A Streetcar Named Desire Unit Plan

Unit Title: A Streetcar Named Desire
Unit Theme: Perceptions of Truth

Level: 12th Grade
Subject: Literature

Unit Rationale: study of a contemporary American play that has affected drama, literature, and film — with important themes & ideas for American history
Big Ideas: Fantasy/Reality, Tragedy, Blues, Sex & Death, Gender Dependence, Truth
<table>
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<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Anticipatory set: freewrite on perceptions vs. truth, activity with newspaper articles</td>
<td>Go over Scenes Five &amp; Six with Reading Check quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Background on Tennessee Williams (biographical/literary handout)</td>
<td>Read “One Girl” aloud (handout)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Background on blues music (listen &amp; discuss)</td>
<td>Freewrite: Blanche &amp; Stella as relates to “One Girl”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read “On A Streetcar Named Success” aloud</td>
<td>Watch <em>A Streetcar Named Desire</em> through Scene Six</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give blank character list (handout)</td>
<td>Assign Scene Seven (and provide time to do so in groups)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assign New Orleans geography worksheet</td>
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<td>Assign Scene One (and provide time to do so in groups)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Go over New Orleans geography &amp; background</td>
<td>Go over Scene Seven with questions</td>
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<td>Go over Scene One with questions</td>
<td>Watch <em>A Streetcar Named Desire</em> through Scene Seven</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerpoint: scenic/light designs</td>
<td>Listen to “It’s Only A Paper Moon” in class, discuss lyrics (handout)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read “Upstage” article, pg. 5-8</td>
<td>Assign Scenes Eight &amp; Nine (and provide time to do so in groups)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watch <em>A Streetcar Named Desire</em> through Scene One</td>
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<td>Assign Scene Two (and provide time to do so in groups)</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Go over Scene Two with Reading Check quiz</td>
<td>Go over Scenes Eight &amp; Nine with questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freewrite: Blanche &amp; Stella’s thoughts about Stanley</td>
<td>Read “The Broken Tower” aloud (handout)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerpoint: costume designs</td>
<td>Watch <em>A Streetcar Named Desire</em> through Scene Nine</td>
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<td>Watch <em>A Streetcar Named Desire</em> through Scene Two</td>
<td>Assign Scenes Ten &amp; Eleven (and provide time to do so in groups)</td>
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<td>Assign Scene Three (and provide time to do so in groups)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>• Go over Scene Three with questions</td>
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<td>• Powerpoint: sound designs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Read “Upstage” article pg. 9-12</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Watch A Streetcar Named Desire through Scene Three</td>
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<td>• Assign Scene Four (and provide time to do so in groups)</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>• Go over Scene Four with questions</td>
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<td>• Freewrite: Blanche &amp; Stella’s thoughts about Stanley</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Watch A Streetcar Named Desire through Scene Four</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Assign Scenes Five &amp; Six (and provide time to do so in groups)</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
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<td><strong>Monday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Test day!</strong></td>
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<td>• Continue prewriting, percolating, workshopping, etc.</td>
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<td>• Prewriting/Brainstorming due at the end of class</td>
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<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
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<td>• Work on rough draft in class</td>
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<td>• Individual conferences with each student</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday</strong></td>
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<td>• Rough draft is due</td>
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<td>• Peer-to-peer review</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
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<td>• Continue peer review and conduct another individual conference with each student</td>
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<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
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<td>• Final draft is due!</td>
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<td>• Present final papers</td>
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<td>• Test review: discussion groups &amp; review game</td>
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**Bibliography**

- New Orleans map: [http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/mapping/outline-map/?map=Louisiana&ar_a=1](http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/mapping/outline-map/?map=Louisiana&ar_a=1)
Streetcar Unit - Common Core Expectations

• **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

• **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

• **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3** Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed)

• **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

• **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5** Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

• **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6** Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

• **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.7** Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

• **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9** Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.
Sometime this month I will observe the third anniversary of the Chicago opening of "The Glass Menagerie," and even which terminated one part of my life and began another about as different in all external circumstances as could be well imagined. I was snatched out of a virtual oblivion and thrust into sudden prominence, and from the precarious tenancy of furnished rooms about the country I was removed to a suite in a first-class Manhattan hotel. My experience was not unique. Success has often come that abruptly into the lives of Americans.

No, my experience was not exceptional, but neither was it quite ordinary, and if you are willing to accept the somewhat eclectic proposition that I had not been writing with such an experience in mind--and many people are not willing to believe that a playwright is interested in anything but popular success--there may be some point in comparing the two estates.

