

The Handmaid's Tale and A Streetcar Named Desire Knowledge Organiser

Assessment	Paper Two Section C Comparative essay exploring <i>the significance of a key word or theme</i> across both texts.	
Themes/topics for exam	memory, difference, place, insecurity, isolation, deception, control, identity, rebellion, societal change, gender, conflict, morality, desire, dreams, power, storytelling, social class, death, violence, family, love and relationships, freedom, appearance,	
Text	The Handmaid's Tale	A Streetcar Named Desire
Context (AO3)	Reagan Presidency, Christian evangelism and the Moral Majority Second-wave feminism America and Puritanism	America in the 1940s Old and New South Williams' sister Williams as a gay writer
Genre (AO3)	Prose: Speculative (not science) fiction Elements of post-modernism Dystopian tradition Environmental writing Writing of the female body	Drama: The American/Southern Gothic Influence of European drama – Strindberg, Chekhov, Ibsen Influence of expressionism realism Williams: 'plastic theatre' Tragedy
Typicality: key features (AO3)	Unreliable narration, shifts in tense, metafiction, intertextuality (indicate narrator's state of mind). 1980s USA taken to extreme (speculative fiction) – social comment	Stage directions – poetic, descriptive 'Plastic theatre' – expressionistic touches (e.g. Varsouviana/gunshot, lighting, jungle cries) to indicate Blanche's state of mind Aspects of realism – social comment
Critical Views (AO5)	'The monthly rape 'Ceremony'...synthesises the institutionalised humiliation, objectification, and ownership of women in Gilead.' Cavalcanti 'Power and conflict are central to the society of Gilead [although] its political and economic structure are never clearly demarcated' Grotsch-Thomson 'The fragmented narrative...represents the mental processes of someone in Offred's isolated situation.' Howells 'Despite – or perhaps because of – the destruction of the natural environment, Gilead adapts the rhetoric of the natural to authenticate its reign' Rule 'Offred's power is in language...the power to feel, and to express that feeling in words that evoke feeling' Beran	'Williams' sympathy is on the side of the delicately built person whose soul is revolted by crass life.' von Szeliski 'Blanche is a wild card in the seven card stud game that is the sex/gender system' Clum 'Blanche is like all women, dependent on a man, looking for one to hang on to: only more so!' Kazan 'a fascination with the image of a helpless creature under the physical domination of another, accepting his favours with tears of gratitude' Magid '[Blanche's] first impulse is to turn to another man as saviour" Londre 'Stanley, on the other hand, is faithful and loyal; his cruelty defends his world.' Cohn 'Characters are defined...by their ability or lack of ability to accept or adapt to the historical process.' Gazolla
Structure (AO2)	The Handmaid's Tale begins <i>in media res</i> . Fractured narrative – symbolic of confused mental state 'I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force.' Changes in tense – present tense immediate, disorientating. Ends with protagonist being taken away at mercy of strangers; reader experiences with protagonist <i>Historical Notes</i> – underlines message of male control of women's stories	Use of time in Streetcar – set over five months. Shift after scene 7. Foreshadowing (Stanley's violation of Blanche foreshadowed by going through trunk, ripping lantern off lamp etc.) Ends with protagonist being taken away at mercy of strangers; audience experiences with protagonist
Key comparisons (AO4)	Typical features of genre to indicate protagonist's state of mind and/or social comment Structure – similar ending, reader/audience finds out at same time as protagonist Sexual violence – male antagonist, representing patriarchal power structure's treatment of women Colour imagery to indicate position of women in society, changing society, control of sexuality Other key methods/patterns of language/imagery: setting, names, bathing, games, intertextuality	

Connections and Methods (AO2/4)		
<p>Masculinity – antagonist as representative of power structure A museum guard...a Midwestern bank president...a vodka ad...a shoemaker in an old fairytale book. Is there no end to his disguises, of benevolence? (ch15) Better never means better for everyone, he says. It always means worse, for some. (ch32) Our job is not to censure but to understand. (HN) Stanley: 'Huey Long said – every man is a king! And I am the king around here, so don't you forget it!' (sc8) Stanley: 'You know what luck is? Luck is believing you're lucky... To hold front position in this rat-race you've got to believe you are lucky.' (sc11)</p>	<p>Masculinity – sexual violence & control Janine, telling about how she was gang-raped at fourteen (ch13) The Commander fucks, with a regular two-four marching beat, on and on like a tap dripping. (ch16) Moira: 'It's like screwing on the altar or something: your gang are supposed to be such chaste vessels...just another crummy power trip.' (ch38) I use the word 'enjoy' in two distinct senses, precluding, of course, the obsolete third. (HN) Stanley...the richly feathered male bird among hens... gaudy seed bearer. (sc1) [foreshadowing/echoing: trunk in ch2; paper lantern in ch9/11] Stanley: 'We've had this date with each other from the beginning' (sc10)</p>	<p>Masculinity – phallic imagery [The Aunts] had cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts. (ch1) His extra, sensitive thumb, his tentacle, his delicate stalked slug's eye (ch15) Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say. (ch29) Vendor: 'R-e-e-d h-o-o-t' (sc1) Stanley carries his bowling jacket and a red-stained package from a butcher's... 