

Key term (AO1)	Definition
Hamartia	A fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine
Hubris	Excessive pride or self-confidence
Patriarchy	A society where men hold the power
Plastic theatre	props, sound, and lighting to convey a character's inner emotions
Vulnerability	being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.
Tragedy	a play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.
Marginalised	a person, group, or concept treated as insignificant or peripheral.
Pathos	a quality that evokes pity or sadness.

Characters (AO1)	
Stanley Kowalski	Blanche Dubois
Dominant Primal	Fragile Delusional
Stella Kowalski	Harold "Mitch" Mitchell
Loyal Submissive	Lonely Moral
Eunice Hubbell	Steve Hubbell
Pragmatic Resilient	Coarse Boisterous
Allan Grey	Shep Huntleigh
Sensitive Tragic	Mysterious Idealised

Key Quotations (AO2)			
"I pulled you down off them columns." Stanley.		"They told me to take a streetcar named Desire and then transfer to Cemeteries." Blanche.	
"I don't want realism. I want magic!" Blanche.		"Tarantula... that's where I brought my victims." Blanche.	
"Tears the paper lantern off" Stage directions.		"We've had this date with each other from the beginning." Stanley	
"He acts like an animal... something ape-like about him" Blanche		"I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." Blanche	

Plot summary (AO2)
1: Blanche arrives unexpectedly at her sister Stella's home in New Orleans, revealing the loss of their ancestral estate, Belle Reve. 2: Stanley becomes suspicious of Blanche and demands to see papers about Belle Reve. 3: During a poker night, tensions rise as Blanche meets Mitch, and Stanley's violent behaviour surfaces when he hits Stella. 4: The next morning, Stella defends Stanley despite his abuse, while Blanche tries to persuade her to leave him. 5: Blanche flirts with a young newspaper boy and hints at her troubled past as she prepares for a date with Mitch. 6: Blanche opens up to Mitch about her traumatic marriage and they begin to form a fragile romantic connection. 7: During Blanche's birthday dinner, Stanley cruelly exposes her past to Mitch, shattering the illusion she built. 8: Stanley gives Blanche a one-way bus ticket as a "birthday present," further humiliating her and intensifying the emotional tension. 9: Mitch confronts Blanche about her lies and, feeling deceived, refuses to marry her despite her pleas. 10: Blanche, now unraveling mentally, is attacked by Stanley after a night of delusion and desperation. 11: Blanche is taken away, while Stella, in denial, stays with Stanley.

Exam information

This is on Section B of your Drama paper (Paper 2)
 You will get a choice of two questions and pick one
 You will have an hour to plan, write and check your essay
 You MUST make strong comparisons with *Duchess of Malfi*
 You will get assessed on all assessment objectives - AO4 will be doubly weighted.

Example question and start of paragraph

How far would you agree that Webster and Williams are alike in ‘creating settings and locations which speak volume about social attitudes’ in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Writer's name

Link to context

Williams crafts settings and locations that vividly reflect the social attitudes of post-war America, particularly surrounding class, gender, and cultural change. The cramped, decaying New Orleans apartment becomes a microcosm of the shifting social order—where traditional Southern aristocracy, embodied by Blanche, is being displaced by the working-class masculinity of Stanley. The apartment's lack of privacy and its overheated, stifling atmosphere reflect the tensions simmering between characters and the erosion of old-world decorum. Blanche's discomfort in this environment—she describes it as “only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe!—could do it justice!”—highlights her alienation from modern urban life and her longing for the past.

Embedded quotations

Key themes (AO1)

Fantasy vs Reality
 Gender
 Desire
 Social class
 Death
 Violence
 The past
 Power
 Disappointment and disillusion

Link to other texts (AO4)

The Glass Menagerie 1944
A Doll's House 1879
Tess of the D'Urbervilles 1891
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest 1975
The Crucible 1953
The Duchess of Malfi 1613

Context (AO3)

Tennessee Williams: father was an alcoholic, mother abused by father, lived in New Orleans, sister suffered from mental illness, he suffered from depression and suffered a breakdown, homosexual

Dates: First staged in 1947. Film released in 1951.

Industrialisation: happening more rapidly after WW2. The plantations of the Old South were decaying after the American Civil War.

Racial tensions were present in society. This is a result of old prejudices and the way society was structured pre-Civil war. However, New Orleans was known for its ethnic diversity and tolerance.

