

The Goodman Theatre
Student Subscription Series
2002-2003 Season

Student Guide

The Rose Tattoo

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About the Playwright

Tennessee Williams will long be regarded as one of the greatest American playwrights. His work spans five decades (1940s – 1980s), and he thrived in numerous literary genres, including plays, novels, poetry, screenplays, and short stories. He was born Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Mississippi, and grew up in Mississippi and St. Louis, Missouri. He had an older sister, Rose, and a younger brother, Dakin. Their father was a travelling salesman, and therefore much of their childhood was spent being raised in the home of their maternal grandparents. He spent much of his time with his over-protective mother, and his grandfather. Williams' grandfather was an Episcopal minister, and very influential in his life. Williams went to both the University of Missouri, in Columbia, Missouri and Washington University in St. Louis before finally graduating from the University of Iowa at the age of 27. Some college friends gave him the nickname "Tennessee," and it stuck. He began writing plays in college, and had a few of them produced. But his true success began after he worked as a screenwriter for MGM. His large Broadway successes include *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. These plays, among others, have been produced as films. His turbulent childhood and the mental disabilities his sister Rose faced were major influences on his writing. In his adult life, he drew upon the experiences of the many successful and influential people he associated with, and his long-term partner, Frank Merlo.

Writing from experience.... Many writers rely on their personal experience and family history in order to write. Tennessee Williams draws from his own experience growing up in the south to create believable southern characters. *The Rose Tattoo* is about an overprotective mother and a young Sicilian girl named Rosa. Williams saw his own mother as overprotective, and his sister was named Rose. Following are some other examples of how Williams' plays mirror some situations in his own life.

- ❑ Both *The Glass Menagerie* and *The Rose Tattoo* are about a family with an absent father. Williams' own father was often travelling and not a consistent part of Tennessee's life.
- ❑ *The Glass Menagerie* is about a young man named Tom (Tennessee Williams' real first name), his sister who suffers from both physical and emotional ailments, and his mother who is overbearing and over protective. Many people think that *The Glass Menagerie* is modeled after the characters in Tennessee Williams' life: his emotionally disturbed sister Rose, and their overbearing mother.
- ❑ In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the character of Blanche suffers with alcohol problems. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* deals with alcoholism and issues of repressed homosexuality. Williams was a homosexual and at times he suffered from various addictions (both alcoholism and an addiction to prescription drugs).
- ❑ *The Rose Tattoo* is about a Sicilian-American population near New Orleans, Louisiana. Tennessee Williams' committed partner was named Frank Merlo. He was a Sicilian-American living in New Orleans, and the two met there. They fell in love, and took a vacation

Selected Writings

Plays

The Glass Menagerie, 1945
You Touched Me! ,1947
A Streetcar Named Desire, 1947
The Rose Tattoo, 1951
I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix, 1951
Camino Real, 1953
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, 1955
Orpheus Descending, 1957
Suddenly Last Summer, 1958
Sweet Bird of Youth, 1959
Period of Adjustment, 1960
The Night of the Iguana, 1962
The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, 1962
The Eccentricities of a Nightingale, 1964
Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle), 1967
In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, 1969
Out Cry, 1973
THIS IS (An Entertainment), 1976
A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur, 1978
Will Mr. Merriwether Return from Memphis?, 1981
Clothes for a Summer Hotel, 1980

Fiction

27 Wagons Full of Cotton, 1982
One Arm and Other Stories, 1967
Hard Candy and Other Stories, 1959
Collected Stories, 1985
The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone, 1950

Tennessee Williams in Chicago

The Rose Tattoo had its first performance in Chicago, at the Erlanger Theatre, Chicago, in December of 1950. From there it moved to the Martin Beck Theatre, in New York City. This opening, however, was not Williams' only experience in Chicago. He produced many plays here in the city, including *The Glass Menagerie*, perhaps his most famous play, which premiered at the Civic Theatre in Chicago in 1944. *The Night of the Iguana* and *Out Cry* are among Williams' other Chicago premieres.

