

AQA  
A-Level  
English Language and Literature  
Paper 2  
Revision Guide

**Exploring Conflict**

Writing about Society

Dramatic Encounters



Paper 2

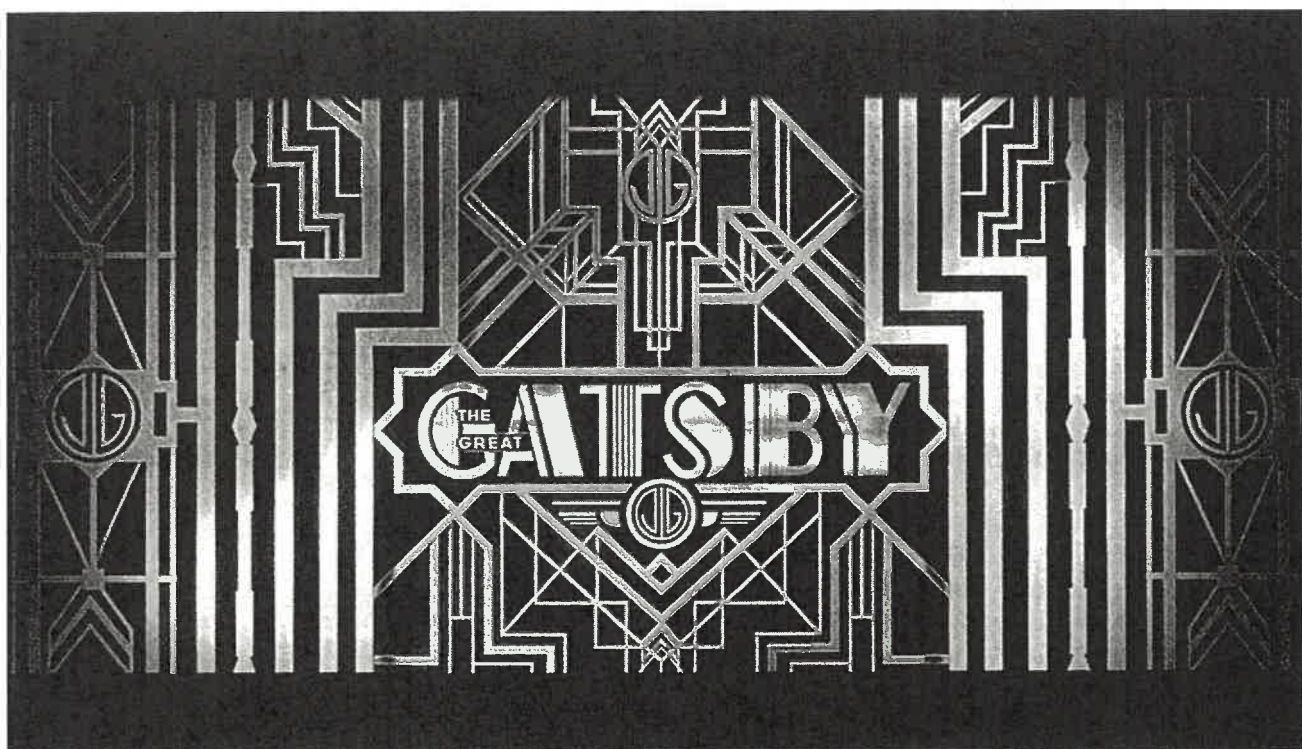
Exploring Conflict

Section A

Writing about society

The Great Gatsby

## Revision Guide – The Great Gatsby



### Assessment Objectives

This component requires students to:

**AO1:** Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression

**AO2:** Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts

**AO3:** Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received

**AO4:** Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods

**AO5:** Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways.

**AO5**

***Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways***

In these questions, students are assessed on their creativity in carrying out a writing task.

Creativity is assessed via the following dimensions:

- creation of a new and original piece of writing
- control of any chosen style(s)
- use of the base text by staying within feasible parameters of the narrative.

<b>Level/Mark</b>	<b>Students are likely to:</b>
<b>Level 5</b> <b>21-25</b>	Show a high degree of flair and originality.  Sustain a chosen style or styles of writing throughout.  Use the base text convincingly.
<b>Level 4</b> <b>16-20</b>	Some flair and originality.  Sustain a chosen style or styles of writing strongly.  Use the base text mainly convincingly.
<b>Level 3</b> <b>11-15</b>	Produce writing that is imaginative in parts, but where some aspects are also derivative or unoriginal.  Sustain a chosen style or styles of writing in most of the text.  Use the base text with some success.
<b>Level 2</b> <b>6-10</b>	Produce writing which has one or two imaginative elements, but where more of the writing is derivative or unoriginal.  Sustain a chosen style or styles of writing with only partial success.  Use the base text sporadically.
<b>Level 1</b> <b>1-5</b>	Produce some writing but with limited new perspectives introduced.  Attempt to sustain a style but with limited success.  Use the base text minimally.
<b>0</b>	<b>Nothing written.</b>

Commentary (Questions 2, 4, 6 or 8)

AO2 <i>Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts</i>		AO4 <i>Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods</i>		AO5 <i>Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways</i>	
In the commentary, this rewards students for making analytical comments about their own writing. They do this by identifying the language choices they made and offering a rationale for their decisions.		In the commentary, this rewards students for their ability to make connections between the text they produced in the re-writing task, and the base text which constituted their starting point. They need to refer specifically to the nature of the base text in order to achieve a comparison and target AO4.		In these questions, students are assessed on their writing expertise in producing a commentary on the re-writing they did in Questions 1, 3, 5 and 7.  Writing expertise is assessed via the following dimensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creation of a well organised text</li> <li>• accuracy of writing.</li> </ul>	
Level/Mark	Students are likely to:	Level/Mark	Students are likely to:	Level/Mark	Students are likely to:
Level 5 13-15	Provide perceptive accounts of how meanings are shaped, by judiciously selecting and identifying significant language features and by evaluating the choices they made.	Level 5 9-10	Offer perceptive insights about particular aspects of language and likely effects produced in the base text, compared with their transformed text.	Level 5 5	Produce a commentary which is well organised and accurately written.
Level 4 10-12	Provide competent accounts of how meanings are shaped, by carefully selecting and identifying some significant language features and by exploring the choices they made.	Level 4 7-8	Offer productive comments about relevant aspects of language and likely effects produced in the base text, compared with their transformed text.	Level 4 4	Produce a commentary which is organised competently, and which is mostly accurate.
Level 3 7-9	Provide clear accounts of how meanings are shaped, by identifying some language features and by making some observations about the choices they made.	Level 3 5-6	Offer some useful comments about relevant aspects of language and likely effects produced in the base text, compared with their transformed text.	Level 3 3	Produce a commentary which is uneven both in its organisation and in its level of accuracy.
Level 2 4-6	Provide broad accounts of how meanings are shaped, by identifying one or two language features and offering generalised comments about the choices they made.	Level 2 3-4	Offer limited comments, not always with relevance, about aspects of language and likely effects produced in the base text, compared with their transformed text.	Level 2 2	Produce a commentary which attempts to organise ideas, but with limited success and with basic errors.
Level 1 1-3	Provide minimal accounts of how meanings are shaped, by offering scant reference to language features and little or no comment about the choices they made.	Level 1 1-2	Offer generalised comments, with little relevance, about aspects of language and likely effects produced in the base text, compared with their transformed text.	Level 1 1	Produce a commentary with limited cohesion and frequent errors.
0	Nothing written about the text.	0	Nothing written about connections across texts.	0	Nothing written.

Instruction to examiners:

In their discussion of language features, students might also consider ways in which they have used narrative strategies (eg speech and thought representation, characterisation), in creating their new text. These would be considered within the broader context of 'language' and their identification and interpretation should be credited for AO2.

Character: Gatsby

Chapter 1

Nick's first mention of Gatsby comes after he informs us that after the war he wanted "the world to be in uniform" and at a "moral attention":

"Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction – Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is a series of unbroken gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life .. – it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. No – Gatsby turned out alright in the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men."

So Nick prepares us to meet this man – we anticipate someone "gorgeous", "extraordinary" and "romantic". And Gatsby is portrayed as the victim - something preyed on Gatsby – a mysterious "foul dust". This draws our sympathy towards Gatsby, whom we assume will be the hero of the novel.

We are then taken back in time to the beginning of the summer to the Buchannan's' house where Gatsby's name is mentioned in conversation:

"I don't know a single..."

"You must know Gatsby."

"Gatsby," demanded Daisy. "What Gatsby?"

The fragment of conversation is cut short but the reader is aware that Gatsby must be a man of reputation, and that Daisy must know of a Gatsby. This narrative hook is left dangling as Tom moves the gathering on.

Back at home, Nick sees Mr Gatsby:

"I saw that I was not alone – fifty feet away a figure had emerged from the shadow of my neighbour's mansion and was standing with his hands in his pockets... Something in his leisurely movements and the secure position of his feet upon the lawn suggested that it was Mr Gatsby himself... But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone – he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, as far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling..."

The reader's interest is aroused by this enigmatic "figure," who behaves in a "curious" way, "trembling" as he stretches out his arms. This is our memorable first physical description of him.

## Chapter 2

Is not concerned with Gatsby. This extends the mystery and allows Fitzgerald to show that Gatsby was gossiped about in general.

## Chapter 3

The chapter begins with the description of the preparations for one of Gatsby's parties. Gatsby's wealth is on display:

"his raft... his two motorboats...his Rolls Royce..."

The food and the music display an uncompromising decadence. His parties would be sure to impress any guest. The guests are not interested in their host, except as the focus of gossip and "romantic speculation".

"He doesn't want trouble with anyone" ...

... "Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once." ...

"... he was a German spy during the war."

These snippets of gossip from around Gatsby's own house serve to further intrigue the reader. What is the truth about Gatsby? We are then taken to meet him, unawares. Nick stumbles into conversation with Gatsby, not knowing it is the host himself. He calls Nick "Old Sport", which from the beginning sounds false and forced to the reader. Gatsby himself is charming:

"He smiled understandingly – much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced – or seemed to face – the whole eternal world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favour. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best you hoped to convey. Precisely at that point it vanished – and I was looking at an elegant young rough-neck, a year or two over thirty, whose



elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd. Some time before he introduced himself I'd got the impression that he was picking his words with care."