'Catch...meat' (sc1) A locomotive is heard outside. [Blanche] claps her hands to hear ears and crouches over. (sc6)</p>
<p>Femininity – desire Or I would help Rita make the bread, sinking my hands into that soft resistant warmth which is so much like flesh. I hunger to touch something, other than cloth or wood. I hunger to commit the act of touch. (ch2) The stains on the mattress. Like dried flower petals. Not recent. Old love; there's no other kind of love in this room now. (ch9) Stella: 'It isn't on his forehead and it isn't genius. It's a drive he has.' (sc3) Blanche: 'brutal Desire...the name of that rattle-trap streetcar.' Stella: 'Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar?' Blanche: 'It brought me here' (sc4) Blanche: 'You make my mouth water'(sc5)</p>	<p>Femininity – dependence on men Household – that is what we are. The Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part. The hold of a ship. Hollow. (ch14) What use are [men] except ten seconds' worth of half babies? (ch20) I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can't be helped. (ch46) It was up to Prof Wade and myself to arrange the blocks of speech (HN) Are there any questions? (HN) Blanche: 'It was panic...that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection...in...unlikely places (sc10) Blanche: 'Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.' (sc11)</p>	<p>Femininity – sexuality as power/ fulfilment They touch with their eyes instead and I move my hips instead, feeling the full red skirt sway around me. (ch4) His mouth is on me, his hands, I can't wait and he's moving, already, love, it's been so long, I'm alive in my skin, arms around him, falling and water softly everywhere...I made that up. (ch273) Stella: 'there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark – that sort of make everything else seem – unimportant' (sc4)</p>
<p>Storytelling and truth This isn't a story I'm telling. It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. (ch7) The things I believe can't all be true... but I believe in all of them (ch18) This is a reconstruction. (ch23) I made that up. It didn't happen that way. Here is what happened. (ch40) I tell, therefore you are. (ch41) She could have told us much...had she the instincts of a reporter or a spy (HN) Blanche: 'Magic! I try to give that...I misrepresent things...I don't tell the truth. I tell what ought to be the truth.'(sc9) Blanche: 'I shall die of eating an unwashed grape...my hand in the hand of a nice-looking ship's doctor (sc11)</p>	<p>Colour Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. (ch2) A Sister, dipped in blood. (ch2) There are several umbrellas: black, for the Commander, blue, for the Commander's Wife, and the one assigned to me, which is red (ch2) Blanche is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea (sc1) The poker players...wear coloured shirts, solid blues, a purple, a red-and-white check, a light green, and they are men...as...powerful as the primary colours. (sc3)</p>	<p>Clothing The skirt is ankle-length... The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen. (ch2) Skirts...just below the knee...legs... nearly naked in...thin stockings...high-heeled shoes...like instruments of torture (ch5) Some are in bathing suits, one-piece or bikini; one, I see, is wearing a crocheted affair with big scallop shells covering the tits. (ch37) Blanche: white (sc1); red (sc2); blue (sc11); Stanley: blue denim work clothes (sc1); coloured shirt (sc3); grease-stained seersucker pants (sc4); brilliant silk bowling shirt (sc8); silk pyjamas (sc10)</p>

<p>Games Mitch: 'Poker should not be played in a house with women.' (sc3) Steve: 'The game is 7 card stud' (sc11) We play two games. <i>Larynx</i>, I spell. <i>Valance. Quince. Zygote. Limp</i>, I spell. <i>Gorge</i>.(ch23) He wanted me to play Scrabble with him, and kiss him as if I meant it. This was one of the most bizarre things that's happened to me, ever. Context is all. (ch24)</p>	<p>Doubling and Foils Moira – Narrator – Janine Commander – Luke – Nick Previous Offred – Narrator Narrator - her mother Aunt Lydia – Aunt Elizabeth Narrator – Serena Joy Doubled, I walk the street (ch6) Stella-Blanche Stanley-Mitch Steve/Eunice – Stella/Stanley Stanley/Allen</p>	<p>Violent and threatening imagery A wreath...a blank space...like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out (ch2) Curtains hanging like drowned white hair (ch19) Blanche: 'The Grim Reaper had put his tent up on our doorstep!' (sc1) Blanche: 'The first time I laid eyes on [Stanley] I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me.' (sc6)</p>
