Suggested Monologue Selections

There are several monologues below from several of Tennessee Williams’s plays, arranged by play. Students and teachers are more than welcome to select portions from these or other Williams plays. Be sure to indicate what you’ll be reciting on your registration form—by letter if you’re choosing one of the ones offered below (A-L), by Act and Scene if you’ve chosen one on your own.

**Monologues for girls:**
Catherine in *Suddenly Last Summer*
Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* (2)
Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (2)
Maggie in *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

**Monologues for boys:**
Jim in *The Glass Menagerie*
Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*
Big Daddy in *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
Chance Wayne in *Sweet Bird of Youth* (3)

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*Suddenly Last Summer*

(A young psychiatrist has been questioning Catherine about the events on the evening of her cousin Sebastian’s death.)

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A.

CATHERINE

At a Mardi Gras ball some—some boy that took me to it got too drunk to stand up! I wanted to go home. My coat was in the cloakroom, they couldn’t find the check for it in his pockets. I said, “Oh hell, let it go!”—I started for a taxi. Somebody took my arm and said, “I’ll drive you home.” He took off his coat as we left the hotel and put it over my shoulders, and then I looked at him and—I don’t think I’d ever even seem him before then, really!—He took me home in his car but took me another place first. We stopped near the Duelling Oaks at the end of Esplanade Street...Stopped!—I said, “What for?”—He didn’t answer, just struck a match in the car to light a cigarette in the car and I looked at him in the car and I knew “what for”!—I think I got out of the car before he got out of the car, and we walked through the wet grass to the great misty oaks as if somebody was calling us for help there! He took me home and said an awful thing to me. “We’d better forget it,” he said, “my wife’s expecting a child and—.” I just entered the house and sat there thinking a little and then I suddenly called a taxi and went right back to the Roosevelt Hotel ballroom. The ball was still going on. I thought I’d gone back to pick up my borrowed coat but that wasn’t what I’d gone back for. I’d gone back to make a scene on the floor of the ballroom, yes, I didn’t stop at the cloakroom to pick up Aunt Violet’s old mink stole, no, I rushed into the ballroom and spotted him on the floor and ran up to him and beat him as hard as I could in the face and chest with my fists ‘till—Cousin Sebastian took me away.
**The Glass Menagerie**

(Amanda is the mother of the two central characters (Tom and Laura) in *The Glass Menagerie.*)

**B.**

AMANDA (to Laura)

I went to the typing instructor and introduced myself as your mother. She didn’t know who you were. Wingfield, she said. We don’t have any such student enrolled at the school! I assured her she did, that you had been going to classes since early in January. ‘I wonder,’ she said, ‘if you could be talking about that terribly shy little girl who dropped out of school after only a few days’ attendance?’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘Laura, my daughter, has been going to school every day for the past six weeks!’ ‘Excuse me,’ she said. She took the attendance book out and there was your name, unmistakably printed, and all the dates you were absent until they decided that you had dropped out of school. I still said, ‘No, there must have been some mistake! There must have been some mix-up in the records!’ And she said, ‘No – I remember her perfectly now. Her hands shook so that she couldn’t hit the right keys! The first time we gave a speed-test, she broke down completely - was sick at the stomach and almost had to be carried into the wash-room! After that morning she never showed up any more. We phoned the house but never got any answer’ – while I was working at Famous and Barr, I suppose, demonstrating those – Oh! I felt so weak I could barely keep on my feet! I had to sit down while they got me a glass of water! Fifty dollars’ tuition, all of our plans – my hopes and ambition for you – just gone up the spout, just gone up the spout like that.

**C.**

AMANDA (later, same scene)

So what are we going to do the rest of our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling? Eternally play those worn-out phonograph records your father left as a painful reminder of him? We won’t have a business career – we’ve given that up because it gave us nervous indigestion! What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren’t prepared to occupy a position. I’ve seen such pitiful cases in the South – barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister’s husband or brother’s wife! – stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room – encouraged by one in-law to visit another – little birdlike women without any nest – eating the crust of humility all their life! Is that the future that we’ve mapped out for ourselves? I swear it’s the only alternative I can think of! It isn’t a very pleasant alternative, is it? Of course – some girls do marry!