Toward the end of his life, Williams established a strong relationship with The Goodman Theatre, and in 1980-82, the Goodman produced several of his plays in the form of a one-act play festival. The final play of his career, *A House Not Meant to Stand*, opened at The Goodman and went on to be produced at Miami's New World Festival of the Arts.

A Travelling Man...

During most of his adult life, Tennessee Williams lived a very migratory life. He never lived in one place for very long, and with the exception of a house in Key West, Florida, where he spent some time, he didn't own a home. He corresponded with friends through letters and telegrams, and traveled from country to country according to his play openings and rehearsal schedules. He led the life of a typical Hollywood star, taking frequent trips to exotic European locations, and socialized with the rich and famous, including actor **Marlon Brando**, directors **Elia Kazan** and **Margo Jones**, actresses **Elizabeth Taylor**, **Jessica Tandy**, **Anna Magnani**, and **Bette Davis**, TV personality **Mike Wallace**, and writer **Ernest Hemingway**.

Tennessee Williams and Sicily

Much of Tennessee Williams' transient life is documented and recorded in books of letters that have been published since his death. One book, called "Letters to Donald Windham," records letters Tennessee wrote to his friend Donnie. Some excerpts are displayed here:

"Dear Donnie:

I don't know how many times I've started letters to you, some of them even finished. **Italy and Rome** are full of such infinite and agreeable distractions that practically nothing is ever finished. I have been traveling around a good deal. I flew down to **Sicily** last week and returned through Naples... My trip to **Sicily** was very interesting but I have written it up in an article I sent Audrey so you will probably see it somewhere. I miss all of you.

Love, TENN."

-dated February 20th, 1948

"Dear Donnie:

...I am very anxious to hear what you feel about **Sicily** and Taorminia. I shall have to go there this summer as my new play "The Rose Tattoo" is about **Sicilians** only as I know them through Frankie and I want to get the Italian dialogue translated into good **Sicilian dialect** if I can. All of the passages, and there are a good many, where verbal meanings are not necessary are written in my very bad dictionary Italian supplemented by Frankie's phonetic spelling of **Sicilian** of which he doesn't seem to have learned very much. This summer I must take a sort of rest-cure at a place where there is good swimming. We are sailing May 20th... taking the car with us. I expect Frankie will drive on down to Rome but I may begin with a week or so in Spain..."

-dated May 7th, 1950

Awards and Recognition

New York Drama Critics Circle Award

1945 – Best Play *The Glass Menagerie*

1945 – Best Play *A Streetcar Named Desire*

1955 – Best Play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Pulitzer Prize

1948 – Pulitzer Prize in Drama *A Streetcar Named Desire*

1955-- Pulitzer Prize in Drama *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Tony Awards

1951 *The Rose Tattoo* – Best Play

1956 *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* – Nominee
Best Play

1962 *The Night of the Iguana*—Nominee
Best Play

Did you know...?

At the time of his death in February of 1983, Williams had written over 25 full-length plays, dozens of screenplays, two novels, 60 short stories, and over 100 poems. He was so well respected and admired that, despite rumors of alcohol, drugs, and sexual antics, the public was stunned and saddened by his death. A week after his death, on Friday, March 8th, the marquees over twenty Broadway theatres (usually illuminated and sparkling) were darkened for 20 minutes in honor of his memory. The inscription on the tombstone reads: “**The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!**” -Camino Real

Williams’ memory lives on in the form of the annual Tennessee Williams festival that takes place in New Orleans. Each year thousands gather to honor his memory, and one of the activities included is the much anticipated Stanley/Stella shouting contest, homage to the famous scene in Williams’ play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Vocabulary

The following vocabulary words are found in the play. Some of them are found in the dialogue and others are found in the stage directions. Find definitions for each.