Homosexuality was illegal and you could be punished.

Critical views (AO5)

Tilshcer “Blanche is a challenge to his authority and family ... he has to destroy her himself”

Dusenbury believes reality is unbearable for Blanche and therefore she can escape only into insanity

Koprince claims “Stanley's macho need for control leads him to abuse Stella both emotionally and physically”

Key terms (AO1)		Characters (AO1)		Key Quotations (AO2)	
Tragedy	Corruption	The Duchess Independent Dignified	Ferdinand Possessive Deranged	"Like plum trees that grow crooked... crows feed on them" Bosola 	"I account this world a tedious theatre, / For I do play a part in't 'gainst my will." The Duchess 
Pathos	Antithesis	The Cardinal Manipulative Cold	Bosola Conflicted Cynical	"I'm Duchess of Malfi still" The Duchess 	"Ambition, madam, is a great man's madness." Antonio 
Patriarchy	Anagnorisis	Antonio Honourable Naive	Julia Ambitious Cunning	"Men oft are valued high, when th' are most wretched." Bosola 	"Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle. She died young." Ferdinand 
Peripeteia	Jacobean				

Plot summary (AO2)
Act 1 The Duchess hires Bosola as her provisor of horses at her brothers' request. Ferdinand and the Cardinal tell the Duchess not to remarry, although she secretly has plans to. The Duchess proposes to and marries Antonio (the household steward). Act 2 (9 months later) Bosola gives the Duchess apricots which forces her into labour. The Duchess gives birth to a boy. Bosola finds out about the baby and tells Ferdinand and Cardinal. We see Julia and the Cardinal together. Act 3 (A year or so later) Ferdinand confronts the Duchess in her bedroom at night, vowing to punish her. The Duchess pretends to fire Antonio, after which Bosola finally wins her trust by sticking up for Antonio. She reveals to him that he is her husband. Bosola, knowing everything he needs, sends the Duchess to Loretto with Cariola and her children. The Duchess and her family are banished by the Cardinal. The Duchess and Antonio split up, after which she, Cariola, and two of the children are captured by Bosola and taken to Ferdinand. Act 4 Ferdinand psychologically tortures the Duchess; among other things he makes her believe that he's murdered Antonio and their children. Bosola strangles the Duchess to death. The executioner kills Cariola and the children. Act 5 Ferdinand has gone mad. Bosola convinces Julia to get Cardinal to confess. Cardinal kills Julia with a poisoned Bible. Bosola accidentally kills Antonio then kills the Cardinal. Ferdinand morally wounds Bosola, then he kills Ferdinand. Delio vows to make the surviving child count.

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Writer's name

Webster uses settings and locations not merely as backdrops but as powerful symbols that reflect and critique the social attitudes of Jacobean society. The confined and oppressive atmosphere of the Duchess's palace, especially during her imprisonment, mirrors the restrictive patriarchal control imposed upon her. The claustrophobic spaces highlight how women's autonomy is violently curtailed, emphasizing the social expectation that noblewomen must remain subservient and chaste. The Duchess herself remarks, **“I am chained to endure all your tyranny,”** a line that encapsulates both her physical confinement and the broader societal oppression she faces.

Embedded quotations

Key themes (AO1)

Fate and free will
 Corruption
 Gender
 Social class
 Death
 Violence
 Power
 Identity

Link to other texts (AO4)

Macbeth 1606
A Streetcar Named Desire 1947
Hamlet c.1600
Death of a Salesman 1949
The Glass Menagerie 1944

Context (AO3)

Jacobean Society and Patriarchy: the play reflects the rigid patriarchal structure of early 17th-century England
The Role of the Aristocracy and Power: The play critiques the corrupt and often violent exercise of power among the nobility
Religion and the Church: The Cardinal's character embodies the corruption and hypocrisy of the Catholic Church
Ideas of Female Sexuality and Reputation: Female chastity and obedience were expected virtues

Critical views (AO5)

T.S. Eliot called Webster a “genius directed towards chaos”
E.M.W. Tillyard states “The Duchess is one of the most powerful and radical female characters in Renaissance drama, challenging patriarchal norms with her independence and sexuality.”
A.C. Bradley states “Webster's play exposes the dark underbelly of Jacobean society, revealing the corrosive effects of power and corruption.”

Link to context