<p>Significance of names 'There is a bomb in Gilead' (ch34) Neologisms: Aunt, Eye, Angel, Offred; Prayvaganza, Birthmobile, Salvaging Blanche: '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' (sc1) Stella: 'Belle Reve? Lost, is it? No!' (sc1) Blanche: 'It's a French name. It means woods and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white woods. Like an orchard in Spring!' (sc3)</p>	<p>Light and dark I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light. (ch18) And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light. (ch46) Blanche: 'And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!' (sc1) <i>[He tears the paper lantern off the light bulb. She utters a frightened gasp]</i> Blanche: What did you do that for? Mitch: So I can take a look at you good and plain! (sc9)</p>	<p>Imagery of fertility This is what God must look like: an egg. (ch19) We are two-legged wombs...sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices. (ch23) The eggs had broken on the floor, there was orange juice and shattered glass. (ch25) She was snipping off the seed pods... some kamikaze committed on the swelling genitalia. (ch25) Stanley: 'Sister Blanche is no lily! Ha-ha, some lily she is!' (sc7) Blanche: 'Try and locate a bunch of artificial violets.' (sc11)</p>
<p>Setting Dances would have been held there; the music lingered, a palimpsest of unheard sound. (ch1) The Wall is hundreds of years old, too (ch6) In this part of New Orleans, you are practically always just around the corner...from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers...New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city. (sc1) Eunice: 'This here is Elysian Fields.' Blanche: 'They mustn't have – understood – what number I wanted...' (sc1)</p>	<p>Class and hierarchy Classes of women (Wife, Handmaid, Martha, Econowife, Unwoman) He is demonstrating, to me, his mastery of the world. He's breaking the rules, under their noses, thumbing his nose at them, getting away with it. (ch37) Blanche: 'We are French by extraction. Our first American ancestors were French Huguenots.' (sc3) Stanley: 'I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is a one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it.' (sc8) Stanley: 'I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it' (sc8)</p>	<p>Imagery of the body Worms, evidence of the fertility of the soil...half dead; flexible and pink, like lips (ch4) I sink down into my body as into a swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing...I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. (ch13) Blanche: 'I, I, I took those blows to my face and body!' (sc1) Mitch: 'I weigh two hundred and seven pounds and I'm six feet one and a half inches tall.' (sc6)</p>
<p>Flowers and death The tulips are red, a darker crimson towards the stem, as if they have been cut and just begun to heal there (ch3) I look at the one red smile...the same as the red of the tulips (ch6) There's a dried flower arrangement on either side of the mantelpiece. (ch14) Stella: 'You are as fresh as a daisy.' Blanche: 'One that's been picked a few days.' (sc3) Mexican Woman: 'Flores para los muertos' (sc9)</p>	<p>Illusion and appearance My self is now a thing I must compose, as one composes a speech. (ch12) Moira didn't look much like Aunt Elizabeth, even with her brown wimple in place, but her stiff-backed posture was apparently enough (ch22) Stanley: 'A solid-gold dress, I believe! ...Pearls! Ropes of them! ...Diamonds! A crown for an empress!' (sc2) Blanche: 'I bought this adorable little coloured paper lantern...I can't stand a naked light-bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action.' (sc3)</p>	<p>Intertextuality – Music <i>Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me...; I feel so lonely, baby...I could die'</i> ch10) Elvis Presley...Boy George...folk songs of Lithuania...Twisted Sister (HN) Blanche: 'From the land of the sky blue water, they brought a captive maid' (sc2) Blanche: 'We danced the 'Varsouviana'!' (sc6) Blanche: 'It's only a paper moon...but it wouldn't be make-believe, if you believed in me' (sc7)</p>