The following are some of the commonly used Italian words in *The Rose Tattoo*. The English translations are given.

abomination
baron
belligerant
clambers
derisively
deshabille
gesticulating
girdle
glissandi
gypsy
hassock
imploring
lorgnette
malicious
matador
Mercurochrome
millinery
minuet
monotonously
morphia
Pagan idolotry
pinioning
pompadour
preposterous
pretense
stupefaction
sullenly
urn
vehemence
wheedling

Aiutatemi: Help me
apri: open
aspettate: wait
attenzione: attention
Baronessa: Baroness
buon giorno: good day
buona notte: good night
che belle: how beautiful
Ciao: Hello or Goodbye
davvero: really
Dio: God
domani: tomorrow
dottore: Doctor
ecco: here
figlia: daughter
Grazie: Thank you
Malocchio: The evil eye
nuda: naked
numero: number
per favore: please
porta: door
scusatemi: excuse me
sentì: listen
sentite: listen to me
Si: Yes
Signora: lady
strano: strange
Strega: Witch
subito: hurry
va via: go away

In the following passages, try to guess what the Italian words mean based on the context of the passage.

Act I; Scene 1

Estelle: I got the piece of silk with me... [She unwraps a piece of rose-colored silk which she holds up like a banner.]

Serafina: **Che bella stoffa!** – Oh, that would be wonderful stuff for a lady's blouse or for a pair of pyjamas!

Act III; Scene 3

Peppina: [to the women] She lock up his shirt so he can't go to the high school?

[The women shriek with laughter. In the house Serafina snatches up the package containing the silk shirt]

Serafina: **Un momento!** [She tears the paper off the shirt and rushes onto the porch, defiantly] **Ecco la camicia!**

OnStage Worksheet

Read the *OnStage* newsletter provided and answer the following questions.

1. One of the characters in *The Rose Tattoo* is a goat. What is Tennessee Williams warning to readers when interpreting the goats symbolism?
2. What does Williams say *The Rose Tattoo* represents as far as an artist's process
3. The fictional couple Serafina and Alvaro contain similarities to what real-life couple
4. What actress did Williams have in mind when he wrote the role of Serafina?
5. What is significant about the production of Williams' play *A House Not Meant to Stand* at the Goodman Theatre?
6. What characteristics about Tennessee Williams' sister did he fear would happen to him?
7. Which Greek mythical character does Williams reference in *The Rose Tattoo's* introduction?
8. A legend has it this mythical character was turned into what animal, which is also a character in the play?
9. What are the similarities between this mythical character and Williams' life?
10. According to Greek myth, what is Dionysus the god of
11. Why did Dionysus supposedly understand the problems of humanity?

Bonus: During what war did Frank Merlo serve in the military?

The Setting of *The Rose Tattoo*

An immigrant is a person enters into a new country for the purpose of establishing a permanent residence. One's motive for establishing one's self in a new nation can be economic, personal, or political. While immigration occurs every day in America, there was an explosion in the time period between about 1870 to 1930, often referred to as the Great Wave of Immigration. Since *The Rose Tattoo* was written about 1950, it is safe to assume that Williams' Sicilian characters were direct descendents of these Great Wave immigrants. Once the immigrants got through the immigration process and traveled through Ellis Island, the procedure of settling in their new country began.

Many of them chose to live in large cities, and for the most part they settled in small isolated communities amongst themselves, forming special ethnic neighborhoods. Common all over the United States, villages of Italian and Sicilian immigrants had many of the same qualities as the community featured in *The Rose Tattoo*.

About Sicily...

Sicily is an island that sits off the southwest coast of Italy; it is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. While it is officially a part of Italy, it very much has its own culture and identity. It was first inhabited as early as 10,000 B.C. The Siculu and the Sicani tribes (from whom the island takes its name) arrived there about 5,000 B.C. Therefore, the Sicilian society is one of the oldest in Europe. It became an official part of Italy only after World War I. Today it is made up of a very diverse population of people: Greeks, Romans, French, Aragonese, Spanish, and of course, native Sicilians. The Sicilian dialect has many of these various influences. Because it is an island, much of the economy relies heavily on the fishing and trade industry that occurs along the coastal towns and cities. The inland towns benefit from a rich land that provides much opportunity for farmers.

Italy is a boot-shaped country that juts out the southeastern side of Europe. It is bordered on the north by France, Switzerland, Germany and Austria. Italy is referred to as a Peninsula, because it is surrounded by water on three sides, while Sicily is referred to as an island because it is surrounded by water on all sides.

