

Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for each question of the critical reading question paper.

Candidate 4

Section 2 – Question 1

Choose a play in which a central character is used to explore an important theme. By referring to appropriate techniques, explain how the character is used to explore the theme and discuss how this contributes to your appreciation of the play as a whole.

The candidate was awarded **17 out of 20 marks** for this essay.

The candidate has chosen question 1 which is a suitable choice for 'A Streetcar Named Desire' by Tennessee Williams. The focus of the answer is the central character of Blanche Dubois and the theme of deception. The candidate sets Blanche's 'self-delusional character' against Stanley's desire for reality. Both Blanche's deceptively 'ladylike' appearance and her deceitful romantic behaviour towards Mitch are used to convey her dishonesty. The candidate contrasts these aspects of Blanche with Stanley's down-to-earth appearance and brash manners. To provide concrete evidence of the growing conflict between Blanche and Stanley, the candidate discusses scenes 3 and 10 in some detail.

This essay has been placed in the 18-16 mark range as the candidate has displayed secure knowledge and understanding of the text, along with detailed analysis throughout.

From beginning to end the candidate has focused securely on Blanche's world of lies juxtaposed with Stanley's desire to expose the truth.

The line of thought has been coherently structured and expressed, with detailed textual evidence to support this. Blanche's appearance of purity is contrasted with the truth about her past; Blanche and Stanley's clothes are used to highlight their differences; Blanche and Stanley's very different backgrounds are used to discuss the very different manners to be found in modern America New Orleans and old-world Belle Reve.

The essay begins by establishing the candidate's aim to focus on Blanche and the theme of deception, as well as providing some explanation and context for her situation. Secure knowledge and understanding are shown, for example in 'give herself the appearance of purity to mask her traumatic and painful past' and 'labours to give the disingenuous impression of romantic feelings towards ... Mitch'.

The candidate comments on the play's opening, developing the idea of the contrast between Blanche and Stanley. This approach is typical of the coherent structure we see throughout the piece. The candidate's analysis is detailed, for example their comments on Blanche's moth-like qualities 'flightiness yet fragility, foreshadowing how easily Blanche will be crushed by Stanley'.

The piece goes on to present detailed analysis of the key scenes (3 and 10), exploring the growing tension between Blanche and Stanley by examining their dialogue and actions.

The discussion of scene 3 provides detailed textual evidence and analysis to support the candidate's line of thought on the 'power struggle' between Blanche and Stanley, for example comments on the use of plastic theatre, on Stanley 'marking territory, belittling Blanche' and on how his 'successful domination over Blanche ... foreshadows the play's climax'. The candidate's engaged evaluative stance is shown, for example, in the view that Mitch's willingness to hang the paper lantern constitutes 'symbolically entering into a collaborative fiction with Blanche'.

The candidate identifies scene 10 as 'the play's pivotal moment which sets in motion Blanche's defeat'. Again, detailed analysis is shown in comments on Stanley 'breaking down Blanche mentally and emotionally before breaking her down physically' and 'absolving himself of the blame' as if 'Blanche's rape was inevitable and deserved'.

In the penultimate paragraph, the essay deals with the play's ending. The candidate shows secure understanding of Blanche's situation as she 'fortifies herself with barriers of illusion and fantasy' and is 'treating the doctor as a gallant gentleman come to save her'. We see again the engaged evaluative stance that has typified this piece.

The short conclusion draws together the candidate's main arguments and returns to the identification of Blanche as a 'complex character who is dishonest and deceptive'.

The candidate engages with the text throughout the essay. While Blanche's 'questionable morality' may show a less attractive side to her character, the candidate concedes that 'Stanley's insistence on the truth ends up dealing far greater damage than Blanche's lies'.

Ultimately the candidate makes clear that our sympathies are with Blanche 'due to Stanley's disproportionately cruel actions and insistence on the truth that leads to Blanche's destruction.'

Overall, this essay shows secure knowledge and understanding of the play, shown, for example, in comments on the contrast between the two main characters. Analysis and evaluation are detailed and engaged throughout, with, for example comments on the characters' dialogue and actions, as well as techniques such as foreshadowing and symbolism. The piece is placed in the 18-16 mark range and sits in the middle with a mark of 17.