Gatsby is both appealing and awkward. He clearly has a talent to appear charming, but at the same time he seems inconsistent as a character. From this, our first meeting with him, he seems to some extent to be playing a part.

Similarly, he does not fit in entirely with the setting he has engineered. "...no one swooned backward on Gatsby, and no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder, and no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link"

Fitzgerald adds to the mystery surrounding Gatsby with Jordan's reaction to a conversation she had with the host. She tantalizes both Nick and the reader that she has an amazing story to share.

#### Chapter 4

Gatsby visits Nick to take him out for lunch in his impressive car:

"It was a rich cream colour, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns. Sitting down behind many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory, we started to town."

The car, like the house, was an impressive status symbol, which Nick exaggerates to describe. It is "swollen" and "monstrous" – almost unnatural in its appearance.

Gatsby is portrayed in a similar way by Fitzgerald in this chapter. Gatsby gives an account of his life to Nick, that results in our narrator only just managing to "restrain" his "incredulous laughter".

Gatsby claimed to have been educated at Oxford.

"He hurried the phrase... as though it has bothered him before. And with this doubt, his whole statement fell to pieces." ... "The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned character leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois du Boulogne."

Our narrator is won over by Gatsby on his production of a photograph of him at Oxford, which for him was enough to validate the other claims.

Once Gatsby has explained his "past" to Nick he proceeds to inform him that his date with Jordan Baker will be largely concerned with a favour Gatsby has to ask of Nick. This irritates Nick.

Lunch is with Meyer Wolfsheim who is naively positive about Gatsby:

"Handsome to look at and a perfect gentleman." ... "He's an Oggxford man." ... "I knew I had discovered a man of fine breeding after I talked with him an hour." ... "There's the kind of man you'd like to take home and introduce to your mother and sister."

And ironically, Wolfsheim adds, "Yeah, Gatsby's very careful about women. He would never so much as look at a friend's wife."

To compound this irony, Fitzgerald brings Tom Buchanan into the scene. Gatsby and Tom "shook hands briefly, and a strained, unfamiliar look of embarrassment came over Gatsby's face." Gatsby then disappears from the scene. For the reader, the association with Wolfsheim suggests his involvement with underhand or illegal dealings.

Jordan then takes us back in time to her first memory of Gatsby ... "a lieutenant I had never seen before." He had been sitting in a car with Daisy Fay. Daisy had had an association with him that had

long since ended, and Daisy had not heard of him in years, until the afternoon tea described in Chapter 1. We learn that "Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay." Nick muses:

"Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired in that June night, He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendour." ... "He had waited five years and bought a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths – so that he could "come over" some afternoon to a stranger's garden."

Nick then revisits his first memory of Gatsby himself. He suddenly understands the behaviour of his neighbour, the *raison d'être* of Jay Gatsby.

## Chapter 5

Gatsby is awkward and anxious about his impending reunion with Daisy, He wants it to be perfect. He wants to have Nick's grass cut to create a good first impression. Gatsby offers Nick a quick way of making money in exchange for Nick's arrangement of the meeting. Gatsby behaves like a child until the ice is broken with Daisy. He appears pathetic, petulant and foolish:

"He sat down miserably, as if I'd pushed him..."

"Gatsby, pale as death, with his hands plunged like weights in his coat pockets, was standing in a puddle of water, glaring tragically into my eyes..."

"Gatsby... was reclining... in a strained counterfeit of perfect ease."

He answers too quickly when Daisy makes reference to their last meeting:

"Five years next November." / The automatic quality of Gatsby's answer set us all back at least another minute."

Gatsby despairs over the reunion as a "terrible, terrible mistake". Nick accuses Gatsby, "You're acting like a little boy."

Later, "there was a change in Gatsby that was simply confounding. He literally glowed; without a word or gesture of exultation, a new well-being radiated and filled the little room."

Gatsby then turns his attention to his house. He begins to see things through Daisy's eyes.

"He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well loved eyes."

"After his embarrassment and his unreasoning joy he was consumed with wonder at her presence. He had been full of the idea for so long, dreamed it right through to the end, waited with his teeth set, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity. Now in the reaction, he was running down like an overwound clock."

He points out to her the green light that he had reached out for at the end of chapter 1.

"Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. ... now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one."

We learn that Gatsby's best friend was Dan Cody. There is an interruption of a business call. Then in the end Nick says:

"... the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault,



but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. ... No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart." ... " ... they looked back at me, remotely, possessed by intense life..."

## Chapter 6

Gatsby's reputation spread, as a result of his parties:

"Gatsby's notoriety, spread about by the hundreds who had accepted his hospitality and so became authorities on his past, had increased all summer until he fell just short of being news."

Nick goes on to give us an account of Gatsby's real past, where James Gatz creates Jay Gatsby. He becomes the product of his own imagination:

"he created just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end."

Nick tells us that, "the most grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed at night..." and that, "these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing."

Gatsby's dreams were more real to him than true reality.

Gatsby was inspired by Dan Cody – "To young Gatz ... that yacht represented all the beauty and glamour in the world."

Gatsby manages to get Daisy to come to one of his parties, with Tom. The evening does not please Gatsby because Daisy "didn't like it." It is at the end of this chapter that the flaw in Gatsby's character becomes clear – to us and to Nick, who tries to speak plainly to Gatsby – who wants Daisy "go to Tom and say: 'I never loved you.'" Nick argues that that may be too much to ask as he believes:

"You can't repeat the past"

"Can't repeat the past? He cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"

We then go on to learn about Gatsby and Daisy's first kiss:

"He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. ...Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed like a flower and the incarnation was complete."

## Chapter 7

A second trip to the Tom Buchanan's for Nick, this time with Gatsby. Gatsby meets Daisy's child:

"...he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he ever really believed in its existence before..."

Tom, in the midst of the conversation, realises that his wife is involved with Gatsby. From this moment on in the chapter, Tom begins to snipe at Gatsby, subtly accusing him of underhand deals, superficiality and lying. The group take off to town, where they hire a suite in a hotel for the afternoon. Tom asks Gatsby about the affair, referring to Gatsby as "Mr Nobody from Nowhere". Gatsby is confident in his dream and tells Tom that Daisy never loved him. Daisy cannot bring Jay's dream to life:

"I love you now – isn't that enough? I can't help what's past."

Here Daisy echoes Nick's words from the previous chapter. Tom's criticism of Gatsby continues openly now – calling him a “common swindler” and a “bootlegger”. As Tom continues, Gatsby startles Nick with his facial expression:

“He looked – and this is said in all contempt for the babbled slander of his garden – as if he had ‘killed a man’.”

Gatsby then becomes desperate – “defending his name from accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further into herself, so he gave that up and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible...”

Tom belittles the dream as a “presumptuous little flirtation”. Daisy and Gatsby then leave – “They were gone, without a word, snapped out, made accidental, isolated, like ghosts, even from our pity.”

After Myrtle's accident, Nick is waiting outside the Buchanan's house for a taxi:

I heard my name and Gatsby stepped from between two bushes into the path. I must have felt pretty weird by that time, because I could think of nothing but the luminosity of his pink suit under the moon.

“What are you doing?” I inquired.

“Just standing here old sport.”

Somehow that seemed a despicable occupation. For all I knew he was going to watch the house in a moment; I wouldn't have been surprised to see sinister faces, the faces of Wolfsheim's people behind him in the dark shrubbery.

All the negative points about Gatsby come to Nick's mind because at this point he assumes that Gatsby was driving and did not stop once he hit Myrtle. The “pink suit” is tasteless and absurd. He seems to be a “despicable” character, associate in Nick's mind with the “sinister” underworld represented by Wolfsheim. Nick dislikes Gatsby, as does the reader at this point. Nick then has to re-evaluate the situation, when he discovers that Daisy was driving. He leaves Gatsby:

“He put his hands in his pockets and turned back eagerly to his scrutiny of the house, as though my presence marred the sacredness of the vigil. So I walked away and left him standing there in the moonlight – watching over nothing.”

## Chapter 8

Unsurprisingly Gatsby reports that “Nothing happened.” He and Nick spend time together around dawn. This is the occasion on which Gatsby tells Nick all about his life – some details of which the reader was told in chapter 6. Gatsby muses over the state of his dream.

“Suddenly he came out with a curious remark.

‘In any case,’ he said, ‘it was just personal.’

What could you make of that, except to suspect that some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured?”

As the chapter draws to a close we get our last glimpse of Gatsby in his “gorgeous pink rag of a suit” as Nick remembers their first meetings:

“the lawn and drive had been crowded with the faces of those who guessed at his corruption – and he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream...”

Our narrator tells of Gatsby's last moments with snippets from the chauffeur and the butler. Nick then poetically describes what he thinks Gatsby's last perception of the world would have been.

...he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air drifted fortuitously about ... like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding towards him through the amorphous trees.

This passage echoes several moments/ideas in the novel – the “grotesque” and “fantastic” dreams Gatsby used to have; the valley of ashes; dreams; old and new; ghosts –both Wilson and Gatsby become ‘ghosts’ as their reasons for living have both been destroyed.

### **Chapter 9**

Gatsby's death has left Nick with a funeral to arrange. He says, “I found myself on Gatsby's side, and alone.” He tries to generate some mourners for the funeral but meets with little success. Gatsby's father arrives, having read of the death in a newspaper. He was proud of his son and his son's potential. The Owl-eyed man sums up the pathetic nature of the funeral: “The poor son-of-a-bitch,” he said.

Nick, at the close of the book reflects on “Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him...”

The ending: “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further... And one fine morning –

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

Nick concludes here that Gatsby's hope is in all of us – and that the desire to follow our dreams will persist, even though the reality we hope for will elude us.