Louisiana was a major settling state for the early Italian immigrants; in 1850, it had more Italians than any other state. In 1910, New Orleans had more Italians than any other city. The immigrants were attracted to this area probably because of the fertile farming land there. The Italians grew vegetables, fruit, and the traditional southern crops such as cotton. Many of these immigrants were Sicilian. By the time Williams wrote *The Rose Tattoo* in 1951, Italians had become a major part of mainstream American society. In the 1950s, many of the original immigrants had settled, had families, children and grandchildren, most of whom had learned to speak English fluently and participated in traditional American activities.

No matter how long a group of people or their ancestors have been living in the United States, many in the group still associate and identify with the culture from which they came. Many Sicilian-Americans may hold on to the beliefs and customs of their culture. For example, many of them practice Roman Catholicism, as did their ancestors in Italy. Many Sicilian-Americans living in Louisiana still celebrate Sicilian traditions such as the St. Joseph altar. Many Italian families build an altar in their home for St. Joseph, who is the patron saint of Sicily. This usually occurs on or around St. Joseph's Day, March 19th. Family members and friends are invited to attend a blessing of the altar and to celebrate with a meal.

Examine the Text... Following are some examples in the play when Serafina seems to be balancing her traditional Sicilian or Catholic ideals with the way things are done in America. This process is called **assimilation**, or adjusting to new life in a new country.

Act I, Scene 4: Serafina: You make me sick!... Your school, you make all this trouble! You give-a this dance where she gets mixed up with a sailor.

Act I, Scene 6: Serafina: We are Sicilians. We don't leave the girls with the boys they're not engaged to!

Jack: Mrs. Delle Rose, this is the United States.

Serafina: But we are Sicilians, and we are not cold-blooded.

Try this...

- In these two quotes, Serafina uses the words "You" and "we." To whom is she referring to with these pronouns? How is this language dangerous when trying to prevent prejudice and stereotypes?
- Can you ...

Stereotypes and Prejudice

Throughout history, groups of people have been judged and discriminated against for something as insignificant as their skin color, hair color, the way they talk, dress, or where they are from. This type of discrimination and prejudice has resulted in centuries of war and violence. A remark or racial slur can be a manifestation of a stereotype. For example, the words “Dago” and “Wop” are slang, derogatory terms for Italian-Americans. The following are examples of stereotypes held by characters in *The Rose Tattoo*.

Character	Scene	Quote	Stereotype
Serafina	Act I; Sc. 1	“Silk this color for a shirt for a man?”	Serafina has a preconception about some colors being masculine or feminine.
Serafina	Act I; Sc. 1	“She has a white eye and every finger is crooked”	Serafina explains that she thinks the Strega is a witch because of these physical conditions.
Strega	Act I; Sc. 4	“The Wops are at it again... they ain’t civilized, these Sicilians.”	Strega has a prejudice against Sicilians. Wop is an offensive slang used as a disparaging term for a person of Italian descent.
Serafina	Act I; Sc. 4	“...she gets mixed up with a sailor.”	Serafina has a preconception about sailors; she thinks they are drunks, womanizers, etc.
Flora	Act I; Sc. 5	“A rose tattoo on her chest same as the Wop’s!”	Flora has a prejudice against Italians, which is demonstrated by her use of the word “Wop”
Serafina	Act I; Sc. 6	“What all of ‘em are hunting? To have a good time!.. I’m sick of men.”	Serafina has a prejudice against men.
Serafina	Act I; Sc. 6	“You don’t look like a catholic to me.”	Serafina has a preconception about what Catholics look like.
The Salesman	Act II; Sc. 1	“Is something giving you gas pains, Macaroni? ... All right. Spaghetti”	The salesman is acting on his prejudice against Italians by calling Alvaro the name of Italian food.

Think about...

Every day speech and activities can be interpreted as a racial slur, or as an example of intolerance. The most common phrase or image might represent some type of bias.

Try This...

