

The Glass Menagerie Study Guide

Characters...*describe each character and why they are important to the book. Include personality details when available.*

Tom Wingfield:

Laura Wingfield:

Amanda Wingfield:

Jim O'Connor:

Mr. Wingfield:

Plot

1. Where does Tom work?
2. What does Tom like to write?
3. Where does The Glass Menagerie take place?
4. At the beginning of the play, where is Laura supposedly attending classes?
5. The Glass Menagerie is a “memory play.” From which character's memory is it drawn?
6. For what does Amanda conduct a telephone campaign in order to make extra money?
7. Amanda returns a library book that Tom has checked out. Who is the author of this book?
8. The action of the play is set nearest to which era of American history?

9. According to Tom, where does he spend most of his nights?
10. What is Amanda most concerned that Tom's friend, the gentleman caller, not be?
11. In what is Jim taking night courses?
12. For whom did Tom's father work?
13. What do the Wingfields have instead of a porch?
14. What is Laura's favorite animal among her glass figurines?
15. What is Jim's nickname for Tom?
16. What class did Jim and Laura have together in high school?
17. Of what origin is Jim's family?
18. Why did Jim call Laura "Blue Roses"?
19. How does Tom plunge the family into darkness?
20. For what does Tom pay membership dues with the money earmarked for the aforementioned bill?
21. What is across the alley from the Wingfields' apartment?
22. Why will Jim not call again on the Wingfields?
23. What, according to Tom, is a man by instinct?
24. What does Amanda make Tom promise that he will never be?

Characterization

1. Why does Tom go to the movies so often?
2. What are the similarities between Tom and his father?

3. Why does Amanda nag Tom so much?
4. Why does it take Tom so long to decide to leave home?
5. Why does Amanda blame Tom for the failure of the evening?
6. Why does Laura give the unicorn to Jim?
7. Does Jim have the potential for greatness attributed to him by Laura?
8. Why does Jim, an ordinary person, seem so wonderful and exceptional to Laura?
9. Does Laura understand the responsibility that Tom feels for her? Explain.
10. What do you think of Tom's act of rebellion at the end of the play? Is he justified in what he does? Explain.
11. In his opening monologue to the audience, Tom says that the stage magician "gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth, I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion." What does he mean?
12. Amanda has closed her mind to the reality that Laura has no prospects for gentleman callers. Does Amanda want the callers for Laura or does she want them so that she can relive her own youth? Explain, using examples from the play.
13. Tom is a character in the story of the play and the narrator who steps outside of the story and creates the memory. Do you like that technique in playwriting? Why or why not?

Symbols

1. How is the fire escape a symbol that reveals something about each character's personality? Do you think the fire escape represents one character more than another? Explain.

Tom:

Laura:

Amanda:

Jim:

Mr. Wingfield:

2. In what way is Laura's limp symbolic of her inner nature? In what ways are her glass animals symbols of her personality?

3. When, in scene seven, the unicorn is knocked off the table and it loses its horn, how does this incident relate to Laura? What is the playwright saying about Laura when she says, "now the unicorn will be like the other animals"?

4. What other symbols can you find in the play? Be specific.

5. At the very end of the play, Tom asks Laura to blow out her candles. What do you think that action symbolizes to Tom?

Essay Topics

- Which aspects of *The Glass Menagerie* are realistic? Which aspects are the most non-realistic? What function do the non-realistic elements serve?
- Who do you think is the main character of the play—Tom, Laura, or Amanda? Why? Is the main character the protagonist? Is there an antagonist?
- Discuss the symbol of the glass menagerie. What does it represent? Does it represent the same things throughout the play, or does its meaning change?
- Generally, plays do not have narrators. How does the fact that Tom is the narrator affect the style and content of the play? Would your appraisal of the events be different if there were no narrator?
- How is the glass menagerie a metaphor for each of the four characters in the play? Discuss with examples.
- 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.
- 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.