**D.**

JIM

You know what I judge to be the trouble with you? Inferiority complex! Know what that is? That’s what they call it when someone low-rates himself! I understand it because I had it, too. Although my case was not so aggravated as yours seems to be. I had it until I took up public speaking, developed my voice, and learned that I had an aptitude for science. Before that time I never thought of myself as being outstanding in any way whatsoever! Now I’ve never made a regular study of it, but I have a friend who says I can analyse people better than doctors that make a profession of it. I don’t claim that to be necessarily true, but I can sure guess a person’s psychology, Laura! [Takes out his gum] Excuse me, Laura. I always take it out when the flavour is gone. I’ll use this scrap of paper to wrap it in. I know how
it is to get it stuck on a shoe. Yep – that’s what I judge to be your principal trouble. A lack of amount of faith in yourself as a person. You don’t have the proper amount of faith in yourself. I’m basing that fact on a number of your remarks and also on certain observations I’ve made. For instance that clumping you thought was so awful in high school. You say that you even dreaded to walk into class. You see what you did? You dropped out of school, you gave up an education because of a clump, which as far as I know was practically non-existent! A little physical defect is what you have. Hardly noticeable even! Magnified thousands of times by imagination! You know what my strong advice to you is? Think of yourself as superior in some way!

E.
(This is Tom’s monologue at end of the play.)

TOM

I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoebox. I left Saint Louis. I descended the step of this fire-escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father’s footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space – I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but torn away from the branches. I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of coloured glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colours, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes ... Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger – anything that can blow your candles out!

A Streetcar Named Desire

F.
(Blanche recounts the tragic death of her late husband. Below are two selections, though in the play they are continuous.)

BLANCHE

He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery – love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that’s how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky. Deluded. There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn’t like a man’s, although he wasn’t the least bit effeminate looking – still – that thing was there ... He came to me for help. I didn’t know that. I didn’t find out anything till after our marriage when we’d run away and come back and all I knew was I’d failed him in some mysterious way and wasn’t able to give the help he needed but couldn’t speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me – but I wasn’t holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn’t know that. I didn’t know anything except I loved him unendurably but without being able to help him or help myself. Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty -- which wasn’t empty, but had two people in it ... the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years ...

G.

Afterward we pretended that nothing had been discovered. Yes, the three of us drove out to Moon Lake Casino, very drunk and laughing all the way. We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly, in the middle
of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later – a shot! I ran out – all did! – all ran and gathered about the terrible thing at the edge of the lake! I couldn’t get near for the crowding. Then somebody caught my arm. “Don’t go any closer! Come back! You don’t want to see!” See? See what! Then I heard voices say – Allan! Allan! The Grey boy! He’d stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired – so that the back of his head had been – blown away! It was because – on the dance floor – unable to stop myself – I’d suddenly said – “I saw! I know! You disgust me ...” And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that’s stronger than this – kitchen – candle ...

**Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**

H.
(Maggie is referring, at the beginning, to the news that her husband’s father is dying of cancer.)

**MARGARET**

I recognized the symptoms soon’s we got here last spring and I’m willin’ to bet you that Brother Man and his wife were pretty sure of it too. That more than likely explains why their usual summer migration to the coolness of the Great Smokies was passed up this summer in favor of hustlin’ down here ev’ry whipstitch with their whole screamin’ tribe! And why so many allusions have been made to Rainbow Hill lately. You know what Rainbow Hill is? Place that’s famous for treatin’ alcoholics an’ dope fiends in the movies! No, you don’t take dope. Otherwise you’re a perfect candidate for Rainbow Hill, Baby, and that’s where they aim to ship you-over my dead body! Yep, over my dead body they’ll ship you there, but nothing would please them better. Then Brother Man could get a-hold of the purse strings and dole out remittances to us, maybe get power of attorney and sign checks for us and cut off our credit where ever, whenever he wanted! Son-of-a-bitch! – How’d you like that, Baby? – Well, you’ve been doin’ just about ev’rything in your power to bring it about, you’ve just been doin’ ev’rything you can think of to aid and abet them in this scheme of theirs! Quittin’ work, devoting yourself to the occupation of drinkin’!-Breakin’ your ankle last night on the high school athletic field: doin’ what? Jumpin’ hurdles? At two or three in the morning? Just fantastic! Got in the paper. Clarksdale Register carried a nice little item about it, human interest story about a well-known former athlete stagin’ a one-man track meet on the Glorious Hill High School athletic field last night, but was slightly out of condition and didn’t clear the first hurdle! Brother Man Gooper claims he exercised his influence t’ keep it from goin’ out over AP or UP or every goddam “P”.

