

**Before seeing/reading the play**

1. Research the life and work of Tennessee Williams. These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc9.htm>  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/williams\\_t.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/williams_t.html)  
<http://www.booksfactory.com/writers/williams.htm>
2. Research the history of the play's production and its film adaptations. How many versions of the script are there? Why are there different versions of the play? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat\\_on\\_a\\_Hot\\_Tin\\_Roof](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat_on_a_Hot_Tin_Roof)  
<http://www.google.com/search?q=cat+on+a+hot+tin+roof+history&hl=en&tbs=tl:1&tbo=u&>
3. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* takes place on a plantation in the Mississippi Delta during the 1950s. Research American society during this period. These and other websites provide information:  
<http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade50.html>  
<http://www.academicamerican.com/postww2/topics/domestic.html>  
<http://www.nps.gov/history/delta/plantation/plantation.htm>
4. Research the culture of American Southern society, paying special attention to the rules of social conduct or etiquette for women. What is a Southern Belle? What does it mean for a girl to make her debut? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture\\_of\\_the\\_Southern\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_the_Southern_United_States)  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A9butante>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern\\_Belle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Belle)
5. Research alcoholism. These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/alcoholism/DS00340>  
<http://www.alcoholism.about.com/od/about/a/symptoms.htm>

6. Define the word “mendacity.” These and other websites provide information:  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mendacity>  
<http://onlinedictionary.datasegment.com/word/mendacity>
7. What is “power of attorney”? This and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.lectlaw.com/files/qflo4.htm>
8. The characters in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* often refer to each other by nicknames. Without prior knowledge of who these people are, what might these nicknames reveal to you about each character: Maggie the Cat, Sister Woman, Big Mama, Big Daddy, Preach? Consider the use of nicknames in your life. On what occasions do you use them, and with whom?
9. Define the word “catty”. This and other websites provide information:  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/catty>
10. What image does the title of the play bring to mind? Write down two or three ideas about what events might occur and what characters might be found in the play based on its title.
11. What is symbolism? How do symbols operate in dramatic literature? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.answers.com/topic/symbolism>  
[http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/literature/bedlit/glossary\\_p.htm](http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/literature/bedlit/glossary_p.htm)
12. What is nostalgia? This web site provides information:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nostalgia>
13. Research the play’s mythic references: Diana (Artemis) and Venus (Aphrodite). What is Diana’s association with bow and arrows? With Actaeon? With Niobe? What is Venus’ association with mirrors? With Hippolytus? These and other web sites provide information:  
<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/artemis.html>  
<http://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Artemis.html>  
<http://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Aphrodite.html>
14. What are the three dramatic unities described by Aristotle? Identify a contemporary play that adheres to these unities. Referring to the play you identified, tell how the unities strengthen

the dramatic structure. How do they interfere with the playwright's story-telling? These and other web sites provide information:

<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/spectopoo7.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical\\_unities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_unities)

### After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research on Southern American society in the 1950s. In what ways are the Pollitts a typical Southern family, and in what ways are they not? Site specific examples from the play to support your answer.
2. Place the members of the Pollitt family in order of status from highest to lowest and explain each character's placement. What confers status in the world of the play? Place the members of your own family in order of status. Who has the highest and the lowest status, and why? What, in your family, determines status?
3. Several characters in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* attempt to raise their status. Identify these characters. What tactics does each use? Which are successful, and how and why? Which fail, and how and why? Chart the changes in status for all the play's characters. Which rise? Which fall? In each case, how is her or his life better or worse because of the change?
4. What role does money play in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*? Identify the play's references to money. What do they tell you about the values of the play's world? What does money represent for each character?
5. Describe the relationship between the three couples in the play: Brick and Maggie, Big Daddy and Big Mama, Gooper and Mae. In each case, what factors or issues drive a wedge between the partners? What factors or issues keep them together?
6. Privacy (and the lack of it) plays a large role in the dynamics of the Politt family. How does the stage setting physicalize the difficulty of finding privacy in the Pollitt house? What is the attitude of each member of the family toward privacy, as expressed in the play? Identify the instances of eavesdropping. Identify the occasions when overheard (possibly misunderstood) information is relayed. How does living without privacy in an atmosphere of gossip and eavesdropping influence the behavior of the characters?

7. List the play's secrets. Be sure to identify the two big ones. In both greater and lesser instances, who keeps the secret, from whom, and for what purpose? What are the positive consequences of keeping each secret? The negative consequences? Under what circumstances is each secret revealed? How do the lesser secrets support the big secrets?
8. What role does mendacity play in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*? Which characters are guilty of some degree of mendacity? Which are free of mendacity? List the lies told in the play. In each case, who lies, to whom, and for what purpose? What are the positive consequences of each lie? The negative consequences? Under what circumstances is the truth revealed? Which lies make a difference?
9. Think of some examples of mendacity in your own experience. When do people lie to others? When do people lie to themselves? Under what circumstances is a telling a lie better than telling the truth? Under what circumstances is keeping a secret better than revealing it?
10. Write the evening's events from the perspective of Big Mama, Gooper and Mae.
11. Consider the names and nicknames of these characters: Brick, Gooper (Brother Man), Mae (Sister Woman), Big Daddy, Big Mama, Margaret (Maggie the Cat). How does Tennessee Williams's use of names reinforce or undercut the personalities of each?
12. Refer to your definition of "catty." How does this quality serve Maggie the Cat? How does it not? What other cat-like qualities does Maggie possess? Who are the other "cats" in the play? How is the character Brick brick-like?
13. What qualities does Gooper share with Big Daddy? What qualities does Brick share with Big Daddy? What of himself does Big Daddy see in each of his sons? Why does he love Brick more? How has Big Daddy's preference for Brick influenced Gooper? How does Gooper feel about Brick? How does Brick feel about Gooper?
14. Make a list comparing and contrasting the qualities of Brick and Gooper. How will the estate benefit if Gooper inherits and how will it suffer? How will the estate benefit if Brick inherits and how will it suffer? Take into account the likely contributions of each brother's wife. Which brother, in your opinion, should be the one to inherit, and why?

