

N.B. Papers should be typed double-spaced, using a font no larger than 12 pt size. The length of the paper below is just over 4 pages, double-spaced, approximately 1400 words, an example of Theatre Paper #2. See the guidelines for the theatre paper for specific details on how to complete the assignment successfully.

Sample Theatre Paper

I attended a performance of the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga Theatre Department's production of *The Glass Menagerie* on October 15, 2005. The play, written by Tennessee Williams, was new to me. I had heard of Tennessee Williams, but I had never read or seen one of his plays before. This production was staged in the Dorothy Hackett Ward Theatre, a 300-seat proscenium theatre. The namesake of the theatre, Prof. Dorothy Ward, taught at UTC for 37 years, and had worked as a faculty member and department chair at UTC.

The play was written for a small cast of four characters:

Amanda Wingfield, the antagonist
Tom Wingfield, the protagonist
Laura Wingfield
Jim O'Connor

There is a fifth character mentioned, but this character doesn't appear onstage in the play: Mr. Wingfield, Amanda's absentee husband and the father of Tom and Laura. Like a ghost, he still haunts the life of the family even though he doesn't live with them anymore. He abandoned them.

Even though this play is old, and was first performed in 1944, I thought it was interesting and I understood the story. The play embraces the human condition by depicting characters with life circumstances and feelings anyone can relate to, even in 2007. With atmospheric lighting, interesting props, attractive performers, and skillful acting, there is no way the play could not have been memorable.

The character of Laura is tragic. Her character has two flaws, and I thought the actress portrayed her convincingly. Laura is crippled, physically, in walking. But she is also crippled socially, by severe shyness. Her anxiety leads to a major plot development, the rising action in the play: Laura was being sent to the Rubicam Business College to learn secretarial skills. As the play unfolds, Amanda and the audience learn that Laura hasn't actually been attending the business classes, she couldn't stand being around unfamiliar people and struggling to learn. This causes the audience to feel sympathy for Laura; most of us can relate to being afraid of not fitting in. When the facts of her absence from classes at the Business College become known, Amanda decides that since her daughter Laura hasn't learned a skill to support herself, Laura must get married. This leads to the scene that is the climax of the play, the scene in which Jim, the "gentleman caller" Tom arranges to visit Laura, reveals that he is engaged to marry another woman. The last scene in the play was very touching, and overall the play made me feel that my time invested in hearing this story was emotionally rewarding.

The character of Tom was the most vivid for me, and he really brought the production to life. The way he spoke, and the way he walked, purposefully, angrily, determined, held my attention in every scene he was in. The scenes in which he argued with his mother Amanda, slamming the door in her face, storming off down the fire-escape, seemed very real. I had no trouble believing the actor was the character. (I watched a movie of *The Glass Menagerie*, and thought that actor was weaker. For one thing, in the movie that actor's voice often sounded monotone.) In the play, the actor portraying Tom was loud when he needed to be, but could also project his voice well softly, such as when he spoke in the role of narrator, and sounded as if he were speaking to me one-to-one from the stage, more like a personal conversation. His emotional expressive range was very convincing, from the anger in scenes with his mother

Amanda to the compassion in scenes with his sister Laura, or when he spoke in apology to his mother after a fight. It seemed sincere.

The character Amanda, the mother, is delusional. She longs to relive her late teenage years, when she was in cotillion, and had many suitors or “gentleman callers.” The contrast with her adult life is harsh. Her husband abandoned her and their 2 children years before, and she doesn’t get invited to cotillion or anything like it. The actress who played Amanda was convincing, but made me uncomfortable. I felt sorry for her children, and sad that her daughter Laura, who is crippled and very emotionally fragile, very shy, felt a need to humor Amanda and go through with that “blind date” with Jim. Considering Amanda, the audience is reminded of the timeless need for awareness of reality, and what a mess it is when someone refuses to deal with the truth of changed circumstances and adjust. Amanda sees limited possibilities for a woman to succeed in life. She has been crippled by the abandonment of her husband, and doesn’t trust that Laura can manage in life without a husband or a job. But she isn’t stopping to consider what steps Laura is emotionally ready to take.

The set in this production played an important role. It was designed so that the audience could see the characters moving in and out of the Wingfield family’s apartment during “The Great Depression,” and key parts of the set were the door and the fire-escape. The cutouts in the set allowed you to see the characters when they walked through the door. This was especially effective in argument scenes between Tom and Amanda. One of my favorite scenes is the one where Tom walks out the door to go to the movies, and Amanda comes chasing after him out onto the fire-escape. In a real apartment, once a person leaves a room, you can’t see him anymore. But in a theatrical representation of an apartment, a person leaves a room, and you can see out beyond the room where characters continue to interact.

The apartment the Wingfields live in in St. Louis is very plain, and crowded. The scenery, costumes, and props make it clear that this is not a wealthy family. They are people who worry about debt, and being able to make ends meet. They live in a gritty reality.

The lighting in the play was intended to set the mood. The playwright uses light as a symbol of hope. This play is sometimes described as a “memory play,” and the stage was often shadowy, as a metaphor for memory and regret and longing. Lighting during soliloquys changed so that the rest of the stage was dimmed, and the light would come up on the solo character. Also, rainbow light is used sometimes. It suggested transient hopefulness, such as in the scene before Jim’s arrival.

The Glass Menagerie touches the audience in a variety of ways. The fights, tears, kisses, and nostalgia are all emotionally expressive. I’m a daughter, but I don’t relate to the character of Laura as much as I relate to the character of Tom on a personal level. My mother and I are very close, and now that I live three hours away from home, she is not on my case. But when I was in high school and lived at home, she would always be after me about grades, money, and golf. I was an “A” student most semesters, and my mother still wasn’t satisfied. In the play, the character Tom works very hard. His father abandoned the family, and Tom supports his mother and sister. The money he earns pays for their apartment and puts food on the table. Amanda is angry at her ex-husband, and is taking it out on Tom. She can’t yell at her missing husband because he isn’t there, but she criticizes her son Tom for going out to the movies late at night. She doesn’t give Tom credit for all the good that he does for the family, and doesn’t admit to herself that without Tom they would have nothing. Maybe that thought scares her. In the end, Tom moves away. The play is Tom telling the story by looking back in time.

The costumes for the play were period costumes, styles for men and women that people wore during “The Great Depression” in the United States. But the costumes aren’t supposed to look “new.” Because this is a poor family, the costumes are supposed to convey their limited means, and the clothes looked worn, a little like hand-me-downs. A memorable costume in this play is seen late in the play when the “gentleman caller” arrives, and the mother, Amanda, can’t resist calling attention to herself. Jim, the “gentleman caller,” is supposed to be coming to the house to see the daughter, Laura. But Amanda gets “dolloed up” in a frilly, girlish dress from her much younger days. It sticks out, and the costume underscores Amanda’s desperate grab for attention.

An important symbol in the play is the actual glass menagerie, Laura’s collection of glass figurines, that she polishes. The glass menagerie is a symbol for Laura’s fragility. The delicate glass animals are easier for Laura to relate to than actual people. In a way, Laura is like one of those glass figurines, and she is “kept” by her mother and brother. The fire-escape is a symbol, and foreshadows Tom’s departure, his decision to leave the family and live independently, far away. A symbolic plot development happens in the climax of the play, when Jim breaks the glass unicorn, ending the illusion that he would become a husband and caretaker for Laura.

I enjoyed the play, and in writing this paper, found it interesting to examine the story, the characters, and where it all led. All of us have a story, or play a part in a story. This play made me reflect on strength, weakness, and choices in life, facets of the human condition.

