



Death of a Salesman

by Arthur Miller
directed by Joe Dowling

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Study Guide

The Guthrie Theater

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CHRONOLOGY

A Selected Chronology of the Life and Times of Arthur Miller

	Playwright	World History
1915	Arthur Asher Miller is born October 17 in New York City to Isidore (owner of the Miltex Coat and Suit Company) and Augusta Miller. He is the second of three children, joining older brother Kermit.	World War I in Europe (1914-1918). Henry Ford develops his farm tractor. Charlie Chaplin produces and performs in the silent film <i>The Tramp</i> . D.W. Griffith's controversial film <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> is produced.
1920-1928	Miller attends public schools in Harlem.	1920 19 th amendment to the U.S. Constitution grants women the right to vote. The "Red Scare" begins in the U.S. resulting in nationwide federal raids and mass arrests of suspected anarchists, communists and labor agitators. 1925 Scopes Trial in Tennessee focuses attention on the debate over teaching the theory of evolution in public schools.
1921	Miller's sister Joan is born. She later becomes a stage actress under the name Joan Copeland.	The first radio broadcast of a baseball game is made from the Polo Grounds in New York City.
1929	Miller's family moves to East Third Street in Brooklyn after Isidore's business suffers severe financial losses as a result of the stock market crash. He attends James Madison High School, plays football, sustaining an injury that later keeps him out of military service.	U.S. stock market crash marks the beginning of the Great Depression. The Academy Awards (Oscars) are introduced in Hollywood to honor each year's best motion pictures.
1930	Miller transfers to Abraham Lincoln High School, where he earns a reputation for being more interested in athletics than academics.	Unemployment and drought plague urban and rural U.S. Grant Wood <u>paints</u> "American Gothic."
1932	Miller graduates from Abraham Lincoln	President Roosevelt launches the New Deal

High School.

He is refused admittance to the University of Michigan. He works at various jobs: singer at a local radio station, truck driver, clerk in an automobile parts warehouse. He writes about working at his father's garment business in a memoir entitled "In Memoriam." He later recounts the bittersweet memory of his work at the warehouse in a nostalgic one-act play, *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955).

1934 Miller reapplies and gains admittance to the University of Michigan as a journalism student. He becomes a reporter and night editor for the student newspaper, *The Michigan Daily*. He supplements his income by caring for laboratory animals.

He meets Mary Grace Slattery at the University of Michigan.

1936 In March, Miller writes his first play, *No Villain*, in six days during spring vacation. In May, *No Villain* receives the Hopwood Award in Drama.

In September he transfers from journalism to English in his studies.

He revises *No Villain* for the Theatre Guild's Bureau of New Plays Contest with a new title, *They Too Arise*.

1937 In February, Miller enrolls in a playwriting class taught by Professor Kenneth T. Rowe.

They Too Arise receives an award of \$1,250 from the Bureau of New Plays

Era of extensive economic and social recovery programs.

Radio City Music Hall opens in New York.

The baby of Charles and Ann Lindbergh is kidnapped.

Dust storms ravage farmland in the U.S. Great Plains.

Benny Goodman organizes his swing jazz band.

"Public Enemy #1," gangster John Dillinger, is killed by the F.B.I.

The U.S.S.R. is admitted into the League of Nations.

Stalin's first purge of the Communist party begins.

Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini establish the Berlin-Rome Axis, a fascist political and military alliance.

The Spanish Civil War begins (1936-38).

Jesse Owens wins four gold medals at the Berlin Olympic Games.

George Kaufman and Moss Hart collaborate on the comedy *You Can't Take It With You*.

Eudora Welty's short story *Death of a Traveling Salesman* is published in the literary magazine *Manuscript*.

Japanese military capture Shanghai and Beijing.

Walt Disney produces *Snow White*, the first feature-length animated cartoon.

and is produced in Ann Arbor and Detroit.

Miller receives a second Hopwood Award in Drama for *Honors at Dawn*.

