

Questions for Suddenly, Last Summer

For discussion at Fremont Public Library on September 28, 2019, at 9:15am.

1. This play has elements of Southern Gothic Literature. Southern Gothic is a mode or genre prevalent in literature from the early 19th century to this day. Characteristics of Southern Gothic include the presence of irrational, horrific, and transgressive thoughts, desires, and impulses; grotesque characters; dark humor, and an overall angst-ridden sense of alienation. How many of these elements can you find in this play?
2. This play is heavily symbolic. Williams called it "poetic realism." How many symbolic things can you find in this play and their purpose in the play. (Consider the "jungle" greenhouse, the names of characters, the Galapagos islands tortoise rituals, the descriptions of "white" in the settings, the tin can music, the poet's notebook of blank pages, the names of the mental hospitals (St. Mary's and Lion's View).
3. How is Violet Venable protecting the reputation of her son Sebastian. How would you describe her? To what means will she go to protect the idea of her son's innocence. Do you feel any sympathy for her as she describes her son as a burgeoning poet?
3. The characters in this play seem to avoid the telling of truth. Can we believe these characters in their beliefs? How many sides to their story are there?
4. How is Sebastian's homosexuality portrayed in this play? What is hidden and what is shown about Sebastian luring young men toward him? How, as a reader, do you respond to his lynching?
5. Describe these characters judgement of each other. What conclusion can you come to about their judgements? Why would they be cruel to each other?
6. Both Violet's and Catherine's views of Sebastian seem either figurative or literal. How would you describe Catherine's story of the lynching: symbolic, real, exaggerated, figurative, and literal? Did it really happen that way?
7. Why does Williams use cannibalism as a metaphor for the lynching? What is he saying about some parts of human society and the southern "old aristocracy?" Is this society symbolically "carnivorous?"
8. We are left choose who we want to believe at the end of this play. Who do you believe, and why? How many contradictions can you find in this play?
9. Describe Miss Holly's desire to silence her daughter. What are her motives? Are their deeper motives that drive these characters: greed, sympathetic truth, hurtful truth, repression, oppression, and denial?