## Sample Questions – The Great Gatsby

### 1) The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald

Read the section of Chapter One from ‘the only completely stationary object’ to ‘you must know Gatsby’.

This describes Nick’s lunch at Tom and Daisy Buchanan’s house.

Recast the base text from the perspective of Miss Baker, Daisy’s friend, who is also visiting the Buchanans.

In your transformation you should consider:

- Miss Baker’s first impressions of Nick
- her attitude to the Buchanans.

You should write about 300 words.

[25 marks]

Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald’s original description.

In your commentary you should:

- consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- structure your writing clearly to express your ideas.

You should write about 400 words.

[30 marks]

## **The Great Gatsby**

Read the extract from the end of chapter 2

From

'Mr Mckee was a pale, feminine man from the flat below...' (page 32)

To

'...and waiting for the four o'clock train.' (page 40)

This describes the drunk scene at the hotel.

Recast this base text into an account Mr Mckee might give to a friend following the encounter.

In your transformation you should consider:

- Mr Mckee's impressions of Tom and Myrtle
- Mr Mckee's impression of the other guests at the hotel

You should write about 300 words.

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Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald's original description.

In your commentary you should:

- Consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- Demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- Structure your commentary clearly to express your ideas

You should write about 400 words



## The Great Gatsby

Read the beginning of chapter 2

From

'But about the grey lands and spasms of dust...' (page 26)

To

"I want to get one of those dogs," she said earnestly...' (page 29)

This describes Nick's meeting of Myrtle and Wilson.

Recast this base text into an account Wilson might write in his diary later that evening.

In your transformation you should consider:

- Wilson's emotions before and during this meeting
- Wilson's impression of Nick and Tom

You should write about 300 words.

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*Carefully consider:*

- *Nicks's state of mind*
  - *His language choices/his mannerisms/you need to reflect these clearly in his diary entries*
  - *His attitude to Nick/Tom*
  - *How he would interpret Myrtle's reactions and responses*
  - *Moral choices*
  - *The conventions of diary writing*
- 

Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald's original description.

In your commentary you should:

- Consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- Demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- Structure your commentary clearly to express your ideas

You should write about 400 words

## The Great Gatsby

Read the section of Chapter 3 (near the end)

From

‘Good night.’

‘Good night.’ He smiled – and suddenly... (page 54)

To

‘A sudden emptiness seemed to flow from the windows and the great doors, ending with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell’ (page 56)

This described the end of one of Gatsby’s parties.

Recast this base text into an account Gatsby might write in his diary later that evening.

In your transformation you should consider:

- Gatsby’s emotions before and during this meeting
- Gatsby’s impressions about Nick and Daisy

You should write about 300 words.

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*Carefully consider:*

- *Gatsby’s state of mind*
  - *His language choices/his mannerisms/you need to reflect these clearly in his diary entries*
  - *His awe of Daisy/ his attitude to Nick*
  - *His desire to prove his material worth to Daisy*
  - *How he would interpret Daisy’s reactions and responses*
  - *Moral choices*
  - *The conventions of diary writing*
  - *Make careful language choices as you would be asked to write a commentary as well*
- 

Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald’s original description.

In your commentary you should:

- Consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- Demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- Structure your commentary clearly to express your ideas

You should write about 400 words

## **The Great Gatsby**

Read the extract from the end of chapter 4

From

‘When Jordan Baker had finished telling me all this...’ (page 76)

To

‘...and so, I drew her closer, this time to my face.’ (page 78)

This describes the conversation between Nick and Jordan in the car.

Recast this base text into an account the driver might give to a reporter about Jordan Baker.

In your transformation you should consider:

- The driver’s impression of Jordan
- The driver’s impressions of Nick

You should write about 300 words.

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Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald’s original description.

In your commentary you should:

- Consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- Demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- Structure your commentary clearly to express your ideas

You should write about 400 words

# The Great Gatsby

Read the section of Chapter 5

From

'Why's that?' (page 54)

To

'Celebrated people.' (page 58)

This describes the meeting between Gatsby and Daisy which was set up by Nick.

Recast this base text into an account Gatsby might write in his diary later that evening.

In your transformation you should consider:

- Gatsby's emotions before and during this meeting
- Gatsby's impressions about Nick and Daisy

You should write about 300 words.

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Carefully consider:

Gatsby's state of mind

His language choices/his mannerisms/you need to reflect these clearly in his diary entries

His awe of Daisy

His attitude to Nick

His desire to prove his material worth to Daisy

How he would interpret Daisy's reactions and responses

Moral choices

The conventions of diary writing

Make careful language choices as you would be asked to write a commentary as well

## **The Great Gatsby**

Read the extract from the beginning of chapter 5

From

‘When I came home to West Egg that night...’ (page 79)

To

‘The day agreed upon was pouring rain.’ (page 81)

This describes the conversation between Gatsby and Nick.

Recast this base text into an account a servant might give to a policeman following up on Gatsby’s.

In your transformation you should consider:

- The servant’s impressions of Gatsby
- The servant’s impressions of Nick

You should write about 300 words.

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Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald’s original description.

In your commentary you should:

- Consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- Demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- Structure your commentary clearly to express your ideas

You should write about 400 words



## **The Great Gatsby**

Read the extract from the end of chapter 5

From

'He had passed visibly through two states and was entering upon a third' (page 89)

To

'...Then I went out of the room and down the marble steps into the rain, leaving them there together.' (page 93)

This describes Gatsby showing Daisy and Nick around his house.

Recast this base text into an account a servant might give to a reporter about Gatsby.

In your transformation you should consider:

- The servant's impression of Gatsby and his belongings
- The servant's impressions of Daisy and Nick

You should write about 300 words.

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Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald's original description.

In your commentary you should:

- Consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- Demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- Structure your commentary clearly to express your ideas

You should write about 400 words

## **The Great Gatsby**

Read the extract from the end of chapter 6

From

'I stayed late that night.' (Page 105)

To

'... what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever' (Page 107)

This describes a conversation between Nick and Gatsby.

Recast this base text into a conversation that a servant might to a fellow servant.

In your transformation you should consider:

- Impressions of Nick
- Impressions of Gatsby.

You should write about 300 words.

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Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald's original description.

In your commentary you should:

- Consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- Demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- Structure your commentary clearly to express your ideas

You should write about 400 words

## The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald

Read the section of Chapter Seven from ‘A new point of view occurred to me’ to the end of the chapter.

This describes Nick looking into Tom and Daisy Buchannan’s house.

Recast the base text from the perspective of Daisy.

In your transformation you should consider:

- impressions of Tom
- her attitude about the event

You should write about 300 words.

[25 marks]

Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Fitzgerald’s original description.

In your commentary you should:

- consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- structure your writing clearly to express your ideas.

You should write about 400 words.

[30 marks]

# The Great Gatsby

The exam:

- Must recast a point in the play
- Write a commentary that selects specific language feature and analyses the choices you made in relation to the base text.
- You are demonstrating your understanding of the original text as well as how to create characters, indicate point of view and control narrative.

Exploring conflict

- The text presents strong views about how things should be, interactions where people are in conflict of point of view or wider conflict of social status.
- Gatsby depicts an elite society with 'old' money and 'new' money conflict

Themes of society:

- The individual and their relationship to society
- Society and culture
- Dominant people, forces and ideas in society and how power influences changes
- Kinds of and feelings about kinship community and belonging.

Socio-cultural context

- Gatsby is set in 1920s, American society – the Jazz era
- It explores the moral crisis of post war America and the fascination with wealth, power and pleasure.
- New York and Chicago became cultural centres for the Jazz age.
- The jazz age represents a sense of 'fun' and cultural realignment where old assumptions are questioned and great social change occurred.
- Social wealth and mobility increased giving way to the 'new' money
- The stock market crash in 1929 led to the great depression – society was living in excess and without curbing its appetite, ruin was impending.
- There was great materialism that categorized the Jazz age.

Prohibition – made buying, selling or transporting of liquor illegal. Many saw this as a moral advance but the illegal liquor business became popular and organised crime met the demand for liquor. This helped make fortune of the new money (Gatsby and Wolfsheimer)

Themes in the great Gatsby

**The desire for transcendence** → desire for a richer and better life, shown in Gatsby and representative of the American dream.

**The American dream** → a dream of meritocracy, a myth of class equality through hard work. Nick realises his American dream after Gatsby's death and his is one of morality. Gatsby best represents the American dream – only achievable through corruption. Myrtle also shows American dream but fails.

**Appearance vs reality** → an illusion to mask the reality of their miserable and uncertain life.

**Feminism** → Jazz era gave women more freedom in the 'flapper age'. Jordan is a stereotypical flapper, Daisy is a dependent female.

**Masculinity** → Tom is the picture of hyper-masculinity, he enforces his dominance over Daisy and Myrtle. Wilson is the complete opposite – he lacks true masculinity for his lack of wealth and power.

**Class, status and wealth** → the old money are people like the Buchannan's and Jordan Baker, the new money is people like Gatsby and the no money represents Nick who will never fit into this class hierarchy.

Conflict

**External** → person vs person e.g. Daisy and Tom, Gatsby and Daisy, Tom and Gatsby OR person vs environment such as Daisy and society, Wilson vs his status, Myrtle and her status, Nick and society.

**Internal** → person vs self e.g. Gatsby versus his dreams, he has unrealistic expectations and is driven by insecurity.

