**Major Theme in “Streetcar Named Desire”

Theme: Fantasy’s Inability to Overcome Reality**Although Williams’s protagonist in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is the romantic Blanche DuBois, the play is a work of social realism. Blanche explains to Mitch that she fibs because she refuses to accept the hand fate has dealt her. Lying to herself and to others allows her to make life appear as it should be rather than as it is.  **1. Have Blanche’s lies helped her survive or hurt her?**

Stanley, a practical man firmly grounded in the physical world, disdains Blanche’s fabrications and does everything he can to unravel them. The antagonistic relationship between Blanche and Stanley is a struggle between appearances and reality. It propels the play’s plot and creates an overarching tension. Ultimately, Blanche’s attempts to remake her own and Stella’s existences—to rejuvenate her life and to save Stella from a life with Stanley—fail.
**2.** **Why does Stella stay with Stanley? Explain.**

The characters leave and enter the apartment throughout the play, often bringing with them the problems they encounter in the larger environment. For example, Blanche refuses to leave her prejudices against the working class behind her at the door. The most notable instance of this effect occurs just before Stanley rapes Blanche, when the back wall of the apartment becomes transparent to show the struggles occurring on the street, foreshadowing the violation that is about to take place in the Kowalskis’ home.
**3.** **How does Stanley feel about Blanche? How does this contribute to his violation of her?**

**Theme: Dependence on Men**

*A Streetcar Named Desire* presents a sharp critique of the way the institutions and attitudes of postwar America placed restrictions on women’s lives. Williams uses Blanche’s and Stella’s dependence on men to expose and critique the treatment of women during the transition from the old to the new South. Both Blanche and Stella see male companions as their only means to achieve happiness, and they depend on men for both their sustenance and their self-image. Blanche recognizes that Stella could be happier without her physically abusive husband, Stanley. Yet, the alternative Blanche proposes—contacting Shep Huntleigh for financial support—still involves complete dependence on men. When Stella chooses to remain with Stanley, she chooses to rely on, love, and believe in a man instead of her sister. Williams does not necessarily criticize Stella—he makes it quite clear that Stanley represents a much more secure future than Blanche does.
**4. What standards of marriage were popular in the 50’s that are not the case today?**

For herself, Blanche sees marriage to Mitch as her means of escaping destitution. Men’s exploitation of Blanche’s sexuality has left her with a poor reputation. This reputation makes Blanche an unattractive marriage prospect, but, because she is destitute, Blanche sees marriage as her only possibility for survival. When Mitch rejects Blanche because of Stanley’s gossip about her reputation, Blanche immediately thinks of another man—the millionaire Shep Huntleigh—who might rescue her. Because Blanche cannot see around her dependence on men, she has no realistic conception of how to rescue herself. Blanche does not realize that her dependence on men will lead to her downfall rather than her salvation. By relying on men, Blanche puts her fate in the hands of others.
**5. What advice would you give Blanche if you could talk to her?**

**6. What advice would you give Stella if you could talk to her?**