

Candidate A – Annotated evidence

In response to SQA 2018 critical reading question paper, question 2:

Drama: Choose a play in which a character has a weakness or flaw.

By referring to appropriate techniques, explain the importance of this weakness or flaw and discuss how it contributes to your appreciation of the play as a whole.

'A Streetcar Named Desire' is a play written by Tennessee Williams. It focuses on the three main characters, Blanche, Stella and Stanley. It first begins with Blanche going to her sisters in New Orleans to stay. It then goes on to show us how the characters get on with the change of Blanche's arrival. Blanche starts to act unusual which makes Stanley question her then Blanche completely goes insane which leads to Stella choosing her husband rather than her sister. Williams use of techniques show the importance of Blanche's weakness and flaws throughout the play.

The candidate has made an appropriate choice of text. The essay focuses on Blanche throughout, showing understanding of aspects of her character. Adequate knowledge and understanding (12-10) are shown in places through the essay though some of the evidence and discussion is limited (9-6). We can see that the content and expression are also at times limited (9-6), as in this introduction.

The opening of the play immediately focuses on Blanche's flaws through revealing her deceptive nature of desire. As she arrives at the Kowalski's apartment she is first introduced by the upstairs neighbour Eunice. William's stage directions have Blanche repeat "They told me to take a streetcar named Desire and then transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at Elysian Fields." The streetcar named Desire is symbolic to Blanche's life and how her sexual desires from her past still maintain in her life which eventually leads to her doom. The Greek mythology 'Elysian Fields' is considered to be the land of the dead this therefore predicts Blanche's fate in the future.

The candidate considers the link between desire and death, represented by the streetcar ride to reach Stella's home. As an individual point, this provides adequate analysis of the use of symbolism. (12-10)

Throughout the play Blanche repeatedly lies about the truth of her past. The audience at this stage of the play are untrustworthy of her as she is portrayed as deceitful and dishonest. This continues throughout as Williams then goes into more detail about Blanche's personality. William's stage directions indicate Blanche's "delicate beauty must avoid a strong light". The textual choice suggests there is something about her beauty that is uncertain which can easily be revealed by a strong light. Blanche's attempts at hiding this are strongly noticeable and Blanche fears the light because of the harsh ultimatum she will be forced to face which will cause her fantasies to end. "Being young and beautiful will then be shattered", it is symbolic as it conceals her sinful and traumatic past. This is the first we notice one of Blanche's flaws that she struggles to maintain throughout the play.

There is evidence here of an evaluative stance and of some understanding of characterisation. Most of the essay focuses on Blanche's deceitfulness.

The candidate shows understanding of the significance of light in terms of Blanche's self-deceit. The discussion and expression are a little limited, for example in the final sentence of this paragraph.

We soon realise more with her interaction with Stella in the kitchen, "while I look around for some liquor." In pretending she doesn't know where the liquor is kept Blanche is lying to her sister as she does multiple times throughout the play. We know she has already discovered and helped herself to a drink from the closet.

Blanche's dishonesty towards Stella is exemplified through the example of her lies about alcohol. This is a specific example of adequate textual evidence used to support a line of thought.

Blanche's lies reveal her propensity to deceit as she retrieves the bottle for the second time. She shakes and pants which causes her to almost drop it, highlighting her alcoholism. We are initially uncompassionate towards her due to her critical nature and blatant lies to her sister. The developing theme of lies and deception is significant in the development of the play as Williams foreshadows Blanche's condescending nature.

The candidate correctly identifies a key theme of the text, though the comment on foreshadowing is unclear and limited.

Blanche's condescending nature is portrayed at this point of the play when she is talking to Stella about her apartment. Williams stage directions "I can't believe you would come back to this horrible place" shows Blanche's disgust towards Stella's choice of living. This is symbolic because it shows Blanche is used to living in much fancier conditions. Blanche talks down to Stella's way of living because she feels common and out of place - a person Blanche tries to forget about. Throughout the play Blanche likes to talk about her fancy clothes and how proper she looks. This comes across and the audience's first reaction to this is why she would come back to a place like this.

The candidate accurately comments on an aspect of Blanche's relationship with Stella. There is perhaps an implicit link with the central theme of deceit, but its development is limited (9-6).

In conclusion, Blanche Dubois shows many flaws and weaknesses through the play and this eventually leads to her downfall.

This is an attempt at an evaluative comment. It is limited and unclear (9-6).

The essay ends with a very brief, though accurate, conclusion.

Candidate B – Annotated evidence

In response to SQA 2018 critical reading question paper, question 2:

Drama: Choose a play in which a character has a weakness or flaw.

By referring to appropriate techniques, explain the importance of this weakness or flaw and discuss how it contributes to your appreciation of the play as a whole.