Important motifs:

- The green light
- The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg
- The valley of the ashes
- Colours → yellow and gold, blue, green
- Owl eyes

Important scenes/narrative gaps:

- The phone call between Tom and Myrtle at dinner
- Gatsby staring out over water when Nick returns to Daisys
- The party in New York
- Gatsby's extravagant party where Nick is invited by a handwritten note. Gatsby and Jordan talk privately.
- Gatsby takes Nick to lunch in NY with Wolfsheim,.
- Jordan offers her recount of how she met Daisy and Gatsby, how she came to marry Tom and Gatsby's request to invite Daisy for tea.
- Daisy meets Gatsby, Nick gives them privacy and then they go to Gatsby's house.
- Nick tells of how Gatsby rose from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby with the help of Dan Cody.
- Daisy and Tom attend Gatsby's party, Tom goes off at one point
- Suspicion grows around Gatsby and his parties stop, he replaces his servants out of fear they may reveal something about him and Daisy.
- Daisy confesses her love as Tom is on the phone to Myrtle, Myrtle is moving as Wilson discovered her secret life.
- Tom and Gatsby argue in NY over Daisy
- Myrtle is killed by Gatsby's car driven by Daisy, Gatsby takes the blame
- Gatsby reveals more of his past and how he ended up in Oxford



- Wilson visits Tom who tells him it was Gatsby's car and he shoots Gatsby followed by himself.
- Police and paparazzi storm Gatsby's house but no sign of any of his friends, Daisy and Tom left town and Wolfsheim doesn't want to come.
- Henry Gatz contacts Nick and finds him going through Gatsby's possessions proudly.
- The funeral takes place with only Nick, Henry and a few servants.

Narrative gaps:

- Chapter 2 when Nick is drunk and can't connect experiences of the party
- How Nick gets home from the party
- Narrative gap of Gatsby's phone calls to Chicago.
- Allusions to criminal events e.g. Wolfsheim's story about Rosy Rosenthal emphasise the secret side of Gatsby that Nick is not initiated into.
- Phone calls to Chicago etc.
- Tom refers to a place he stayed with Daisy 'Kapiolani' to undermine her argument to leave Tom for Gatsby. This highlights Tom and Daisy's shared experience from which Gatsby and the audience are excluded.
- Jordan's fragmented account of Daisy's decision to change her mind, omitted details about the letter
- Wilson's movements on the days of Gatsby's death
- Gatsby's thoughts and feelings as he leaves Louisville to become Gatsby.
- Gatsby's thoughts as he uses the pool for the last time
- Jordan's motivations
- Daisy's worldview
- Tom's phone calls with Myrtle
- When Tom leaves at the party
- Jordan and Gatsby's conversation

The 1<sup>st</sup> Person Narrator

Advantages:

- Intimate
- Personal
- Detailed account of events

Disadvantages:

- Biased
- One dimensional point of view
- Not present in all events

How Fitzgerald modified the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator:

The first person voice is modified to include stories and events of which Nick has no experience.

- Recounting dialogue between characters
- Direct quotes of another character's account
- Paraphrasing other characters' words
- Piecing together fragments into a continuous story

- Speculation about events and others feelings
- Evocations of another characters consciousness.

Other narrative devices:

- **Telephone calls** – introduce characters, clarify relationships, foreshadow outcomes and also leave a narrative gap.
  - interruption of nicks narrative through telephone call with Myrtle
  - Gatsby is interrupted by phone calls concerning business. His business is revealed in the final chapter when Slagle calls Gatsby's house and begins taling to Nick thinking it is Gatsby.
  - Nick and Jordans relationships is terminated by phone
- **Photographs**
  - Mr McKee photographs the party in NY, this emphasises the gap between image and reality
  - Photograph of Gatsby at Oxford to guarantee truth of his claim of being and Oxford man. It is a prop to his illusionary narrative.
  - Photo of Dan Cody represents Gatsby's history – narrative of Dan Cody combines material success with corruption and violence.

The use of selective detail:

- **Gatsby** – lacks physical description, emphasis on his smile, his suits, and his use of 'old sport'.
- **Daisy** – appearance changes, detail about her voice (superficial phrases, repetition and stuttering), colour white
- **Tom** – large physique, inability to express abstract ideas, dominating.
- **Wolfsheim** – human moral cufflinks, organised crime and pronunciation of c's as g's
- **Myrtle** – sexualised curves and appearance, little about her personality.
- **Wilson** – inferior male, spiritless and weak, worn away
- **Jordan** – successful, flapper, superior to others, dishonest character, sport star.
- **Catherine** – red bob and white face, outgoing, flapper.

Narrative techniques:

**Dialogue and the scenic method** = Nick recreates dramatic exchanges in dialogue mimicking the idiosyncrasies of a range of voices to prevent monotonous narration. The scenic method is a sequence of scenes which are each self-contained but echo others through cross referencing.

**Intricate patterning** – colour words regularly recur such as green, white and gold.

**Foreshadowing** – used a lot e.g. when Gatsby snatches a book off of Nick saying 'if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse'

**Irony** – utilised through artificiality. E.g. Gatsby's mystery is the main appeal but the more we discover the more boring he becomes.

**Geography** – the conflict between East and West Egg, three pieces of drama occur in New York. The east coast is a centre of conflict pushing Nick back to the Midwest.

Speech and dialogue:

Character	Speech
Gatsby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nick points out his speech of 'elaborate formalities' is bordering on 'absurd'</li> <li>• Artificial language supports façade but he is ironically too posh → 'old sport'</li> <li>• Inconsistent in his stories → Oxford man, spent 5 months in Oxford, accidentally ended up in Oxford.</li> <li>• Unmediated voice shown in his diary and his desire for improvement.</li> </ul>
Wolfsheim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of education and class shown 'Oggsford' and 'Gonnection', phonetic spellings indicate a caricature of Jewish of New York gangsters.</li> <li>• Working class despite his wealth and power.</li> <li>• Very cryptic – characteristics of criminal?</li> </ul>
Daisy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repetition of phrases indicate delicate/ditzy persona 'you remind me of a rose, an absolute rose'</li> <li>• Complimentary and flirtatious, mirroring her position in society.</li> <li>• She is very passive and doesn't tell her own stories, her one narrative about the birth of her daughter was a bitter anecdote.</li> <li>• Hyperbolic and dramatic 'paralysed with happiness'</li> </ul>
Nick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited, first person narrator, unreliable mediator of events</li> <li>• Switches between 3<sup>rd</sup> person when inferring other characters thoughts</li> <li>• Direct and indirect speech are blurred</li> <li>• Gives irrelevant detail of history and setting creating imagery and foreshadow</li> <li>• External heterodiegetic narrative – externalises himself.</li> <li>• Vague recollection.</li> </ul>
Jordan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplies details in retrospect and a position of knowledge</li> <li>• Selective in detail to provide sense of confusion – tantalisingly silent</li> <li>• Emotive and focuses on anecdotes and personal details</li> <li>• Temporal deixis as she calls on schemas</li> <li>• Long sentences show her stream of consciousness.</li> </ul>
Tom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses declarative sentences and imperatives to show superiority</li> <li>• Malapropisms – using wrong word for something when trying to appear educated</li> <li>• Melodramatic, combining violence and self-pity.</li> </ul>
Henry Gatz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talks of 'Jimmy' a young man who 'ran away'</li> <li>• Naïve</li> <li>• Untainted pride in his son</li> </ul>

Myrtle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commanding, upper class entitlement she adopts when with Tom</li> <li>• Passionate and excitable – retells stories of the past and of future plans</li> <li>• Irrational – out of touch with reality for example her perceived worth to Tom</li> <li>• Uses imperatives and has a condescending tone.</li> </ul>
Wilson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stutter – inferiority</li> <li>• Uses short, simple sentences</li> <li>• Talks about God and religion</li> </ul>
Michaelis	Nicks voice blurs with voices of others on omniscient narrative. Nick recalls what he doesn't witness.
Taxi driver	Nick reconstructs a possible narrative as he supposes a taxi driver tells passengers about Daisy and Gatsby.

### Writing the commentary

Key points:

- Start with 'my intention was'
- Show understanding of character
- Pay attention to small details
- Use variety of linguistic terms
- Concise and selective plan, working through recast chronologically
- Refer to the base text – changes, similarities and why something was elaborated or minimised in the base text
- Use buzzwords such as 'reshaping meaning'

# Exploring conflict (7707/2)

Paper 2, Section A: Writing about society (re-creative writing),

Q5

Student example G

(L5)

An odd group to say the least. Well, it's unexpected for a ~~man~~ great man like Gatsby to be coming to this dainty restaurant, <sup>Mr Gatsby's</sup> ~~the man's~~ kitchen, <sup>our restaurant</sup> it's probably twice the size of ~~ours~~ <sup>the whole restaurant</sup> ever if to compare others ~~its~~ <sup>in</sup> luxurians. The nymphs we have would look like a cheap knock-off next to his holy gargoyles.

He may be rich but he sure has guts to wear suits like that, pink? God Good God if it wasn't Gatsby, the person wearing the suit would've had the whole town calling him a pansy.

I betcha' his whole suit is triple the price of our annual rent of feet. Here I am, in this upper class restaurant serving 'snobs' who couldn't care less about people like us, they don't know the struggle. The rich have it all, prestige, fame and class; they'd be sipping high balls right under a police dog's nose and the dogs will do nothing but wag their tails. There was this other guy eating lunch, looked poor and proper but he doesn't seem like he's one of 'them'.

He ain't got his head held high above us with a gaze like we're all dirt. The way I see it, this gargoyle with his large flat nose is here to do shady business and the poor lad is gonna be corrupt by them. I'm surprised they can discuss any business, his nose could attract the attention of a crowd from a mile away.

The great Gatz and his herchner kept switching out like they were having a ~~re~~ timed relay race, always going as they stare at their watch. Quite amusing, the middle guy even paid the check. He's either a dying breed of gentlemen or he's in it to win connections. Not that I can blame him, in this day and age, everyone wants a slice of the booming economy, the so called Roaring twenties, I'd throw away my morals any day to live their high life. I'd own a car and parade around with several ladies around me and the police dogs at my beck and call. If ~~the~~ anything, money buys you happiness and peace - corrupt or not. In our times, everyone is corrupt so might as well join them to fit ~~society's~~ ~~society's~~ <sup>kind</sup> ~~of~~ it. ~~New~~ New York ain't a gentle place, far from it. We're already corrupt, me and you. Breaking the amendments, passing high balls like water, heck, the prohibition doesn't even exist. Great Gatz and his herchner hardly ~~ate~~ <sup>ate</sup> their lunch. Jesus, they nibble and go for a dish that cost this much? Only the guy who paid ate all his up. Well, there's two full dishes, you and me. You hungry?



