

THE GLASS MENAGERIE



Written by **Tennessee Williams** | Directed by **Mark Clements**
March 7 - April 9, 2017 | **Quadracci Powerhouse**

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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SUGGESTED TEACHING & LEARNING TOPICS

Classroom activity topics include:

- 1.) Memory
- 2.) Family Ties
- 3.) Gender Roles

This Teacher's Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with The Rep's Play Guide for *The Glass Menagerie*. These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The Play Guide is available online at milwaukeeep.com/Tickets--Events/201617-Season/The-Glass-Menagerie/The-Glass-Menagerie-PlayGuide/

MEMORY

For more information on Tennessee Williams's Memory Play, please see *The Glass Menagerie Play Guide Page 7*

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- How might perspective and emotion affect a memory? How might a memory change over time?
- How do memories vary from generation to generation? Think about memories your grandparents share compared with the memories you share. What are the similarities? The differences?
- When you hear the term, "Memory Play", what do you think? What are your predictions about a "Memory Play"?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- Why is *The Glass Menagerie* classified as a "Memory Play"? How might the story be different if Tom retold this memory when he was 40 years old? 70 years old?
- What theatrical elements created more fantastical moments of the play? How did the overall production design elevate the form of the memory play?
- Why do you think Tennessee Williams chose to have a narrator (who is also a character) in this story? How might the action or tone of the story be altered if we saw the same memory through Laura or Amanda's perspective, rather than Tom's?



Kelsey Brennan (Laura) and Brandon Dahlquist (Jim) in *The Glass Menagerie*.
Photo by Michael Brosilow.

"You are the only young man that I know of who ignores the fact that the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don't plan for it."

-Amanda

ACTIVITY: Remember the Memory

Split the class into groups of three. Within their trios, students each share an embarrassing memory from when they were young. From those shared, each group chooses one memory to present to the class; ideally the one with the strongest beginning, middle, and end. The memory should not include any clues that give away to whom the story belongs.

After each group is familiar with the details of their chosen memory, the full class comes back together to share and listen. Audience members may vote on who will be the narrator from each trio; they can choose any of the three group members to tell the story. To the best of their ability, the chosen narrator must share the memory as if it was their own.

The audience may ask three clarifying questions about the memory to inform their decision about who the original narrator was, forcing the chosen narrator to improvise answers to their questions.

Finally, the full class votes on which of the three group members was the original narrator before revealing whose memory it actually was!

DISCUSS: What about the performances made it challenging or easy to guess who the original narrator was? What was it like to have another person share your memory? Overall, what skills or strategies were most successful in this activity?

FAMILY TIES

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- This play takes place in 1937 in St. Louis, Missouri. What do you know about this time period? About St. Louis? What hardships might a family experience in this setting?
- There's a saying that goes, "You don't have to like your family, but you do have to love them". What does this mean? Do you agree or disagree? Provide an example to justify your response.
- What other plays do you know that are centered around familial love and conflict? (*August: Osage County*, *Tribes*, *Pride and Prejudice*) Movies? TV shows? (*Malcolm in the Middle*, *This Is Us*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Home Alone*, *Moonlight*, *Lilo and Stitch*). What common themes do you notice in all of those examples?

"We have to do all that we can to build ourselves up. In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is – each other..."

-Amanda

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- Do you believe any members of the Wingfield family experience or demonstrate compassion by the end of the play? If so, whom, and in what ways?
- Compare and contrast Amanda's relationships with and behaviors towards each of her children (Laura and Tom). Consider how she shows affection towards and disciplines them.
- Discuss the characters' strengths and weaknesses. At what moments in the show do you notice these character traits most come out? How do these traits positively or negatively impact the family dynamic?
- How might the family dynamic change if Mr. Wingfield was still in the picture? If Laura did not have a physical impairment?



*Kelsey Brennan (Laura) and Hollis Resnik (Amanda) in The Glass Menagerie.
Photo by Michael Brosilow.*

ACTIVITY: Character Walk

Looking at the list below, brainstorm some different responsibilities or stereotypes associated with each of these archetypes. Consider which responsibilities or stereotypes are "heavier" or have a greater emotional impact on that archetype.

