom.
19. What does Amanda ask Tom to do at the end of Scene Four?
20. In Scene Five, Tom gives his mother two realistic warnings to counter Amanda's pleasant fantasy of the gentleman caller. What are these warnings? How does Amanda react to them?

21. How does Amanda transform herself for the gentleman caller? How is her attitude about their guest different from Laura's?
22. What is Laura's reaction when she learns the identity of the gentleman caller? How does Amanda respond to this reaction?
23. At the beginning of Scene Four, both Tom and Amanda try to make peace. Why do they begin to argue again?
24. The basic **dramatic situation** from which a play can grow involves a person or persons whom viewers care about, who are in more or less desperate situations with a great deal at stake. Such characters decide to act and then actually take steps to achieve their "wants." Discuss how these dramatic elements are used up to this point in "The Glass Menagerie."
25. In most plays, suspense is preferable to surprise. If a person reaches the top of a hill and looks down to see two trains at the moment they crash, it is a **surprise** and it is shocking. But dramatically, it would be more effective if, as the person neared the top of the hill, he saw the trains approaching each other on the same track from perhaps a mile apart. This would be **suspense**. How has Tennessee Williams used suspense in the play up to now?
26. Amanda is a **complex character**: not easily described as either "good" or "bad." What aspect of her character do you see in Scenes Five and Six? Do you feel sympathetic toward her? Explain.
27. What are your feelings for the gentleman caller at this point in the play? How do you feel about Tom?

Scene Seven

28. What does Williams achieve in the way of "theater poetry" by having Tom neglect to pay the light bill?
29. What happens to make you think at first that Jim O'Connor's visit may work out as Amanda hopes? Explain how the evening ends in disappointment for Laura and Amanda.
30. The gentleman caller scene is a perfect little play within a play. Tell how the **basic dramatic elements** are used in this scene: characters you care about placed in a situation where much is at stake, taking steps to get what they want.
31. One of the basic elements of drama is **progression**, or change. Trace the progression of the relationship between Jim and Laura in this scene.
32. How did you feel about Jim O'Connor in this scene?
33. Why does Laura say about the broken horn on the unicorn: "Maybe it's a blessing in disguise"?
34. What does Tom mean at the end when he talks about Laura blowing out her candles?

The Play as a Whole

35. Discuss the **symbolism** of the glass menagerie in relation to Laura. How, for example, does Laura resemble the glass animals? What does the unicorn represent at first, and what does it represent once its horn has been broken?
36. Discuss the way Williams uses the following motifs in the play as **symbols**. What does each one represent? How do they relate to the play's theme?

37. The movies	The fire escape
38. The Paradise Music Hall	Laura's leg brace
39. The **climax** of a play is the high point of the story-its most intensely emotional moment. What scene do you think marks the climax of "The Glass Menagerie"?
40. In any story, complexity makes for interesting characters. Good drama rarely pits a "good guy" against a "bad guy." The best drama often occurs when both people in a conflict are right. Do you sympathize with Amanda, even though she causes her children to suffer? Do you think Tom and Laura are both wrong and right? Explain.
41. One critic has said that "The Glass Menagerie" shows a series of contrasts between (a) the dreamer and the doer, (b) the past and the present, (c) fantasy and reality, (d) psychological and physical handicaps, and (e) the desire for escape and the awareness of responsibilities. Choose one of these contrasts, and trace the way it is developed in the play.