1. Can you think of examples in your every day life which perpetuate stereotypes?

These could be

- a) conversations you’ve had
- b) jokes you’ve made, or laughed at
- c) television shows or movies that you’ve watched
- d) others?

2. **Brainstorm** and think of times when others misunderstood you or when you made an assumption without all of the facts. What happened after the real facts were uncovered?

3. Acting Activity:

Most scenes or stories are based around conflict. In a comedy, the conflict is resolved in order for the play to end.

- Using one of the scenarios you used as an example for activity number 1, create a two-person scene or dialogue. Use your own experience, and dramatize it. Be sure that the conflict within the scene is clear. There doesn’t have to be a clear resolution.
- Grab a partner, and perform the scene in front of the class. After the performance, ask the audience how the scene made them feel. Ask them for possible resolutions, or endings, to the conflict in your story.
- Now, re-write the scene with one of the chosen endings.
- Perform the scene again, and ask the audience to compare their reactions.

Stereotypes and Racism

Examples of Racism

Racism can occur whenever one group or person has misconceptions about another group. Many different cultural groups have been subject to stereotyping and racial profiling. The following are examples of prejudice in American History.

- The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced all Native Americans to live on land west of the Mississippi. American Indians have endured years of racism and exclusion by Americans and the American government. Finally in 1953, Congress agreed to give Native Americans the same civil status as U. S. citizens. However, many Native Americans still feel discriminated against.
- Until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, almost all African-Americans were forced to work as slaves. The Civil Rights movement has granted equal rights to blacks, including the right to vote and the integration of schools. Still, racial tension exists between Caucasians groups and African-American groups.
- Japanese-Americans were suspected of treason during World War II as a result of Pearl Harbor, and were sent to internment camps by the government.
- In the early 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy suspected and accused some liberal Americans as being communists living in America.
- Many Afghan-Americans are the victims of racial profiling across the United States as the result of the attacks on September 11th

Try this...

- Pick one of the five events listed above.
- Do some research to find out about the political event or events that led to the persecution of that particular group.
- Write two journal entries based on the event your researched. One entry will take the perspective of a person in the group who was discriminated against. The other journal entry will take the perspective of a person in the group that is doing the discriminating. For example, write a journal entry from the perspective of a Japanese-American, and a journal entry from the perspective of an American soldier.

What is the traditional Italian-American stereotype?

Italian-Americans bear the burden of the reputation for being lawbreakers and criminals. This reputation has led to several violent portrayals of Italian-Americans in the media, and sometimes innocent people are accused of crimes because of their heritage.

- In New Orleans in 1890, the chief of police, David Hennessy, was murdered. A group of 9 Italians were the major suspects, and, even after they were found innocent, the group was massacred and shot to death in public.
- Many TV shows and movies tend to generate stereotypes about Italian-Americans. Movies such as “The Godfather” trilogy, “Grease,” and “Saturday Night Fever,” and TV shows such as HBO’s “The Sopranos” perpetuate Italian-American stereotypes, such as that all Italian-Americans are involved in the Mafia.
- The popular TV show, “The Sopranos,” also depicts a mobster family. Some feel that it is an unfair representation of Italian-Americans. In fact, the Italian-American Defense Association has twice tried to sue the producers of the TV Show, with the accusation that the show offends Italian-Americans.

Examining Religion

While we read or watch a play, we experience the world of the play, that is, the world in which the characters exist. Just as in our world, various societal components play a major part in the characters' every day lives. Religion is one of these components, and is particularly influential in *The Rose Tattoo*.