15. Compare the three wives in terms of loyalty, resilience, ambition, similarity to her husband, values shared with her husband, strategies for supporting her husband, willingness to forgive. How well is each served by these qualities? How is each harmed? Which qualities do you admire, and why? Which not, and why not?
16. Refer to your research on the etiquette of Southerners in the 1950s. To what extent do Maggie, Mae and Big Mama fit the definition of Southern belles? Take into account their backgrounds and their present situations. How does each regard her own status compared with the status of the other two, and why? Compare the situations of Maggie, Mae, Big Mama and Sookey. In this society, what options other than being wives or servants does each have? In what ways do their options depend on their social status? In what ways do their options depend on money? What options does each have for acquiring more money?
17. One of the play's major themes is unrequited love. Identify the instances. Who loves whom? Why is he or she not loved in return? How does each cope with the hurt and sadness of not being loved?
18. Another of the play's major themes is poison—that is, toxic attitudes, thoughts, lies and denials as well as an actual poisonous substance. Consider both the figurative and literal meanings of the word. What poison pervades the entire family? What specific contaminant is gnawing away at each of the principal characters?
19. From Brick's first entrance to the last moment of the play he drinks. Citing examples from the play, state what Brick uses alcohol for. What drives him to drink? How do you think Brick's relationship with alcohol will change after the play ends and why?
20. What is Echo Springs? What are the various references to Echo Springs? What do the words suggest it is? What is the relationship between the name and the use?
21. Skipper is a central character in the play, although all we learn of him comes from the words of others. Describe Skipper's personality, relationships, ambitions and yearnings using the information revealed by other characters.
22. What is the attitude of the principal characters toward homosexuality? Using examples from the text, make the case that Brick is a homosexual. Make the case that he is not. To whom is this an important question and why? To whom is it not and why?

23. What about his love for Skipper does Brick insist is clean and pure? What soils it? How does he cope with his disillusionment? What other options would have been available to him in the 1950s?
24. What do you learn about the offstage characters Jack Straw and Peter Ochello? What does their bed symbolize? What does it mean that Maggie and Brick now occupy it?
25. Describe the attitude of each of the principal characters toward children. Describe their attitudes toward the specific children in the play. What is Maggie implying when she calls them “no-necked monsters”? What does her childless state symbolize for Maggie? For the others? What does she hope to accomplish by claiming to be pregnant?
26. While at college, Maggie won the Diana Trophy, a prize for archery. Refer to your research on the goddess Diana (Artemis). Why is Diana a threatening goddess? What characteristics does Maggie share with the goddess?
27. Refer to your research on the goddess Venus. What emblems of Venus occur as props or pieces of the set for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*? Why are they appropriate for Maggie? What danger threatens men who reject Venus?
28. Maggie tells Brick, “I’ll win, all right.” Brick responds, “Win what? What is the victory of a cat on a hot tin roof?” What does Maggie want to win? To what extent is she victorious? Make a list of what each character wants to “win.” Who are the winners and who are the losers by the play’s conclusion? For which characters has it been necessary to lose something in order to win something? For which characters has losing something given them something else? Describe these character’s gains or losses.
29. Refer to your research on symbolism. What are the symbols in the play? What is the significance of each?
30. The stage directions in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* call for many specific offstage noises, such as the cry of a hawk, the sound of a storm, telephone conversations and the voices of children. What is the symbolic function of each of these sounds? How does each enhance the play’s action? What effect do the sounds have on you as an audience member?

31. Refer to your research on the Aristotelian unities. Which of these does *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* observe? How do they strengthen the play's impact?
32. Find instances of humor in the play. Why are they funny? How does humor function in the play?
33. If you are seeing *Pride and Prejudice*, compare the social significance of a young woman's coming out in the Regency Era in England with a young woman's debut in the American south in the 1950s. What in your own social group holds similar importance as a rite of passage?
34. What is nostalgia? Tennessee Williams is noted for writing characters who look back at and/or long for the past. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, what lies in each character's past that she or he yearns for? How does the presence of the past influence your feelings about the play?
35. Refer to your list of ideas about what the title *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* might signal regarding the play's content. Now that you've seen and/or read the play, which of your initial ideas holds true to the title's relevance? What do you now think is the meaning of the title?

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Members of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Education department—Amina Henry, Sarah Langan, Hilary Tate and Joan Langley—created the "Suggestions for Teaching *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*."

These suggestions were designed for students and teachers but may be enjoyed by audiences of all ages. They may be used without restriction for educational purposes.

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