## Student example 1 (extract)

By using a first person narrative, I intended to create a sense of empathy between the reader and the character (the waiter). In order to depict Gatsby's fame and reputation I've used Gatsby as the embodiment of a 'great man' and his exponential wealth shown in contrast with the waiter. 'I betcha' his whole suit is triple the price of our annual rent of flat'. The dialect 'betcha' hints that the waiter has a social divide between the people he serves ~~and~~ ~~as does~~ and converges upwards when talking to another class as he's trained to. As a 'head waiter' his divide between those he serves is still significantly large.

Through a triplet of abstract nouns 'prestige, fame and class' I intended to portray the ~~concurrent~~ strong social division in society. ~~and~~ The abstract nouns are still applicable to today's ideals and thus form a greater sense of empathy.

Through figurative language of a metaphor, the 'police dog's nose' pragmatically refers to corrupt cops who are obedient to those with wealth and power (refer anaphorically cataphorically refers to Gatsby's previous pardon to speeding "Knew you next time, Mr. Gatsby - Excuse me!"). and hence the society's ignorance to law offenders and the emotions of injustice are apparent in the head waiter's frustration to 'police dogs'.

The use of colloquial language and informal lexicon such as ~~omit~~ the contractions 'aint' provide a more realistic environment of the waiter giving an account of his encounter with the three individuals during lunch (abides felicitly conditions) to his friend.

There's no need to use overt prestige as he isn't an elite (works as a head waiter and thus if abiding by society's constructs, they'd be friends with those with occupations belonging to the same class and status).

By noticing Nick's identification with Wolfsheimer's nose, I assumed everyone else of that era tended to be less culturally aware and more so stereotypically racist and thus included into my transformation, the waiter's a clear declaration of the 'large flat nose' as his main description of Wolfsheimer as a character and a point which in the base text, is furthered exaggerated for comical effect e.g. 'Mr. Wolfsheimer's nose flared at me indignantly'. Hence, the over-exaggeration of the waiter's rude remark 'I'm surprised they can discuss any business, his nose could attract the attention of a crowd from a mile away!'

Anaphorically referencing to Nick's divide of opinion



With the rest of the characters, the writer notices subtle differences between Mr Gatsby and the gangster. Rather than describing Mr Gatsby and Wolfsheimer as an odd pair due to their contrast in appearance and reputed background, due to Gatsby's rumours as 'the devil's cousin' and 'killed a man', the Mr Gatsby is only liked due to his lavish parties showing generosity with his power and wealth. Thus 'The Great Gatsby and his menagerie'. Nick throughout the novel shows progressively strong good morals and hence the writer's not observation of his manner to be a key hint to the base text. 'he doesn't seem like one of them.'

Nick lacks any arrogance and superiority over other class and ~~some~~ those of different ethnic backgrounds. 'He ain't got his head held high above us with a gaze like we're all dirt' (simile).

From bringing in historical context, the 1920s was a time of predominance, <sup>a high</sup> rise of cars and a larger title <sup>on the streets</sup> but high status associated with owning one. It was an era where materialistic and consumeristic actions were seen as ~~a~~ well deserved traits as it portrayed you thrived during a time of economic boom. If you had wealth, you had money and ladies/men. 'I'd own a car and parade with several ladies around me'. The use of the lexis 'parade' shows the lavish and almost boastful distastefulness that during the time, was seen as acceptable and rather a part of the American dream. We included the prohibition which led to Gatsby's bootlegging business to speakeasies and society in general. Nobody paid attention to the amendment law and thus the lax attitude to the supply of alcohol.

Full marks for A02

Paper 2

Exploring Conflict

Section B

Dramatic encounters

A Streetcar Named Desire

## Revision Guide – A Streetcar Named Desire



**Section B: Dramatic Encounters**

<b>AO1: Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression</b>		<b>AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts</b>		<b>AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received</b>	
This rewards students' ability to apply literary and non-literary concepts and methods to the study of a dramatic text. AO1 also rewards the ability to maintain an academic style throughout the essay.		This relates to students' ability to examine the ways that meanings are shaped in the dramatic text through the selection and exploration of relevant sections in response to a specific focus.		This relates to students' ability to explore the ways that dramatic conflict is presented through particular genre conventions. It also rewards students' ability to evaluate the influence of contextual factors (social, historical, biographical, literary) on the production and interpretation of their chosen text.	
<b>Mark</b>	<b>Students are likely to:</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Students are likely to:</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Students are likely to:</b>
<b>Level 5</b>  <b>13-15</b>	<p>Apply a range of terminology accurately.</p> <p>Select language levels with sustained relevance and evaluate patterns.</p> <p>Express ideas with sophistication and sustained development.</p>	<b>Level 5</b>  <b>17-20</b>	<p>Offer a thorough and open-minded analysis by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interpreting the question theme subtly</li> <li>evaluating varied forms of the question focus</li> <li>making careful selections from the text.</li> </ul> <p>Provide perceptive accounts of how meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investigating closely how the writer's construction of characters' identities contribute to the question focus</li> <li>evaluating how the relationships between characters are negotiated</li> <li>exploring the writer's crafting and evaluating its role in shaping meaning symbolically</li> </ul>	<b>Level 5</b>  <b>9-10</b>	<p>Offer a perceptive account.</p> <p>Evaluate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>particular genre conventions to present dramatic conflict</li> <li>the influence of contextual factors on the production and various interpretations of the play.</li> </ul>

<b>Level 4</b>  <b>10-12</b>	<p>Apply terminology relevantly and mainly accurately.</p> <p>Select language levels purposefully and explore some patterns.</p> <p>Express ideas coherently and with development.</p>	<b>Level 4</b>  <b>13-16</b>	<p>Offer a good and secure analysis by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interpreting the question theme relevantly</li> <li>exploring different forms of the question focus</li> <li>making appropriate choices from the text.</li> </ul> <p>Offer a clear account of how meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exploring how the writer's construction of characters' identities contributes to the question focus</li> <li>exploring how relationships between characters change</li> <li>examining the writer's crafting and its role in shaping meaning symbolically.</li> </ul>	<b>Level 4</b>  <b>7-8</b>	<p>Offer a clear account.</p> <p>Explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>genre conventions to present dramatic conflict</li> <li>how the production and various interpretations of the play are motivated by contextual factors.</li> </ul>
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Level 3 7-9	<p>Apply terminology with some accuracy.</p> <p>Select language levels and explain some features.</p> <p>Present ideas with some clear topics and organisation.</p>	Level 3 9-12	<p>Offer some analysis by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifying the question focus straightforwardly</li> <li>identifying some forms of the question focus</li> <li>making some successful choices from the text.</li> </ul> <p>Show some awareness of how meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explaining some ways that the writer's construction of characters' identities contribute to the question focus</li> <li>explaining how relationships between characters may change</li> <li>discussing the writer's crafting and its role in shaping meaning.</li> </ul>	Level 3 5-6	<p>Offer some consideration.</p> <p>Explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>more obvious genre conventions to present dramatic conflict</li> <li>the contexts in which the play was produced and has been interpreted.</li> </ul>
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Level 2 4-6	<p>Apply terminology with more general labels.</p> <p>Select language levels with incomplete development.</p> <p>Communicate ideas with some organisation.</p>	Level 2 5-8	<p>Offer a partially descriptive/analytical account by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>commenting generally on the question theme</li> <li>making broad links to other forms of the question focus</li> <li>showing less certainty in selecting from the text.</li> </ul> <p>Show a partial or an emerging awareness of how meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>commenting broadly on how characters' identities can contribute to manipulation</li> <li>identifying that relationships between characters may change</li> <li>making observations about the writer's crafting with little comment on its role.</li> </ul>	Level 2 3-4	<p>Offer partial awareness.</p> <p>Describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>broad genre conventions to present dramatic conflict</li> <li>the contexts in which the play was produced and has been interpreted.</li> </ul>
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Level 1 1-3	<p>Describe language features without linguistic description.</p> <p>Show limited awareness of language level</p> <p>Present material with little organisation.</p>	Level 1 1-4	<p>Offer a brief or undeveloped account by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>describing the question theme</li> <li>giving little exemplification of forms of the question focus</li> <li>making limited reference to other sections.</li> </ul> <p>Show limited awareness of how meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>labelling characters' identities; little relevance to their contribution to the question focus</li> <li>seeing relationships between characters as fixed</li> <li>making brief or no reference to the writer's crafting.</li> </ul>	Level 1 1-2	<p>Offer limited discussion.</p> <p>Identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>basic genre conventions to present dramatic conflict</li> <li>some basic ideas about the production and interpretation of the play.</li> </ul>
0	Nothing written about the text.	0	Nothing written about the text.	0	Nothing written about the text.



**Is the tragedy the result of individual failing (the tragic flaw) or a mistake, or might wider social forces and conflicts be to blame?** Adrian Poole argues that tragic playwrights stage the points of convergence at which light and darkness meet, the sacred and secular, divine power and human reason. The ages that produced their drama were not characterised by stable coherent belief. It was precisely the conflicts to which they gave expression, between old religion and new politics, between traditional faith and modern rationalism, between the sacred and the secular (Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford: OUP. 2005 P29)

**Does the protagonist have to be morally good?** Aristotle himself is ambivalent on this: It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity; for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possess no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear.'

**Do we feel better/enlightened/uplifted after watching a tragedy?** Terry Eagleton takes issue with the idea that as he puts it that tragic suffering is ennobling rather than appalling; In this perverse vision, real life calamities – an air crash, a famine and outbreak of genocide – do not count as tragic, since they leave us despondent rather than delighted. Aeschylus is tragic, but Auschwitz is not [...] Besides, in this view tragedy is a thoroughly virile affair, a matter of heroes, warriors and a very masculine nobility of spirit it does not chime with sensibility of a secular, sceptical democratic age (Foreword to the edition of Jonathan Dollimore's Radical Tragedy Basingstoke: Palgrave 2004 px)

**Does tragedy ever give us hope for the future or does it portray life as meaningless and chaotic?** Some critics find the experience of watching the end of a tragedy to be a gloomy confirmation of human powerlessness' writes Sean McEvoy 'others see there a pointer to a more just world which is perhaps the product of but separate from the conflicting forces which have just destroyed the protagonist. There is death, waste and destruction at the end of a tragedy, but there is always some hope' (Shakespeare's The Basics, Routledge 2000 P185.