“A Streetcar Named Desire” is a play by Tennessee Williams which conveys weaknesses and flaws in all of the characters. However, Blanche Dubois is the main character for whom the audience quickly realises has many flaws and these are revealed throughout the play. “Streetcar” is about a woman, Blanche, who comes to live with her sister and her husband in Elysian Fields – New Orleans. During her visit, her obvious flaws and weaknesses are revealed to the audience through dialogue, her actions and her influence on others. These flaws ultimately bring Blanche to her tragic demise.

Upon arriving at Elysian Fields, Blanche is immediately represented to us as someone of class and someone who receives great admiration for her looks. However, Tennessee Williams describes Blanche as someone who’s “delicate beauty must avoid a strong light.” This highlights how Blanche must shy away from the light as the artificial brightness reveals to us, and everyone in the room, Blanche’s true colours and literally will reveal Blanche’s imperfections, which she ever so desperately attempts to hide. This is also symbolic of Blanche trying to hide her dark and sinful past. This is one of Blanche’s many lies and deceptions she attempts throughout the play. However, we as an audience can see right through her.

Another highlighted theme of lies and deceit Blanche conveys is when she immediately goes for the “liquor” as soon as she arrives. When her sister comes back she acts as if she never touched it and asks “Where could it be I wonder?” This shows us how dependent Blanche is on alcohol and how she lies to keep a maintained expectation of this. Initially, this makes us as the audience wary of Blanche due to the compulsory need to lie and trick everyone she meets, even family.

A key flaw revealed by Blanche is her strongly highlighted denial of reality. In a conversation with Mitch, one of Blanche’s brother in laws friends, she drunkenly admits “I don’t want realism.” This conveys the idea that Blanche tries to live in a world she creates for herself. She uses lies and trickery to create false realities for her to live as she strongly dislikes the real world. Blanche later goes on to say. “I’ll tell you what I want, I want magic.” This highlights Blanche’s desire to live in this falsely formulated world of fantasy which she imagines herself in.

The candidate has chosen an appropriate text and character, Blanche Dubois, who is the focus of the essay throughout. This shows adequate knowledge and understanding, as well as adequate focus on the demands of the question. (12-10)

This introduction is followed by a number of examples of Blanche's weakness in action, following a line of thought which is adequately structured. (12-10)

The discussion of Williams' use of light to suggest the revelation of truth is an example of adequate analysis and shows awareness of characterisation. (12-10)

The identification of Blanche's key weakness, namely deceit, shows adequate understanding of her character. (12-10)

The candidate demonstrates adequate evidence of an evaluative stance in the idea that the audience is not taken in by Blanche's deception. (12-10)

Here the example of Blanche's pretence regarding alcohol provides adequate textual evidence to support the candidate's line of thought on deception. (12-10)

The discussion of reality versus fantasy is a further example of adequate analysis of Williams' techniques. (12-10)

Blanche also shows this weakness when she exclaims in a demanding manner “don’t turn the light on.” As said before the light will reveal to everyone the parts of herself physically and within her personality which she tries to hide. The light is symbolic of the truth and Blanche wants to be as far away from the truth as she can get. Blanche can’t stand the realism of a lightbulb and how it helps you see every small detail. As a light bulb helps you see in the dark, the lightbulb will reveal the dark side of Blanche. No matter how much she hides the light will always find its way to reveal the truth.

The candidate continues to examine light as a symbol of truth, focussing on the lightbulb as representing realism. Adequate knowledge and understanding of Blanche's character is shown here. (12-10)

Blanche’s flaws and weaknesses are strongly conveyed throughout the play. However, a strongly highlighted one is Blanche’s destructive, desire driven nature. Blanche talks about the death of her husband and how she felt completely lost without him. She explains that she was “Hunting for some protection, even at last in a seventeen year old boy.” The youth aspects of this boy would remind her of her late husband. This would also fuel Blanche’s desire to feel younger, which is a lie she attempts to maintain throughout. The protection and validation that Blanche longs for is one she can never quite seem to catch and Blanche later describes her multiple lovers, after the death of her husband and how she longed for something to validate her. “Intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with.” The word choice of “fill my empty heart” suggests how Blanche was seeking someone to mend her broken heart. Bouncing from lover to lover, no man could heal her and each time she was left wanting more, craving more.

Blanche's self-destructive tendencies are explored here. The candidate makes the link with her inability to accept reality, using the example of the death of her husband. This is an example of adequate textual evidence used to support the candidate's line of thought. (12-10)

An adequate evaluative stance is shown here. The candidate demonstrates understanding of Blanche's need for meaning and love. (12-10)

‘A Streetcar Named Desire’ is a play by Tennessee Williams in which one of the main characters, Blanche Dubois, has many flaws and weaknesses. Williams shows us these throughout the play and the audience sometimes feel sorry for Blanche but also dislike her because her actions affect not only herself but also others in the play.