“A woman can be dignified in her grief but when it’s carried too far it becomes a sort of self-indulgence. Oh, I knew this was going to happen when you broke the church law and had your husband cremated!”-Father De Leo

“When he was shot at the wheel of the truck, it crashed and caught fire. But deliberate cremation is not the same thing. It’s an abomination in the sight of God.” -Father De Leo, *The Rose Tattoo*

Cremation

Cremation, disposal of a corpse by fire, is an ancient tradition and is often followed by the family saving or burying the ashes. Serafina chose to use cremation rather than burial as a means to dispose of her husband’s body, even though at that time it was against catholic law. In 1917, the Code of Canon Law forbade cremation for Catholics, and it was prohibited until 1963, when it was allowed, only if it was not chosen as a sign of denial of Christian teaching. **The Rose Tattoo** was written in 1951; therefore Serafina was breaking the ordinance. Since 1963, the Catholic Church has issued many statements and instructions, urging that “the practice of burying the bodies of the faithful is by all means to be kept,” and “the Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed.” So, although it is permissible for Catholics to practice cremation, it is strongly frowned upon by church officials.

Reasons that the Catholic Church gives for disagreeing with cremation:

from the Committee on the Liturgy, United States conference for Catholic Bishops

- the physical human body represents the experience of baptism
- the human body is a temple of the Holy Spirit
- “The body which lies in death recalls the personal story of faith, the past relationships, and the continued spiritual presence of the deceased person.”
- the worship of ashes could be construed as idol worship

What’s a shrine?

1. A container or receptacle for sacred relics; a reliquary.
 2. The tomb of a venerated person, such as a saint.
 3. A place at which devotion is paid to a venerated person.
3. A site hallowed by a venerated object or its associations

Do you think Serafina has built a shrine to her husband? Explain your answer, using examples from the text.

Finding Examples in the Text...

A character’s religion might affect how they think, feel, and act. Some religions may have very close ties to a certain geographical area. For example, many Italians practice Roman Catholicism. Therefore, it is not surprising that Serafina and several other characters in *The Rose Tattoo* practice Catholicism. Re-read the scenes listed below, and then answer the following questions.

Act I, Sc. 6 – Assunta and Serafina discuss “signs from Our Lady”

Act I, Sc. 3 – Father De Leo states that cremation is “an abomination in the sight of God.”

Act I, Sc. 5 - Serafina declares to Bessie and Flora, “This is a catholic house”

Act I, Sc. 5, Sc. 6 – Serafina asks for guidance: “Oh Lady, give me a sign.”

Act I, Sc. 6 - Serafina questions Jack: “What are you? Catholic?... You don’t look catholic,” and then asks Jack to prove his love for Rosa by making a promise to the shrine of Mary.

Act II, Sc. 1- Father De Leo scolds Serafina for her “idolatrous shrine,” and for neglecting confession.

- After re-reading the scenes above, what role do you think religion plays in the lives of various characters? How influential is religion in Serafina’s life?
- The Roman Catholic tradition has had certain ordinances regarding burial practices. Pick a different world religion, and do some research to find out about burial practices in that religion.
- Describe the role of religion in the lives of the De Leo family. How does it influence their lives? Explain your answer.

Dealing With Loss

Serafina suffers from the sudden and tragic death of her husband, Rosario. This strongly affects her character. For some people, the loss of a loved family member or friend can cause emotional distress or depression. The process people go through to deal with these feelings of loss is called grief. Hospitals and hospice centers often offer counseling or materials to help people deal with their grief.

THE STAGES OF GRIEF

A Normal Life Process

At some point in our lives, each of us faces the loss of someone or something dear to us. The grief that follows such a loss can seem unbearable, but grief is actually a healing process. Grief is the emotional suffering we feel after a loss of some kind. The death of a loved one, loss of a limb, even intense disappointment can cause grief. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has named five stages of grief people go through following a serious loss. Sometimes people get stuck in one of the first four stages. Their lives can be painful until they move to the fifth stage - acceptance.

Five Stages Of Grief

1. **Denial and Isolation.**

At first, we tend to deny the loss has taken place, and may withdraw from our usual social contacts. This stage may last a few moments, or longer.

2. **Anger.**

The grieving person may then be furious at the person who inflicted the hurt (even if he/she is dead), or at the world, for letting it happen. He may be angry with himself for letting the event take place, even if, realistically, nothing could have stopped it.

3. **Bargaining.**

Now the grieving person may make bargains with God, asking, "If I do this, will you take away the loss?"

4. **Depression**

The person feels numb, although anger and sadness may remain underneath.