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I.

(Big Daddy thinks Brick, Maggie’s husband, is gay, and is trying to tell him it’s ok.)

**BIG DADDY**

I knocked around in my time... I bummed, I bummed this country till I was— Slept in hobo jungles and railroad Y’s and flophouses in all cities before I—I seen all things and understood a lot of them, till 1910. Christ, the year that—I had worn my shoes through, hocked my—I hopped off a yellow dog freight car half a mile down the road, slept in a wagon of cotton outside the gin—Jack Straw an’ Peter Ochello took me in. Hired me to manage the place which grew into this one.—When Jack Straw died—why, old Peter Ochello quit eatin’ like a dog does when its master’s dead, and died too!
Sweet Bird of Youth

J.
(Chance tells his story of how he left home to become an actor. There are three separate selections here, though they’re all continuous in the play)

CHANCE WAYNE

Here is the town I was born in, and lived in till ten years ago, in St. Cloud. I was a twelve-pound baby, normal and healthy, but with some kind of quantity ‘X’ in my blood, a wish or a need to be different.... the kids that I grew up with are mostly still here and what they call ‘settled down,’ gone into business, married and bringing up children, the little crowd I was in with, that I used to be the start of, was the snobset, the ones with the big names and money. I didn’t have either... the others are all now members of the young social set here. The girls are young matrons, bridge-players, and the boys belong to the Junior Chamber of Commerce and some of them, clubs in New Orleans such as Rex and Comus and ride on the Mardi Gras floats. Wonderful? No, boring... I wanted, expected, intended to get, something better... Yes, and I did, I got it. I did things that fat-headed gang never dreamed of. Hell when they were still freshmen at Tulane or LSU or Ole Miss, I sang in the chorus of the biggest show in New York, in “Oklahoma,” and had pictures in LIFE in a cowboy outfit, tossin’ a ten-gallon hat in the air! YIP... EEEEEEE!

K.

I was about to be sucked into the Army so I went into the Navy, because a sailor’s uniform suited me better, the uniform was all that suited me, though. I kept thinking, this stops everything. I was twenty-three, that was the peak of my youth and I knew my youth wouldn’t last long. By the time I got out, Christ knows, I might be nearly thirty! Who would remember Chance Wayne? In a life like mine, you just can’t stop, you know, can’t take time out between steps, you’ve got the keep going right on up from one thing to the other, once you drop out, it leaves you and goes on without you and you’re washed up. ... And so I ran my comb through my hair one morning and noticed that eight or ten hairs had come out, a warning signal of a future baldness. My hair was still thick. But would it be five years from now, or even three? When the war would be over, that scared me, that speculation. I started to have bad dreams. Nightmares, and cold sweats at night, and I had palpitations, and on my leaves I got drunk and woke up in strange places with faces on the next pillow I’d never seen before. My eyes had a wild look in them in the mirror.

L.

I started to have bad dreams. Nightmares, and cold sweats at night, and I had palpitations, and on my leaves I got drunk and woke up in strange places with faces on the next pillow I’d never seen before. My eyes had a wild look in them in the mirror. I got the idea I wouldn’t live through the war, that I wouldn’t come home, that all the excitement and glory of being Chance Wayne would go up in smoke at the moment of contact between my brain and a bit of hot steel that happened to be in the air at the same time and place my head was... that thought didn’t comfort me any. Imagine a whole lifetime of dreams and ambitions and hopes dissolving away in one instant, being blacked out like some arithmetic problem washed off a blackboard by a wet sponge, just by some little accident like a bullet, not even aimed at you but just shot off in space.