Two other viewpoints relevant to Streetcar:

Tragedy always deals with toxic past bequeathed to the present, in personal terms it means what fathers and mothers have passed on to their children in terms of duties, passions, and injuries.

Adrian Poole: Tragedy and Very Short Introduction (Oxford OUP, 2005 p35)

Tragedy is the art for created to confront the most difficult experiences we face, death, loss, injustice, thwarted passion, despair.

## **II: A Streetcar Named Desire and Ideas of the American South**

'I write out of love for the South,' wrote Williams. 'But I can't expect Southerners to realise that my writing about them is an expression of love. It is out of regret for a South that no longer exists that I write of the forces that destroyed it.' (quoted by his mother in Edwina Dakin Williams and Lucy Freeman, Remember me to Tome (New York: Putnam, 1963)

Ideas of the South are very important to Streetcar; here are some things the students should know:

The prosperous economy of the Southern states, founded on cotton plantations worked by Negro slaves, was ruined after defeat in the American Civil War (1861-65) which killed millions and almost broke a nation leaving deep scars and the guilt and trauma of slavery. The South recovery was further held back by inadequate educational provision, poverty, racial conflict and what Rod Horton and Herbert Edwards call 'a paralyzing obsession with the largely imaginary glories of the past.'

Other references in stage direction early on 'Stanley slaps Stella's thigh' not only show the social acceptability of violence but also the sexual undertones of it for Stanley. This is especially dangerous to Blanche's survival as it foreshadows how he mixes these two feelings later on before her implied rape, 'All right lets have some rough-house.' This irony of how Blanche's own weapon of sex is being used against her not only points out a blatant danger through the use of dialogue, but Williams has also used it to foreshadow how her love for fantasy and escaping reality will also be used against her when she is institutionalized for insanity.

Williams expresses how these two strong emotions often fuel one another; this is a constant feature of Stella and Stanley's relationship. Stella refers to their wedding night where Stanley smashed the light bulb as, 'thrilling' showing how perhaps contextually people could not recognize the innate difference between passionate love or hate, and the repression that was expected of their society caused these feeling to manifest in such a volatile way. This theme of linked emotions could also suggest why Elysian Fields is hazardous for Blanche; she herself is full of repressed desires and in such a claustrophobic setting, ;just the 'two rooms; these lay the foundations of an emotionally traumatic climax; the implied rape.

These warzones are mirrored within the Kowalski apartment, personified by Blanche and Stanley. This is emphasized by how territorial Stanley is, 'Get out the bathroom!' This suggests his resentment of the upper classes which Blanche returns with the slur 'Polack' indicating the superiority she feels her family has to Stanley's, 'I guess this is what we have to mix our bloodline with now'. This hatred is a technique of irony as it is later revealed that use of the word 'Polack' is what enrages Stanley leading to the rape. This resentment is once again an indicator of how life in Elysian Fields is not safe for Blanche.

Violence is also explored contextually through all male characters. The first male we meet is sailor, 'I've got a date.' This shows Williams already playing upon the sailor stereotype of sexual promiscuity of 1940s America which is furthered to explore violence through the character of Stanley predominantly. Stanley is a characterized as ex-army, 'two-forty-first' is mentioned briefly; this relationship and background of war is considered to be where he became a man. This is possibly a metaphor for how in Post-war America, Blanche cannot survive because life is created around violence and warzones, even if these are gender and class. Thinking about streetcar as a tragedy is a very useful way into the play. Although it's important to steer students away from an unthinking checklist approach to tragedy, the play lends itself to analysis from both traditional Aristotelian and more political, materialist perspectives.

Teachers could use this model drawn from Aristotle's poetics as a starting point but one that students should be encouraged to interrogate.

#### **Characteristics of a tragedy:**

- A tragic hero – a term treated with suspicion by some critics who prefer the more neutral 'protagonist'.
- The protagonist is basically good.
- The protagonist is usually high born or someone of significance in society (one who is highly renowned and prosperous', says Aristotle) so that their actions have consequences for the community and not simply for themselves.
- A plot built around a downturn in the protagonist's fortunes often triggered by a tragic flaw or error of judgement on the protagonist's part.
- A progression from order to disorder, harmony to chaos.
- The action of a tragedy seems to unfold with a horrible inevitability.
- Unhappy endings – the tragic catastrophe.

- An antagonist, a figure who stands out against the protagonist.
- The protagonist often has some moment of self-knowledge near the end of the play.
- The audience feel sorrow and pity at the end of a tragedy but leave the theatre morally enlightened and ennobled by their vicarious experience of tragic suffering.

This very simplified model begs some important questions:

**Is it necessary to be rich and power in order to be a tragic protagonist?** As Williams' great contemporary Arthur Miller puts it, 'it matters not at all whether a modern play concerns itself with a grocer or a president if the intensity of the hero's commitment to his course is less than the maximum possible'. (Introduction' to plays I (London: Methuen, 1988, p33)

**Is the catastrophe inevitable? Could matters had been different?** Raymond Williams writes, 'We have to see not only that suffering is avoidable, but that it is not avoided. And not only that suffering breaks us but that it need not break us.' (Modern Tragedy [1960] Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966, pp202-3)

V: Narrative Context

Pre-action timeline:

C17-19 DuBois family established at Belle Reve, Laurel, Mississippi (Blanche tells Stanley, 'There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve.') thanks to the epic fornications' of Blanche and Stella's improvident grandfathers and fathers and uncles and brothers', everything is lost.

1917 September, Blanche born (she is 30 as the play begins).

1922 Stella born

1933 Blanche elopes with and marries Allan Gray: he commits suicide

1937 Stella leaves Belle Reve for New Orleans. Stella and Blanche's father dies.

Late 30s/early 40s

Blanche left to care for everything. Mother, Margaret, and cousin Jessie die. Blanche teaches English at Laurel High School.

All that's left of the estate is the house, 20 acres of ground and the graveyard.

Stella marries Stanley (he's still in uniform at the time).

1946 Christmas Eve, Blanche meets Shep Huntleigh in Miami (assuming this isn't a figment of Blanche's imagination).

1947 Spring term, Blanche is fired from her job after an affair with one of her students: Belle Reve is finally lost; Blanche moves to the Hotel Flamingo.

End of April, Blanche arrives in New Orleans.



## Sample Questions for A Streetcar Named Desire

1. Refer to Scene 10 (2017 question)

### **beginning**

'Operator, operator! Give me long distance, please...' and

### **ending**

'We've had this date with each other from the beginning!'

This interaction occurs near the end of the scene. Blanche is on her own after her party when Stella goes into labour. Stanley returns from the hospital.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, examine how and why Williams presents characters' loss of control at different points in the play.

[45 marks]

2. Refer to Scene 8 (2017 question)

### **Beginning**

'(suddenly) Stanley, tell us a joke' and

### **Ending**

'You want me to clear your places? *Stella begins to cry weakly*'.

This interaction occurs at the beginning of the scene. It is Blanche's birthday. Mitch has not arrived and Stanley and Stella have been arguing about Blanche.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents characters' contrasting values at different points in the play.

3. Refer to Scene 1 (2018 question)

### **Beginning**

[in an uneasy rush] 'I haven't asked you about the things you probably thought I was going to ask' and

### **Ending**

'Does that surprise you?'

This interaction occurs near the end of the scene. Blanche has just been hearing about Stella's happiness with her married life in New Orleans. Blanche tells Stella about the loss of Belle Reve.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents characters' feelings of bitterness at different points in the play.

[45 marks]

4. Refer to Scene 6 (2018 question)

**Beginning**

'Sit down! Why don't you take off your coat and loosen your collar?' and

**Ending**

'He is insufferably rude. Goes out of his way to offend me.'

This interaction occurs in the middle of the scene. Blanche and Mitch have returned to Elysian Fields after an awkward evening out together. Blanche has invited Mitch into the apartment for a drink.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents characters' contrasting personalities points in the play.

**[45 marks]**

5. Refer to Scene 5

**Beginning**

*'Blanche is seated in the bedroom fanning herself with a palm leaf...'* and

**Ending**

*'[He looks around the corner a bit timidly, then turns with affected boldness and runs after her.]'*

This interaction occurs at the start of the scene. Blanche and Stella are in the apartment. In the apartment above there is an argument between Steve and Eunice.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents gender roles at different points in the play.

**[45 marks]**

6. Refer to Scene 9

**Beginning**

"What did you do that for?"

**Ending**

"Never inside, I didn't lie in my heart..."

This interaction occurs between Mitch and Blanche at the apartment in Elysian Fields. Stanley has told Mitch about Blanche's past and he is confronting Blanche with this information.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents characters' feelings of being betrayed at different points in the play.

**[45 marks]**

7. Refer to Scene 11

**Beginning**

“Hello, Blanche.”

**Ending**

“Not unless necessary.”

This interaction occurs in Elysian Fields at the end of the play. Blanche is about to be removed to an asylum.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents characters who evoke a feeling of sympathy in the audience at different points in the play.

**[45 marks]**

8. Refer to Scene 8

**Beginning**

[He hurls a plate to the floor]

**Ending**

“...so don't ever call me a Polack.”

This is in the middle of the scene. They are celebrating Blanche's birthday but Mitch has not arrived to the party.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents characters who evoke a feeling of antipathy in the audience at different points in the play.