<p>Intertextuality – Literature & Art Some fairytale figure in a red cloak (ch2) A Tennyson garden, heavy with scent, languid. (ch25) Mademoiselle...Esquire...Ms...Raymond Chandler...Hard Times; Venus de Milo...The Sabine Women (ch29) Context is all, or is it ripeness? (ch30) ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ appended to it by Prof. Wade, partly in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer. (HN) Only Poe! Out there, I suppose, is the ghoulish-woodland of Weir! (sc1) There is a picture of Van Gogh’s...(sc3) Blanche: ‘my favourite sonnet by Mrs Browning!’ (sc3) Blanche: ‘I attempt to instil a bunch of bobby-soxers and drug-store Romeos with a reverence for Hawthorne and Whitman and Poe!’ (sc3) Blanche: ‘My Rosenkavalier’ (sc5) Blanche: ‘Je suis la Dame aux Camellias!’ (sc6)</p>	<p>Intertextuality – The Bible/Christianity ‘Gilead’ (ch5, various) ‘Lilies of the Field...Milk and Honey...All Flesh...Daily Bread’ (ch5) <i>Give me children, or else I die.</i> There’s more than one meaning to it. (ch8) <i>Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the silent.</i> I know they made that up...left things out too, but there was no way of checking. (ch15) I have enough daily bread, so I won’t waste any time on that. (ch30) Blanche: ‘Samson’ (sc6) Blanche: ‘you seemed to be gentle – a cleft in the rock!’ (sc9) Blanche: ‘I have been foolish – casting my pearls before swine!’ (sc10) Blanche: ‘It’s Della Robbia blue.’ (sc11)</p>	<p>Intertextuality – Epigraph Genesis (Biblical precedent for Handmaids as surrogates) Swift (satire, social commentary, ‘speculative fiction’?), theme of children Sufi Proverb – ambiguous; warning against desperate measures, even in direst circumstances? Suggesting that some rules should be self-evident, even if not officially written down? Crane – ‘The Broken Tower’ (love as destructive, desperate; a ‘broken world’, unsympathetic and unwelcoming to a desperate character); gay writer, admired by Williams, committed suicide</p>
<p>Language and wordplay ‘It’s French. From <i>m’aidez.</i>’ (ch8) <i>Nolite te bastardes carborundorum</i> (ch9) I sit in the chair and think about the word chair. It can also mean the leader of a meeting. It can also mean a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in charity. It is the French word for flesh. None of these facts has any connection with the others. (ch19) Blanche: ‘Ha-ha! I’m compiling a notebook of quaint little words and phrases I’ve picked up here.’ (sc5) Young Man: ‘I’m collecting for The Evening Star’. Blanche: ‘I didn’t know that stars took up collections.’ (sc5)</p>	<p>Animal imagery Something about [Blanche’s] uncertain manner...suggests a moth. (sc1) [Mitch is] like a dancing bear. (sc3) Stella: ‘drunk, animal thing’...[Stanley is] like a baying hound...they come together with low, animal moans (sc3) Blanche: ‘this party of apes...don’t hang back with the brutes!’ (sc4) Blanche: ‘the Tarantula Arms! That’s where I brought my victims!’ (sc9) I wait, washed and brushed like a prize pig...[I read about] caged rats...pigeons’ (ch13) Attached to her head are two ears...why are rabbits supposed to be sexually attractive to men? (ch37)</p>	<p>Prostitution and sexual exploitation What about the Pornycorners? (ch32) ‘You can’t cheat nature,’ he says. ‘Nature demands variety, for men.’ (ch37) You’d have three or four good years before your snatch wears out and they send you to the bone-yard. (ch38) ‘Soft people have got to court the favour of hard ones...got to be seductive – put on soft colours, the colours of butterfly wings, and glow – make a little – temporary magic’ (sc5) Stanley: ‘The Flamingo! A second-class hotel which has the advantage of not interfering with the private social life of the personalities there!’ (sc7)</p>
<p>Bathing I wish to be totally clean, germless, without bacteria, like the surface of the moon (ch12) The bath is a requirement, but also a luxury. (ch12) The water is soft as hands. I close my eyes, and she’s there with me, suddenly, without warning, it must be the smell of the soap. I put my face against the soft hair at the base of her neck (ch12) Blanche: ‘Here I am, all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand-new human being.’ (sc2) Blanche: [from the bathroom] ‘Possess your soul in patience!’ Stanley: ‘It’s not my soul I’m worried about!’ (sc7)</p>	<p>Memory and the past Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. (ch9) We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edge of print. (ch10) I can see her, going away from me, holding her arms out to me...of all the dreams, this is the worst one. (ch13) I found out...by coming into a room that I thought was empty...which... had two people in it...we danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly...a shot! (sc6) <i>Lurid reflections appear on the walls around Blanche...of a grotesque and menacing form</i> Operator, operator! Give me long-distance... I want to get in touch with Mr Shep Huntleigh (sc10)</p>	<p>Violent societies Angels of the Apocalypse...are smoking out a group of Baptist guerrillas. (ch14) They used steel cables, frayed at the ends...for our purposes, your hands and feet are not essential. (ch15) ‘This man has been convicted of rape.’ I want to tear, gouge, rend. (ch43) Stanley hurls the furs...jerks open a... drawer...pulls up a fistful. (sc2) Stanley tosses [the radio] out of the window...there is the sound of a blow (sc3) Stanley: ‘Take at Salerno. I figured that 4 out of 5 would not come through but I would...and I did.’ (sc11)</p>