

Name _____

Date _____

Tennessee Williams

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Tennessee Williams wrote plays featuring complex, defined characters navigating their relationships with one another. Equally important to his plays were the settings, which underscored the themes in his writing. **A Streetcar Named Desire** takes place in an apartment near the French Quarter in New Orleans. Working-class people populate a busy street, presenting a backdrop of liveliness to the play's emotional proceedings. Similarly, **The Glass Menagerie**'s setting in a crowded tenement apartment in St. Louis evokes claustrophobia, repression, and entrapment. **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**'s old Mississippi plantation sets the stage for the characters' intergenerational strife.

Which of the following best describes how Tennessee Williams used settings in his plays?

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| A. As aesthetic backdrop with no thematic relevance | B. To provide historical context for the plays |
| C. To emphasize the themes he was writing about | D. As a contrasting element to the characters' dialogue |

2. Tennessee Williams often wrote in an expressionist style. Expressionism is an artistic and literary movement that rejects realistic or naturalistic depictions in favor of magical or dreamlike events. Symbolism and abstraction push the story forward. **The Glass Menagerie** portrays character memories in a hazy, dreamlike state. **A Streetcar Named Desire** incorporates the constant symbolism of spirited music that intrudes on the characters' thoughts, even as things turn violent. Williams once wrote that expressionism is "a closer approach to the truth," arguing that symbolic representation of themes is a stronger method of portraying humanity than strict naturalism.

Which of these best explains why Williams employed symbolism and dreamlike elements in his plays?

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| A. To illustrate truths about human nature | B. To entertain audiences with complex scenery, lighting, and costumes |
| C. To temper the violence that often explodes from characters' actions by detaching them from reality | D. To take advantage of the unique aspects of theater as a medium |

3. The women in Tennessee Williams's plays display emotional depth, literary complexity, and striking characterization that sometimes borrows from people in Williams's real life. Blanche DuBois, the protagonist of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, has just suffered the loss of her husband and grapples with finding her place as a woman of traditional values in a rapidly changing society. Her anxiety and grief parallel Williams's own struggle to maintain his own tumultuous relationship and career. Amanda and Laura of *The Glass Menagerie* are heavily based on Williams's mother and sister, respectively. Amanda's strict parenting and Laura's intense anxiety surrounding her physical disability reflect conflicts that arose in the family in real life. In every play, Williams presents female characters that embody a wide spectrum of emotional and intellectual complexity. He often made them central figures at a time when male characters were still often the primary figures on stage.

From whom did Tennessee Williams draw inspiration when writing complex female characters?

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| A. A female politician he admired | B. His ex-wife |
| C. The women in his family | D. Famous actresses |