The sort of life which I had had previous to this popular success was one that required endurance, a life of clawing and scratching along a sheer surface and holding on tight with raw fingers to every inch of rock higher than the one caught hold of before, but it was a good life because it was the sort of life for which the human organism is created.

I was not aware of how much vital energy had gone into this struggle until the struggle was removed. I was out on a level plateau with my arms still thrashing and my lungs still grabbing at air that no longer resisted. This was security at last.

I sat down and looked about me and was suddenly very depressed. I thought to myself, this is just a period of adjustment. Tomorrow morning I will wake up in this first-class hotel suite above the discreet hum of an East Side boulevard and I will appreciate its elegance and luxuriate in its comforts and know that I have arrived at our American plan of Olympus. Tomorrow morning when I look at the green satin sofa I will fall in love with it. It is only temporarily that the green satin looks like slime on stagnant water.

But in the morning the inoffensive little sofa looked more revolting than the night before and I was already getting too fat for the $125 suit which a fashionable acquaintance had selected for me. In the suite things began to break accidentally. An arm came off the sofa. Cigarette burns appeared on the polished surfaces of the furniture. Windows were
left open and a rainstorm flooded the suite. But the maid always put it straight and the patience of the management was inexhaustible. Late parties could not offend them seriously. Nothing short of a demolition bomb seemed to bother my neighbors.

I lived on room-service. But in this, too, there was a disenchantment. Sometime between the moment when I ordered dinner over the ’phone and when it was rolled into my living room like a corpse on a rubber-wheeled table, I lost all interest in it. Once I ordered a sirloin steak and a chocolate sundae, but everything was so cunningly disguised on the table that I mistook the chocolate sauce for gravy and poured it over the sirloin steak. Of course all this was the more trivial aspect of a spiritual dislocation that began to manifest itself in far more disturbing ways. I soon found myself becoming indifferent to people. A well of cynicism rose in me. Conversations all sounded like they had been recorded years ago and were being played back on a turntable. Sincerity and kindliness seemed to have gone out of my friends’ voices. I suspected them of hypocrisy. I stopped calling them, stopped seeing them. I was impatient of what I took to be inane flattery.

I got so sick of hearing people say, "I loved your play!" that I could not say thank you any more. I choked on the words and turned rudely away from the usually sincere person. I no longer felt any pride in the play itself but began to dislike it, probably because I felt too lifeless inside ever to create another. I was walking around dead in my shoes, and I knew it but there was no one I knew or trusted sufficiently, at that time, to take him aside and tell him what was the matter.

This curious condition persisted about three months, till late spring, when I decided to have another eye operation, mainly because of the excuse it gave me to withdraw from the world behind a gauze mask. It was my fourth eye operation, and perhaps I should explain that I had been afflicted for about five years with a cataract on my left eye which required a series of needling operations and finally an operation on the muscle of the eye. (The eye is still in my head. So much for that.)

Well, the gauze mask served a purpose. While I was resting in the hospital the friends whom I had neglected or affronted in one way or another began to call on me and now that I was in pain and darkness, their voices seemed to have changed, or rather that unpleasant mutation which I had suspected earlier in the season had now disappeared and they sounded now as they used to sound in the lamented days of my obscurity. Once more they were sincere and kindly voices with the ring of truth in them.

When the gauze mask was removed I found myself in a readjusted world. I checked out of the handsome suite at the first-class hotel, packed my papers and a few incidental belongings and left for Mexico, and elemental country where you can quickly forget the false dignities and conceits imposed by success, a country where vagrants innocent as children curl up to sleep on pavements and human voices especially when their language is not familiar to the ear, are soft as birds'. My public self, that artifice of
mirrors, did not exist here and so my natural being was resumed.

Then, as a final act of restoration, I settled for a while at Chapala to work on a play called "The Poker Night," which later became "A Streetcar Named Desire." It is only in his work that an artist can find reality and satisfaction, for the actual world is less intense than the world of his invention and consequently his life, without recourse to violent disorder, does not seem very substantial. The right condition for him is that in which his work is not only convenient but unavoidable.

This is an over-simplification. One does not escape that easily from the seductions of an effete way of life. You cannot arbitrarily say to yourself, I will now continue my life as it was before this thing. Success happened to me. But once you fully apprehend the vacuity of a life without struggle you are equipped with the basic means of salvation. Once you know this is true, that the heart of man, his body and his brain, are forged in a white-hot furnace for the purpose of conflict (the struggle of creation) and that with the conflict removed, the man is a sword cutting daisies, that not privation but luxury is the wolf at the door and that the fangs of this wolf are all the little vanities and conceits and laxities that Success is heir to--why, then with this knowledge you are at least in a position of knowing where danger lies.