5. **Acceptance**

This is when the anger, sadness and mourning have tapered off. The person simply accepts the reality of the loss.

Grief and Stress

During grief, it is common to have many conflicting feelings. Sorrow, anger, loneliness, sadness, shame, anxiety, and guilt often accompany serious losses. Having so many strong feelings can be very stressful. Yet denying the feelings, and failing to work through the five stages of grief, is harder on the body and mind than going through them. When people suggest "looking on the bright side," or other ways of cutting off difficult feelings, the grieving person may feel pressured to hide or deny these emotions. Then it will take longer for healing to take place.

Recovering From Grief

Grieving and its stresses pass more quickly, with good self-care habits. It helps to have a close circle of family or friends. It also helps to eat a balanced diet, drink enough non-alcoholic fluids, get exercise and rest. Most people are unprepared for grief, since so often, tragedy strikes suddenly, without warning. If good self-care habits are always practiced, it helps the person to deal with the pain and shock of loss until acceptance is reached.

(Information from www.memorialhospital.org/Library/general)

Dealing With Loss

Examining the Text...

Examine the stages of grief listed on the previous page. Those dealing with loss often go through very specific stages. See if you can trace Serafina as she journeys through each of the five stages of grief. Try to find a place in the text where Serafina identifies with each of the following:

Denial and Isolation

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

Improvisation Acting Activity:

- Write down the names of the five stages of grief on small pieces of paper or note cards and put them in a hat, lunch bag, or bucket.
- Pair the class into groups of two.
- Each pair will pull out one of the stages, and improvise a short scene. One actor will play Serafina, and the other actor will play Rosa. Act out a scene according to the stage of grief on the piece of paper.
- Perform the scene in class. See if the other members of the class can guess which stage is being acted out.
- Ask the class for reflections and comments on the stage of grief, and how the improvisation actors represented it, compared with how it is represented in the play.

Loss can come in many forms. Whether it is the death of a close family member or friend, the loss of a pet, a friend moving away, or the death of an unborn child, this loss can greatly affect the way we see the world. Everyone deals with loss in his or her own way. Although Serafina is the central character in the play, Rosa also must deal with the loss of her own father.

- Write a letter from Rosa to a friend at school, telling about how she feels about her father's death. Consider the responsibility she feels to help her mother deal with the loss, contradicted with her own need to grieve.
- Write a journal entry, reflecting on a loss (big or small) you have dealt with in your life, or on a time when you have helped a friend deal with a loss.

Symbolism

Symbolism: The practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships. 2. A system of symbols or representations. 3. A symbolic meaning or representation.

Symbol: A person, act, or thing that has both literal significance and additional abstract meanings. A symbol usually refers to several complex ideas that may radiate contradictory or ambiguous meanings.

Symbolism in *The Rose Tattoo*

the rose: Its abundance in the play represents the lavishness of the characters. It is a symbol of love. Also, of growth and new life.

the goat: a symbol of lust; The goat appears in the script at times when Serafina is feeling passionate.

the dressmaker's dummies: these represent the alienation Serafina has found herself in. She no longer has friends in the community, and she can only relate to dummies, which may represent the classical reference to the seven ages of man, or the seven phases of the moon.

the wristwatch: a symbol of the passage of time.

Symbolism in Colors

Whether displayed in clothing, set pieces, or descriptions, the following colors are generally associated with specific ideas.

Black— typifies grief, death.

Red— martyrdom for faith, charity, divine love.

Rose—color, martyrdom

White—purity, temperance, innocence, chastity, faith, purity.

Why Seven?