**[45 marks]**

## Scene summary

1. Blanche arrives at Elysian fields and tells Stella about the loss of their family and Belle Reve. Stanley meets Blanche and there is tension immediately.
2. Stanley demands to know what happened to Belle Reve, concerned he has been swindled. He confronts Blanche who remains flirtatious. Stanley reveals Stella's pregnancy.
3. Poker night – Blanche meets Mitch and Stanley becomes violent with Stella, who retreats upstairs but later comes back and makes love with Stanley.
4. Blanche shocked at Stella's return, she ignores Stella's happiness and tries to plot a way for them both to escape. Stanley is listening to Blanche's criticism.
5. Stanley confronts Blanche about her past which she denies, she worryingly asks Stella if she has heard any gossip and admits to lying to Mitch to create an illusion. She flirts with the young newspaper man at the door and kisses him whilst waiting for Mitch to arrive for their date.
6. Blanche and Mitch return from date, she tells him about how Stanley hates her and asks if he has told Mitch anything. Mitch asks how old she is and Blanche tells the story of her husband's suicide. They talk about marriage.
7. Blanche is bathing and Stella is preparing for her birthday, Stanley stops Stella to tell her what he has found about Blanche (the flamingo hotel, why she lost her job etc), Stella tries to defend her by telling Stanley about the tragedies she faced. Stanley reveals Mitch won't be coming as he told him about Blanche. Blanche notices the atmosphere.
8. Blanche's birthday party – she can't understand why Mitch didn't show up. Stella and Stanley argue and Stanley asserts his authority. Stanley presents Blanche with a gift of a bus ticket back to Laurel. He believes they will be happy again when Blanche leaves. He takes Stella to hospital.
9. Mitch arrives when Blanche is alone, it is clear something is wrong. Mitch wants to turn on the light but Blanche pleads not to, he does anyway and notices she is much older. He reveals the stories he has heard and checked and Blanche tries to explain it was due to the loss of her husband. Mitch accuses her of lying to him. Mitch demands sex and she requests marriage, he tells her she is not good enough.
10. Blanche is drunk and Stanley returns, she tells him about the invite from Shep Huntleigh. Stanley changes into silk pyjamas from his wedding night, he attacks her verbally, she flees to the phone to call Shep and then tried to pass Stanley. He rapes her.
11. Blanche is sent to an institution as Stella believed Stanley over her. Stanley tears down the last paper lantern. The doctor is kind to Blanche and leads her out.

## Characterisation

### **Blanche Dubois**

- Psychologically and emotionally damaged heroine. She is the archetypal lost soul.
- Insensitive, prickly and often irritating rather than a character with identify with and pity.
- Her tragic life leads her to avoid reality and opt for magic, presenting the illusion of purity and youth.
- Her instability grows and Stanley strips away her fantasy life.
- She represents the old south through her racism and classism, and desire to appear prim and proper.

### **Stanley Kowalski**

- A proud, second generation polish American who at first appears down to earth and practical.
- He has a strong hatred of fantasy and prefers realism.
- Dislikes Blanches racism and classism.
- Present as primal and animalistic – he is abusive to everyone around him and seeks to be the most powerful.

### **Stella Kowalski**

- Stellas origins lie in the old south but she has accepted a new way of life by meeting Stanley who is working class.
- She is sexually passionate and submissive to Stanley, she pities Blanche and wants to defend her.

### **Mitch**

- Mitch appears lumbering but is a sensitive and kind soul. His actions revolve around his care for his mother
- He has loved and lost like Blanche and believes they can comfort each other.
- He feels he has made a fool of himself when he discovers the truth about Blanche

### **Eunice**

- Stellas friend, neighbour and landlady.
- Representative of the working class woman, foreshadowing Stellas future life with Stanley of abuse and passion.
- She remains sensitive to Blanche but affirms Stellas choice to stay with Stanley indicating male dependency of women.

### **Steve**

- Stanleys friend, a loutish drunk that foreshadows what Stanley will become.
- He has the last line of the play

Relationships between characters:

### **Blanche and Stanley – conflict**

- Stanley feels threatened by Blanche and doesn't like her influence on Stella, she brings out the southern belle qualities in Stella
- He is suspicious of her and immediately accuses her of swindling him, he does not believe any of her façade and sets about to destroy her fantasy.
- The sexual tension is apparent from the first scene – an act of dominance, the only way to gain power of Blanche is to sexually dominate her, this is the final act of destruction.
- They clash over values of new society and the old south, Blanche's racism and classism causes conflict.

### **Blanche and Stella – love**

- Blanche and Stella have a caring relationship, both mothering each other. Blanche tries to baby Stella but in reality it is Stella who provides the most support to her emotionally instable sister.
- Their familial bond is strong as Stella tries to take Blanches side in the conflict between her and Stanley. In the end Stella takes Stanley's side.

### **Stella and Stanley – dominance and submission**

- Stanley is clearly dominant and Stella accepts her passive role openly
- There are incidents of domestic abuse but they always return to each other.
- They are highly sexual and passionate – the overpowering physical passion appears to be the only reason Stella remains by his side.
- Helene Desutch points out victims of abuse are masochists who provoke their abuses and found pleasure in them.
- She is trapped in the cycle of abuse but also defends it.
- Eventually they will end up as Eunice and Steve.

### **Blanche and Mitch – hope**

- Blanche fools Mitch with her illusion but they both hope to find love and comfort in one another.
- She sees Mitch as her salvation and an escape, at first he is naïve but overcomes this with the help of Stanley

### **Stanley and Mitch**

- Stanley needs Mitch's respect, his jealousy over Mitch's relationship with Blanche spurs his determination to expose her.
- They contrast greatly in terms of masculinity and dominance but both attempt to dominate Blanche sexually and tear away her illusion. Mitch is Stanley's shadow, failing at the masculine 'jobs' such as the rape.

## Themes

**Gender and sexuality** – sexual desire is evident in all characters, Blanche's promiscuity, Stanley and Stella's passionate romance. Sexual passion is unstoppable carrying victims to path of self-destruction. Males are dominant and females submissive.

**Social class** – conflict between the old aristocracy and 'old south' and new working class. Stella is happy to abandon her class but Blanche is not. Class is a major conflict between Stanley and Blanche.

**Death, madness and tragedy** – Blanche's decline in mental stability is the result of the many tragedies of her past. Her metaphorical death occurs after the rape. She is a tragic heroine.

**Reality and illusion** – Blanche lives in an illusion and Stanley wants to bring her to reality. This theme is played out on the stage as a desperate struggle.

**Death and desire** – the streetcar links to sex and death, the liebestod theme enhances the romantic and tragic grandeur of Blanche's downfall. Sex and death are fatally entwined.

**Madness** – destructive power of society on sensitive, non-conformist individual. Blanche's mental health is shattered by Stanley's brutality. Mental deterioration is foreshadowed from beginning.

**Domestic abuse** – Stella and Stanley, Steve and Eunice – reflects Williams upbringing.

## Conflict and Tension

**Blanche and Stanley** are the main source of tension

- Stage proxemics used to highlight tension e.g. rape scene
- Social class is a source of conflict, Blanche intimidates Stanley and he wants to assert his dominance
- Huge conflict between reality and illusion.
- Stanley is responsible for Blanche's breakdown, stripping her of her psychological, sexual and financial identity.
- Blunt sentences in first scene foreshadow conflict in personalities, there is immediate resentment.

**Blanche** is the catalyst of conflict in all senses.

**Stella and Blanche** despite similarities conflict in their desires. Blanche disregards Stella's happiness and acceptance of her new social status and will not understand her viewpoint. Ultimately her rejection of Stella's wants cause her to choose Stanley over Blanche.

**Stanley and Stella** begin to feel tension because of Blanche's presence. Stanley then blames Blanche which contributes to their conflict.

**Reality and illusion** – the conflict between Blanche and Stanley can be boiled down to conflict between reality and illusion. It is also shown in her relationship with Mitch.

## Symbols/Motifs

- **The streetcar** – Williams called this the ideal metaphor for the human condition
  - The title refers to the power of desire as a driving force
- **The Varsouviana Polka** – associated with Blanche's husband's suicide. The music plays when she is reminded of her past and continues until some event distracts her or until a gunshot goes off. It occurs in her mind.
- **Bathing** – Blanche takes frequent baths to soothe her nerves. It is an attempt to cleanse herself and forget reality, she seeks rejuvenation and respite from the past. Drunk men shower Stanley to bring him back to reality.
- **Paper lantern and paper moon** – Blanche's attempt to mask her past and present appearance. It is only a temporary solution that can be ripped off at any moment.
  - Stanley and Mitch tear down the lantern as they find out the truth.
  - A paper world cloaking reality, just as fragile as her façade.
- **Alcohol and drunkenness** – Stanley and Blanche drink frequently. Stanley's masculinity becomes exaggerating and Blanche hides her alcoholism, she uses it as an escape mechanism.
- **Shadows** – represent the dreamworld and escape from light of day. Blanche seeks refuge in shadows and half-light but they soon become menacing to her.
  - In the rape scene Stanley's shadows overtake hers
  - Shadows contribute to the jungle-like mad atmosphere in the last scene.

## Critical perspectives

- Nicola Onyett – Blanche has become a social outcast because she refuses to conform to conventional moral values. Stanley strips her of her psychological, sexual and cultural identity.
- Lart – Blanche is a tragic figure and Stanley is agent of her destruction
- Emerged and threatened by the old-fashioned Southern belle values Blanche embodies, Stanley determines – albeit unconsciously at first – to destroy the threat she poses to his brave new world.



**AO 5 – Context**

Context is the dominant assessment objective for this unit so here is some more information to help you to make sure that you are able to incorporate this element into your essays.

You are NOT expected to learn it all, merely to use it to add to your understanding of the play. Likewise, huge swathes of contextual information are not necessary in your essays – you just need to show that you have thought about it, understood it and are able to apply the knowledge to the text.

This is not exhaustive – feel free to add your own information as you wish.

**Context of the author:**

- Williams is thought to have been able to identify with a fragility and vulnerability in women and once said:  
I draw every character out of my very multiple split personality. My heroines always express the climate of my interior world at the time in which those characters were created.
- He found examples of universal experience in the fringes of acceptable behaviour – maybe this relates to his personal experiences.