You know, then, that the public Somebody you are when you "have a name" is a fiction created with mirrors and that the only somebody worth being is the solitary and unseen you that existed from your first breath and which is the sum of your actions and so is constantly in a state of becoming under your own volition--and knowing these things, you can even survive the catastrophe of Success!

It is never altogether too late, unless you embrace the Bitch Goddess, as William James called her, with both arms and find in her smothering caresses exactly what the homesick little boy in you always wanted, absolute protection and utter effortlessness. Security is a kind of death, I think, and it can come to you in a storm of royalty checks beside a kidney-shaped pool in Beverly Hills or anywhere at all that is removed from the conditions that made you an artist, if that's what you are or were intended to be. Ask anyone who has experienced the kind of success I am talking about--What good is it? Perhaps to get an honest answer you will have to give him a shot of truth-serum but the word he will finally groan is unprintable in genteel publications.

Then what is good? The obsessive interest in human affairs, plus a certain amount of compassion and moral conviction, that first made the experience of living something that must be translated into pigment or music or bodily movement or poetry or prose or anything that's dynamic and expressive--that's what's good for you if you're at all serious in your aims. William Saroyan wrote a great on this theme, that purity of heart is the one success worth having. "In the time of your life--live!" That time is short and it doesn't return again. It is slipping away while I write this and while you read it, and the
monosyllable of the clock is Loss, Loss, Loss unless you devote your heart to its opposition.
Streetcar Character List
(function, goal(s), obstacle(s), tactics, expectations)

• Blanche DuBois -

• Stella Kowalski -

• Stanley Kowalski -

• Mitch -

• Eunice -

• Steve -

• Pablo -

• A Negro Woman -

• A Mexican Woman -

• A Young Collector -

• A Doctor -
About New Orleans

New Orleans?

• Elysian Fields Avenue -

• L & N tracks -

• “the river” -

• The French Quarter -

• Preservation Hall -

• Lake Pontchartrain -

• Bourbon Street -

• Desire Street -

• Canal Street -
Streetcar Unit - Thought Questions

• Choose a character to analyze from an actor's perspective. What are your characters goals, obstacles, tactics, expectations? Choose two scenes in which your character appears to annotate and demonstrate beat-shifts in the text.

• Compare Stanley’s view of Stanley with his view of Blanche. Use specific text examples. How do these specific relationships inform his overall view of women?

• Come up with a design concept for the play, and demonstrate your overall vision for scenic, costume, lighting, and sound. Explain how it would interact with the text.

• What is the dichotomy between reality & Blanche’s perception of it? Use specific examples from the text. Where do you think this comes from?

• Choose a line of dialogue from the play to go with each of Hart Crane’s poem “Broken Tower,” and create a visual representation of these connections.

• What is the connection between sex and death in the play? Use specific examples from the text. How does this inform Tennessee Williams’ worldview?

• Write a short play involving at least two of the characters from Streetcar. You may write a scene set before, after, or during the action of the play.

• Analyze the differences between the film & the play. Tennessee Williams wrote both — why did he choose to include certain differences? If you were developing a movie version, what would you change?
About Tennessee Williams

He was brilliant and prolific, breathing life and passion into such memorable characters as Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski in his critically acclaimed A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE. And like them, he was troubled and self-destructive, an abuser of alcohol and drugs. He was awarded four Drama Critic Circle Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was derided by critics and blacklisted by Roman Catholic Cardinal Spellman, who condemned one of his scripts as “revolting, deplorable, morally repellent, offensive to Christian standards of decency.” He was Tennessee Williams, one of the greatest playwrights in American history.

Born Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Mississippi in 1911, Tennessee was the son of a shoe company executive and a Southern belle. Williams described his childhood in Mississippi as happy and carefree. This sense of belonging and comfort were lost, however, when his family moved to the urban environment of St. Louis, Missouri. It was there he began to look inward, and to write—“because I found life unsatisfactory.” Williams’ early adult years were occupied with attending college at three different universities, a brief stint working at his father’s shoe company, and a move to New Orleans, which began a lifelong love of the city and set the locale for A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE.
About Tennessee Williams

Williams spent a number of years traveling throughout the country and trying to write. His first critical acclaim came in 1944 when THE GLASS MENAGERIE opened in Chicago and went to Broadway. It won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award and, as a film, the New York Film Critics’ Circle Award. At the height of his career in the late 1940s and 1950s, Williams worked with the premier artists of the time, most notably Elia Kazan, the director for stage and screen productions of A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE, and the stage productions of CAMINO REAL, CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, and SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH. Kazan also directed Williams’ film BABY DOLL. Like many of his works, BABY DOLL was simultaneously praised and denounced for addressing raw subject matter in a straightforward realistic way.