The essay ends with a brief conclusion. The candidate mentions the audience's reaction to Blanche and her impact on other characters, which has not been developed in the essay.

Candidate C – Annotated commentary

In response to SQA 2021 critical reading assessment, question 13:

Film and TV Drama: Choose a film or television drama in which a sequence effectively conveys conflict or tension.

With reference to appropriate techniques, discuss how the film or programme makers engage the audience's interest in this conflict or tension.

The film 'Psycho' directed by Alfred Hitchcock is an iconic horror film, said to be the first of the 'slasher'- style films. The film follows the story of a psychopath who kills someone and then has to kill more people in order to cover it up. Hitchcock brought together new and enhanced directing techniques in order to make the film intense for the viewers. These techniques include mis-en-scène, sound, and camera angles. This essay will discuss how Hitchcock enhanced these techniques in order to engage the audiences interest by creating tension.

Mise-en-scène is used in the parlour scene in which Marion Crane (the main character) is having dinner with Norman Bates over an intense conversation about life. Stuffed birds of prey are seen looking over Marion as she eats her dinner. These birds loom over their prey in a similar fashion in the wild so the fact that they are doing this on Marion is symbolic of a murderer waiting for the right moment to strike. Also, the fact that the birds are dead and inanimate symbolizes the death that is to come. These purposefully placed props create tension by giving the viewers clues and suspicions as to who the murderer is and when it will take place, engaging the readers interest as they start to fear what is to come.

Almost straight after eating dinner in the parlour, Marion takes a shower in her hotel room, at which point, she is murdered, with sound being at the center of what makes the scene so intense. At the start of the scene we hear almost nothing as she peacefully begins to relax in the comfort of the warm shower. This near silence (except the sound of the shower) is completely contrasted when the murderer draws the curtain. Suddenly, loud, jarring music starts playing and that, along with Marion's high-pitched, screeching scream puts the audience into an immediate state of discomfort, contrasted by the previous calmness. The shrieking violins in the music are in time with the stabbing motion of the killer, as he begins to kill her, emphasizing the power of these strikes on Marion, giving us an aural emphasis of Marion's pain. Marion's ear-bursting scream and the dark murderous tone of the music in time with the killer's actions contrasted with the relaxation felt just before, shocks the viewers by creating immense tension, engaging their interest as the sudden change in atmosphere puts them in shock and disbelief.

The candidate has chosen an appropriate text. This is a clear introduction which identifies specific techniques to be explored: mis-en-scène, sound and camera angles. The essay is clearly structured round these three techniques: the candidate explores how they combine to create tension. (15-13)

This is the first of three examples of clear textual evidence used to support the line of thought. (15-13)

The candidate provides clear analysis of the use of the birds of prey as symbols of death, foreshadowing the murder that is to come. (15-13)

Here the candidate makes a clear evaluative comment, which shows a grasp of the effect of the use of mise-en-scène. (15-13)

This paragraph focuses on the use of sound. There is detailed analysis of, for example, how the contrast between the quiet sound of the water and the screaming violins create tension. The candidate handles this material with confidence. (18-16)

Also in the infamous shower scene, camera angles play a key role in creating tension. Again, a sense of calmness is made by the slow, panned shots of Marion getting in the shower. At one point we see a point of view shot of the shower head from Marion's perspective. This allows us to identify with Marion and feel her relaxation. All this is again contrasted when the killer draws the curtain. We see a sudden increase in pace of switching between shots. This distorts the viewers giving them the same sense of confusion and shock that Marion is feeling. Of the 50 or so shots, we see at one point, a close up of the knife to emphasise again the power and deadliness of the stabs on Marion. We also see point of view shots from the killer's perspective as well as Marion's. This puts the viewer right into the middle of the chaos, amplifying tension by alternating violently between the psycho and the victim's points of view. All of these important shots all happening at once enhances the tension created, engaging the audience's interest by putting them into the action, seeing it all as if they were there.

So in conclusion Hitchcock brought together many powerful techniques in order to build tension and engage viewers. The mis-en-scène gives the audience clues building tension towards the climactic solve of the mystery, the sound and camera angles make the audience feel as though they are there feeling the horror and tension. The execution of these techniques engages the viewers in a way not seen previously in Hollywood.

The candidate now explores the use of camera angles and movement immediately before and during the murder. Again, there is detailed analysis of, for example, the pace of cutting between shots and use of point of view shots, both of Marion and the killer. (18-16)

This paragraph demonstrates a clear evaluative stance, which edges into engaged through the candidate's appreciation of how skilful use of techniques impacts on the viewer. (18-6) and (15-13)

The essay concludes with a clear summing up of the key techniques explored by the candidate and their effectiveness in creating tension. (15-13)