**Dramatic / Theatrical context:**

- Remember to talk about plastic theatre. You should also be able to talk about the version that you saw in Edinburgh (Royal Lyceum Theatre Company; 2002) and the film version.
- As the Twentieth Century dawned, so too did a distinct Southern Literature. Writers' fascination with the past began to turn towards the economic decay symbolised by the decaying beauty of the plantations (see Belle Reve).
- In the 1920s, playwrights were looking at the behaviour of the world and addressing the question "why did this happen?" through their works. Williams asked "what did it feel like to have this happen?" His focus was on the workings of the human psyche.
- You could look at particular images in the play, for example the meat at the start of the play, or Blanche's clothes, or bathing or ...

**Historical context:**

- Tennessee Williams was working on *Streetcar* at the end of WW2 but there is very little mention made of the war. Despite the fact that the events of the war had been cataclysmic, they receive only a brief mention in the play. This is characteristic of all of Tennessee Williams' plays.
- That said, many writers at the time were concerned with the idea that, whilst great leaps forward were being made in a variety of spheres, man's capacity for evil and destruction also continued to grow. In one sense, the journey from desire to death can be linked to this theme.

## ***A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams**

- As a Southerner, he was more affected by the events of the American Civil War (1861 – 1865). Following their defeat by the Northern states, the South suffered economically. However, this air of decaying grandeur added to the romantic appeal for many writer including Williams.
- As time moved on, industrialisation continued in the cities. Whilst the plantations continued to decay, urban growth and capitalism flourished in the cities.
- Williams was interested in the progress of American history – not only where it had been, but also where it was going and how it would get there.
- Stanley represents the American Dream that all men are born equal and can succeed equally, whilst Blanche represents the old world, where class and race are still important issues.
- Williams was homosexual and whilst this is clearly an aspect of his work, it is important to remember that for most his life, homosexuality remained illegal. It was, however, tolerated in some places, such as New Orleans.

### **Cultural and political context:**

- Tennessee Williams saw the South as a broken and damaged place in which the decay was somehow charming. He said:

I write out of love for the South ... once a way of life that I am just able to remember – not a society based on money ... I write about the South because I think the war between romanticism and the hostility to it is very sharp there.
- Williams is an almost completely non-political writer. More than any other American dramatist, he began to move away from writing about the large political issues to writing about the emotional burdens of everyday life.
- The tensions in this play come partly from cultural conflict – the worlds of Stanley and Blanche are so opposed that neither can understand the other.
- Explore the cultural context in the section at the end of scene 4. Look at the stage directions and at how Blanche characterises the sisters' upbringing.

### **Social context:**

- Women in the Old South had a social and symbolic role, were expected to be passive and chaste. This world could not give Blanche what she needed (see scene 5) and so she tried to marry into the 'light and culture', she discovers that there is corruption and deceit behind the façade.
- All of the Southern writers seemed to have vivid imaginations which were often bizarre and grotesque (Southern Gothic). The roots of this literature lay perhaps in the fact that the writers knew that they were part of a dying culture – where the dashing and romantic were founded on an economy based on injustice and cruelty.
- Blanche and Stanley are from different worlds where money has different values.
- Something to think about - if Blanche and Stanley represent different classes and values, where do Williams' sympathies lie? Are either of the characters fully endorsed? If not, why not?

**Tennessee Williams' Background to**  
**A Streetcar Named Desire**

- From an early age, Williams used writing as “an escape from a world of reality in which [he] felt acutely uncomfortable.
- He wrote about the human condition as he saw it; unafraid to tackle topics such as incest, rape and madness.
- He believed that “we are all savages at heart”. Which of the characters in *Streetcar* prove or disprove this?
- He lived in New Orleans from 1938, a bohemian place where all manner of behaviour was tolerated, if not encouraged. It was here that he was inspired to create *Streetcar*. It is said that he saw, on the Vieux Carré, two streetcars. One was named “Desire” and the other “Cemetery” – which he thought was somehow symbolic of life itself.
- We find, in this play, an implicit condemnation of homosexual behaviour. Was this his attempt to pacify those who disagreed with homosexuality or influenced by the fact that he was a homosexual but extremely uncomfortable with his sexuality?
- He also has a preoccupation with physical ugliness and the inevitability of death. He suffered a crisis in 1946 when he believed, incorrectly, that he was suffering from incurable cancer. Is this why **Blanche** is so afraid of the light?
- His sister Rose suffered a breakdown in 1937 and was admitted to a mental hospital and, not long afterwards, she was lobotomised. Williams suffered from depression throughout his life and lived in fear that he too would go insane.
- In the mid-twentieth century, Americans were fascinated and charmed by the idea of the South, a place they associated with a landed elite in elegant houses, flaunting their inherited wealth and studied gentility. For Williams, the South stood for strong cultural values whilst the North was greedy and sordid. Thus we can see that **Blanche** and **Stanley** are opposites.
- Williams was influenced not only by American drama, including that of the South, but also by European culture. Like Ibsen and Miller, he increases dramatic tension through revealing to the audience the degree to which the characters' self image is pretence. The climax comes when the character is forced to confront both the past and the present simultaneously, either acknowledging their actions and dealing with the consequences or retreating further into pretence, even madness.

**Question 14: *A Streetcar Named Desire* – Tennessee Williams**

Refer to Scene 7, beginning 'What's all this stuff for?' and ending 'Some lily she is.'

This interaction occurs at the beginning of the scene. Stella is preparing Blanche's birthday party.

Referring to these lines and other parts of the play, explore how and why Williams presents tension between characters throughout the play.

Assessment objective(s) covered:

AO1 (15 marks)

AO2 (10 marks)

AO3 (5 marks)

Total marks available: 30

In '*A Streetcar Named Desire*', the tension seems to arise from the contrasting and conflicting qualities of Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski. Their relationship is a fragile and tempestuous one, held together only briefly by their mutual affection for Stella. The huge contrast between them and their close proximity throughout the play act as a catalyst for the build-up of tension. In Scene 7, Stanley's commitment to ensuring Blanche's swift undoing creates a tense atmosphere as Blanche's secrets finally come to light.

The opening stage directions create an immediate dramatic irony. Williams describes a scene that should be a light-hearted and enjoyable event, a 'birthday supper', complete with 'cake and flowers'. This use of setting creates an image of happiness and celebration, which is highly ironic considering the fact that the supper is about to be made disastrous due to Stanley's vindictive and feral behaviour. As soon as Stanley enters the set, he begins to fire short, snappy interrogatives at Stella: 'What's all this stuff for?', 'She here?', 'How long she been in there?'. This portrays his naturally aggressive and suspicious attitude towards Blanche, instantly creating tension by showing his intolerance of her seemingly inconsequential behaviour.

Stanley continues to behave in an irritable and forceful manner as he uses the imperative 'Set down here a minute' towards his wife, and then repeats it (at presumably a louder volume) as an exclamatory when she refuses: 'Set down!'. This creates tension between them both due to the fact Stanley appears to be in a hostile mood, which is likely to cause further problems later on, and the fact he is so insistent that Stella listens to him suggests he has something important to say. The tension rises further as Stanley asks: 'You know she's been feeding us a pack of lies here?' suggesting they've been readily accepting everything she's been saying at great cost, and through the idiom 'now that cat's out of the bag'. This is an incredibly dramatic point as this moment has been built up to throughout the course of the play. Blanche's past was always a subject of debate from the moment she arrived (for example in Scene 2 when Stanley questions how Blanche has acquired such expensive clothing and accessories). The tension between Stanley and Stella is clear as Stanley is in possession of a great amount of knowledge, and therefore holds the power in this conversation.

**AO1**

The student applies methods in a systematic way to the analysis of the text, focusing closely on exploring specific language features and their effects, for example the use of interrogatives, markers of politeness and impoliteness, and the pragmatics of speech including comments on types of knowledge that characters hold.

**AO2**

There is a close focus on the ways that meanings are shaped and the student shows that she is able to select relevant sections in response to a specific focus, for example the comparison she makes to Scene 2. There is also an awareness of the characters' contrasting identities that contribute to the tension; this is explored and evaluated throughout the extract.

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**AO3**

The student understands some of the contextual factors within the text, in the chronology of events leading to this point, as well as the wider contexts of the dramatic genre, such as the significance of setting, and considers the audience reception of the scene. There is understanding of how aspects of the genre (eg stage directions) help to shape meaning, and in this instance are used for an obviously ironic effect, which as she points out, is significant in our interpretation of the opening sequence in this scene.



Paper 2, Section B: Dramatic encounters, Q13  
Student example L (extract)

L5

The spiral of madness begins through her exploding exposure of bitterness to the audience through her long monologue of the pain she had perked up to herself with no one to rely or voice to.

The epigrams of 'Saw! Saw! Saw!' and 'I, I, I' elongates the trauma Blanche has of the deaths but only to reveal she's bitter due to the cost of death 'How is hell do you think all that sickness and dying was paid for.' This increases Blanche's bitterness as she is materialistic and focuses on status, wealth and power rather than her family members' passing. Stella This does not meet felicitous conditions as Blanche also distances herself from Stella as she uses the "honorific" 'Miss Stella'. She focused on the financial situation without thinking of the distress and mourning of her sister's mourning as the prioritised ~~stip~~ factor.

Blanche also uses sarcasm 'And, oh, what gorgeous boxes they pack them away in!' - the adjective 'gorgeous' is out of context as once again she ~~de~~ presents to the audience, she's bitter of the cost of the 'gorgeous boxes'.

Stella after Blanche's rebuking all of ~~to~~ Grace's maxims of quality and quantity (too low and she exaggerates with metaphors - figurative, language reduces the accuracy of information 'Grim Reaper had put up tent on our doorstep') is broken into tears. Blanche's is then back to her

Mother by nature and rather than accepting Blanche's infantilisation and worry, can only return her declaration 'Oh, Stella, Stella, you're crying' with a rhetorical latter question 'Does that surprise you?'