Why would Tennessee Williams chose to have seven dressmaker's dummies instead of 6, or 8, or even 9? There are many literary references to the number seven in the bible, in mythology, or in classical folklore:

- There are seven days in creation, seven spirits before the throne of God, seven days in the week, seven graces, seven divisions in the Lord's Prayer, seven ages in the life of man, and the just fall "seven times a day."
- There are seven phases of the moon, every seventh year was sabbatical, and seven times seven years was the jubilee.
- The three great Jewish feasts lasted seven days, and between the first and second of these feasts were seven weeks.
- We have seven churches of Asia, seven candlesticks, seven stars, seven trumpets, seven spirits before the throne of God, seven horns, the Lamb has seven eyes, ten times seven Israelites go to Egypt, the exile lasts the same number of years, and there were ten times seven elders.
- It is frequently used indefinitely to signify a long time, or a great many; thus in the Interlude of the Four Elements, the dance of Apetyte is called the best "that I have seen this seven yere."
- Shakespeare talks of a man being "a vile thief this seven year."

from Dictionary of Phrase and Fable. 1898.

The Sick Rose
by William Blake

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does this destroy

One Perfect Rose
by Dorothy Parker

A single flow'r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet—
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the floweret;
"My fragile leaves," it said, "his heart enclose."
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine. do you suppose?

Analyzing Symbols...

- Read the poems on the left.
- How is the symbol of the rose used in each?
- How are the poems different from each other, in terms of the rose?
- How does Tennessee Williams' use of the rose symbol differ from these two poets?
- Can you locate places in *The Rose Tattoo* where symbolism is

Looking at Relationships

Tennessee Williams describes *The Rose Tattoo* as “My love play to the world.” It is, essentially, a love story about a mother and daughter searching for love. The two main pairings that exist at the end of the play are Serafina and Alvaro, and Rosa and Jack. Other relationship pairings exist and grow throughout the play, however, and are essential to the plot.

Serafina and Rosario

Because Rosario dies at the beginning of the play, we never meet him. However, we can take clues from the text to find out what Serafina and Rosario’s relationship was like.

- / What was their day-to-day relationship like?
- / What secrets did they keep from each other?
- / How did Serafina relate to Rosario’s memory after his death?

“When I think of men I think about my husband. We had love together every night of the week...”
-Serafina,

Serafina and Alvaro

Alvaro is, in many ways, Serafina’s chance to escape the grief she has dealt with since Rosario’s death.

- / How immediate is their attraction to each other?
- / How does their relationship signify or represent the distinction between love and lust?
- / What is each of them looking to achieve in a relationship with each other?

“I like a woman that laughs with all her heart” –Alvaro
“And a woman that cries with her heart?” –Serafina
“I like everything that a woman does with her heart.”-Alvaro

Rosa and Jack

The relationship between Rosa and Jack transpires in light of many restrictions.

- / What are some of the constraints put upon their relationship?
- / How did these two meet? Do you think either of them was expecting to meet someone so significant?
- / How are their backgrounds different from each other? Do you think this will be a further obstacle for their relationship?

“Just think.
A week ago
Friday- I didn’t
know boys
existed!”
–Rosa

Estelle and Rosario

Because we never meet Rosario, we never get the chance to witness Estelle and Rosario’s relationship.

- / Examine the text for clues about Estelle and Rosario’s relationship.
- / What is the nature of their relationship?
- / What other characters knew about the relationship at the beginning of the play? In the middle? Who knew about it at the end?
- / Discuss the role that rumors and myths can play in love relationships.

Serafina and the community

Whether it is the women from the neighborhood or Father De Leo, several people in the village have a tension-filled relationship with Serafina.

- Which events have led up to such a relationship?
- How does Serafina seem to feel about the negative relationship she sometimes has with her neighbors?
- How would you react if one of your neighbors behaved the way Serafina does?
- How would you feel if you were in Serafina’s position?

“When your candle burns low, you’ve got to believe that the last light shows you something besides the progress of darkness”
-Inscription by Tennessee Williams on a photo of Frank Merlo

Tennessee and Frank

Tennessee Williams met Frank Merlo in 1947 while they both lived in New Orleans.

Merlo was a second generation Sicilian-American, and had served in the military during

World War II. They fell in love, and spent fourteen years together as a couple. Some believe that the story line of *The Rose Tattoo* follows the story of Williams’ meeting Merlo. Frank Merlo was a stable influence in Tennessee’s chaotic life. Merlo died of lung cancer in 1961.

- / Where do you find similarities between Serafina and Alvaro’s relationship and the relationship described above?