The 1960s were perhaps the most difficult years for Williams, as he experienced some of his harshest treatment from the press. In 1961 he wrote THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA, and in 1963, THE MILK TRAIN DOESN’T STOP HERE ANY MORE. His plays, which had long received criticism for openly addressing taboo topics, were finding more and more detractors. Around this time, Williams’ longtime companion, Frank Merlo, died of cancer. Williams began to depend more and more on alcohol and drugs and though he continued to write, completing a book of short stories and another play, he was in a downward spiral. In 1969 he was hospitalized by his brother.

After his release from the hospital in the 1970s, Williams wrote plays, a memoir, poems, short stories and a novel. In 1975 he published MEMOIRS, which detailed his life and discussed his addiction to drugs and alcohol, as well as his homosexuality. In 1980 Williams wrote CLOTHES FOR A SUMMER HOTEL, based on the lives of Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Only three years later, Tennessee Williams died in a New York City hotel filled with half-finished bottles of wine and pills. It was in this desperation, which Williams had so closely known and so honestly written about, that we can find a great man and an important body of work. His genius was in his honesty and in the perseverance to tell his stories.
A Streetcar Named Desire Scene Two
Reading Check

1. What is Belle Reve?

2. What is the Napoleonic Code, and why does it matter to Stanley?

3. What explanation does Blanche give for having lost Belle Reve?

4. What does Stanley reveal to Blanche at the end of the scene?
A Streetcar Named Desire Scenes Five & Six

Reading Check

1. Why does Eunice threaten to call the police? What does she do instead?

2. Describe Blanche’s interactions with the Young Man.

3. What happened to Blanche’s husband? Why?
“One Girl” by Sappho
Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

I
Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough,
Atop on the topmost twig, — which the pluckers forgot, somehow, —
Forget it not, nay; but got it not, for none could get it till now.

II
Like the wild hyacinth flower which on the hills is found,
Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever tear and wound,
Until the purple blossom is trodden in the ground.
“The Broken Tower” by Harold Hart Crane

The bell-rope that gathers God at dawn
Dispatches me as though I dropped down the knell
Of a spent day - to wander the cathedral lawn
From pit to crucifix, feet chill on steps from hell.

Have you not heard, have you not seen that corps
Of shadows in the tower, whose shoulders sway
Antiphonal carillons launched before
The stars are caught and hived in the sun's ray?

The bells, I say, the bells break down their tower;
And swing I know not where. Their tongues engrave
Membrane through marrow, my long-scattered score
Of broken intervals… And I, their sexton slave!

Oval encycicals in canyons heaping
The impasse high with choir. Banked voices slain!
Pagodas, campaniles with reveilles out leaping-
O terraced echoes prostrate on the plain!…

And so it was I entered the broken world
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.

My word I poured. But was it cognate, scored
Of that tribunal monarch of the air
Whose thigh embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word
In wounds pledged once to hope - cleft to despair?

The steep encroachments of my blood left me
No answer (could blood hold such a lofty tower
As flings the question true?) - or is it she
Whose sweet mortality stirs latent power?- 

And through whose pulse I hear, counting the strokes
My veins recall and add, revived and sure
The angelus of wars my chest evokes:
What I hold healed, original now, and pure...

And builds, within, a tower that is not stone
(Not stone can jacket heaven) - but slip
Of pebbles, - visible wings of silence sown
In azure circles, widening as they dip

The matrix of the heart, lift down the eye
That shrines the quiet lake and swells a tower…
The commodious, tall decorum of that sky
Unseals her earth, and lifts love in its shower.
"It's Only A Paper Moon"

It's only a paper moon
Sailing over a cardboard sea
But it wouldn't be make believe
If you believed in me

Yes, it's only a canvas sky
Hangin' over a muslin tree
But it wouldn't be make believe
If you believed in me

Without your love
It's a honky tonk parade
Without your love
It's a melody played in a penny arcade

It's a Barnum and Bailey world
Just as phony as it can be
But it wouldn't be make believe
If you believed in me

Without your love
It's a honky tonk parade
Without your love
It's a melody played in a penny arcade

It's a Barnum and Bailey world
Just as phony as it can be
But it wouldn't be make believe
If you believed in me