From that list, each student will pick an archetype to portray. Guide the students in walking around the room as that character, embodying the responsibilities, weight, emotional duties, career, etc. of that character that affects their walk. Does the character walk with a slow and calculated trudge, or are they quick-moving and light on their feet? Use your imagination and be specific!

If exploring this activity post-show, allow the students to choose one character from *The Glass Menagerie* to portray, considering the same items from above.

ARCHETYPES:

- THE BREADWINNER
- THE HOUSEWIFE
- THE SHY MIDDLE CHILD
- THE TROUBLE-MAKER YOUNGEST CHILD
- THE RESPONSIBLE OLDER CHILD
- THE OVER-WORKED FATHER
- THE PROTECTIVE GRANDPARENT

DISCUSS: Which character or archetype did you enjoy playing the most? Which archetype had the most dramatic physical movements? Did any changes in physicality bring up any emotions? Did you find yourself giving into the archetype or defying the stereotypes that come with these descriptions?

GENDER ROLES

For more information on Gender Roles in the 1930s please see *The Glass Menagerie Play Guide Page 10-11*

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- Compare and contrast biological sex and gender. What are gender roles?
- Brainstorm reasons why people get married in today's society. Is marriage a choice for women in today's society? Men? Is it socially acceptable not to get married? Why or why not?
- Discuss how gender roles in the 1930s affected the following: clothing, careers, parenthood, education, and dating.

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- How did the characters in *The Glass Menagerie* respond to their gender roles (did they fight the stereotype, or give in to them)?
- Compare and contrast gender roles in 1937 to gender roles in 2017.
- What opinions did you have on the ending of this production? What did you expect to happen between Jim and Laura? Brainstorm ideas for the sequel of *The Glass Menagerie* – what happens? What is the climax?

"You make it seem like we were setting a trap."

-Laura

"We are. All pretty girls are a trap, and men expect them to be traps."

-Amanda

ACTIVITY: Pick a Side

Designate specific areas of the room as "agree", "disagree" and "indifferent". Acting as the moderator, call out the statements below without revealing your personal bias about the subject. Students choose how they feel about the statement and quietly move to the appropriate section of the room. Students then justify why they agree, disagree, or are indifferent, citing specific examples to support their answers. If so moved, a student may change their mind and move to a different area in the room.

Tip: Choose the statements to which your students will most relate. The recommendation is to explore 4-5 statements.

Play a practice round using the example: Pizza is the best food. Students should move to "agree", "indifferent", or "disagree". Take examples of why it is and is not the best food.

- THE WAY A PERSON ACTS IS BASED OFF OF THEIR ENVIRONMENT.
- THE WAY A PERSON ACTS IS BASED OFF OF NATURE (THEIR GENETICS).
- MEN AND WOMEN ARE TREATED DIFFERENTLY.
- WOMEN AND MEN HAVE DIFFERENT ROLES IN SOCIETY.
- STEREOTYPES ARE UNAVOIDABLE.
- PARENTS SHOULD HAVE A SAY IN THEIR CHILD'S FUTURE.
- GETTING A JOB IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION IN LIFE.
- WOMEN MUST BE MARRIED IN ORDER TO BE SUCCESSFUL.
- MEN ARE ONLY SUCCESSFUL IN LIFE IF THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL AT THEIR JOB.

DISCUSS: What was it like to share your opinions without the side comments? Did you feel the need to justify your opinions? Were you surprised by the amount of students in one area for any of the questions? What does an activity like this teach us about listening to one another's opinions?

OTHER QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How do you define weakness?
- Do you think Tom's attitude would change with his mother if he had a more fulfilling job?
- Discuss the term "escapism". What are each of these characters escaping from?
- Compare and contrast "illusion" and "reality". Which characters live in illusion? Reality?



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Common Core State Standards:

English Language Arts

- RL.6-10.1** LITERACY COMPREHENSION
- RL.6-12.3** ANALYZE DIALOGUE
- SL.8-12.1** COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSIONS
- SL.8-12.3** POINT OF VIEW
- SL.6-12.4** PRESENTATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS
- L.8-12.5** FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

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