Setting the Atmosphere of *Streetcar*...

**Directions:** Read playwright Tennessee Williams’ description of the Elysian Fields neighborhood in New Orleans. As you read, highlight instances of imagery (sensory language) and diction. Explain the significance of the playwright’s choices in the annotations column on the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Playwright’s description of the Elysian Fields neighborhood</th>
<th>Annotations</th>
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| The exterior of a two-story corner building on a street in New Orleans which is named Elysian Fields and runs between the L & N tracks and the river. The section is *poor* but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a *raffish* charm. The houses are mostly white frame, *weathered* gray, with rickety outside stairs and galleries and quaintly ornamented gables. This building contains two flats, upstairs and down. *Faded white stairs* ascend to the entrances of both. | Diction (words and phrases in bold print)  
- poor, raffish charm, weathered, faded, atmosphere of decay, spirit of life, cosmopolitan, warm and easy intermingling  
- The neighborhood is a run-down section of New Orleans where people of different races live happily. Even though these people scrape by to survive, they are friendly with one another and content with their lives.  

Imagery/Sensory Language (highlighted words and phrases)  
- **Sight:** The sky is soft (tender) and gives a sense of peace to the setting.  
- **Touch and Scent:** The air is humid and damp with the mix of salt and fresh water of the Mississippi.  
- **Scent:** Exotic foods (bananas and coffee) flavor the air. As a port city, New Orleans has many items shipped into its ports.  
- **Sound:** Blues music and people laughing/fighting/drinking in bars can be heard at all times. |

It is first dark of an evening early in May. *The sky that shows around the dim white building is a peculiarly tender blue, almost a turquoise*, which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the *atmosphere of decay*. You can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with their faint redolences of bananas and coffee. A corresponding air is evoked by the music of Negro entertainers at a barroom around the corner. In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This “Blue Piano” expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here.

Two women, one white and one colored, are taking the air on the steps of the building. The white woman is Eunice, who occupies the upstairs flat; the colored woman a neighbor, for New Orleans is a *cosmopolitan* city where there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old part of town. Above the music of the “Blue Piano” the voices of people on the street can be heard overlapping.

Words to know:  
1. **raffish** (adj): vulgar or cheap  
2. **gables** (pl. n): decorative elements on the triangular points of buildings’ roofs  
3. **redolences** (pl. n): fragrances; scents; smells  
4. **infatuated** (adj): passionate  
5. **cosmopolitan** (adj): a population made up of people from different backgrounds or walks of life