- 1938 Completes another revision of *They Too Arise*, now entitled *The Grass Still Grows*.
It wins the Theater Guild National Award.
He graduates from the University of Michigan with a B.A. degree in English Language and Literature. He returns to New York.
He writes scripts for the Federal Theater Project and also radio scripts.
- 1939 Continues to write scripts for Federal Theatre Project until it is ended by Congress.
Also continues to writes radio plays for CBS and NBC.
- 1940 Miller marries Mary Grace Slattery, who works as a waitress and editor so Miller can write.
Rejected by the army on medical grounds, Miller works for a year as a fitter in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, at the same time writing plays for the radio.
- 1941 Completes two radio plays, *The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber Who Was a Man*
- German forces enter Austria. Britain and France assent to Hitler's claims to the Sudetenland.
President Roosevelt sends an appeal to Hitler and Mussolini to settle European problems amicably.
U.S. Congress establishes a committee to investigate "Un-American Activities."
Antonin Artaud publishes *The Theatre and Its Double*.
- Germany invades Poland; World War II begins in Europe. Millions of Jews and other innocent people are sent to concentration camps by the Nazis: the Holocaust begins.
Finding the U.S. military underfunded and ill-prepared for defense, Roosevelt directs the military and industry to begin mobilizing for war.
- Germany invades France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Norway and Denmark. Japan joins Germany and Italy to form the Axis powers.
U.S. sends surplus war supplies and aid to the European countries allied against Axis aggression.
Registration for the military draft becomes mandatory in the U.S.
John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* wins the Pulitzer Prize for Literature.
- Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor draws U.S. into WWII.

and *William Ireland's Confession*.

- 1942 Completes radio play, *The Four Freedoms*.
President Roosevelt calls for increased military build-up.
U.S. rations industrial materials such as steel, copper and aluminum, in order to have them available for military production.
- 1943 Miller completes another play, *The Half-Bridge*.
He studies Marxist theories.
Allied forces under General Eisenhower defeat Axis forces in North Africa.
Allied forces invade Italy. Italy surrenders.
Oklahoma! by Rogers and Hammerstein opens.
- 1944 Miller tours several U.S. army camps and collects material for the screenplay *The Story of G.I. Joe*. He also publishes *Situation Normal*, his journal of the tour.
The Man Who Had All the Luck runs for only four performances on Broadway but receives the Theatre Guild's National Award.
A daughter Jane is born.
On D-Day, Allied forces land at Normandy beach. Under General Patton they win ground in Northern France. France is liberated. U.S. forces under General MacArthur retake the Philippines.
Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit* opens.
- 1945 Miller's first novel, *Focus*, a denunciation of anti-Semitism in America, is published.
Completes radio play, *Grandpa and the Statue*, and a one-act play, *That They May Win*.
Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin attend the Yalta Conference. Roosevelt dies soon after and is succeeded by Harry Truman. Germany surrenders in May. Japan surrenders in August after U.S. drops atomic bombs. WWII ends.
Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* opens on Broadway.
- 1947 Miller's *All My Sons* opens January 29 on Broadway. The play, directed by Elia Kazan, wins the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Donaldson Award and professional recognition for Miller.
Plans to stage *All My Sons* abroad meet with opposition over its potentially negative depiction of U.S. culture.
India gains independence from Great Britain.
U.S. and U.S.S.R. emerge as superpowers. Tensions between the two nations escalate into what will be called the Cold War.
Soviet-dominated governments are set up in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and (in 1948) in Czechoslovakia.

	A son Robert is born.	Tennessee Williams' <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> opens.
		Jackie Robinson, the first black player in the major leagues, plays for the Brooklyn Dodgers.
1948	Film version of <i>All My Sons</i> directed by Irving Reis is released.	Communist <i>coup d'état</i> in Czechoslovakia. Israel is established as a Jewish state.
1949	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> opens on Broadway, directed by Elia Kazan. Features Lee J. Cobb, Mildred Dunnock, Arthur Kennedy, Cameron Mitchell, Thomas Chalmers, Howard Smith and Don Keifer. The play <u>wins</u> the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics Award, the Antoinette Perry "Tony" Award and numerous other honors. He publishes "Tragedy and the Common Man" and "Arthur Miller on 'The Nature of Tragedy'" in <i>The New York Times</i> .	The Korean War begins (1949-1952). Vietnam gains independence from France. Communist Revolution leads to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Mao Tse-Tung becomes Chairman. South African <u>government</u> adopts Apartheid as official policy, sparking decades of social and racial unrest.
1950	Miller meets Marilyn Monroe at 20 th Century Fox Studios. Reacting to Congressional "witch hunts," Miller begins writing <i>The Crucible</i> and adapts Ibsen's <i>An Enemy of the People</i> .	U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy warns President Truman that Communists and their sympathizers have allegedly infiltrated the State Department. Truman instructs the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission to develop the hydrogen bomb.
1953	<i>The Crucible</i> opens on Broadway. Play <u>wins</u> the Antoinette Perry "Tony" and Donaldson Awards.	Francis Crick and James Watson discover the shape of DNA. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are executed for espionage against the U.S.
1954	The U.S. State Department denies Miller a passport to visit Brussels to attend the European premiere of <i>The Crucible</i> on the grounds that his presence there would not be in the best interests of the country.	U.S. Supreme Court declares racial segregation of public schools to be unconstitutional. William Golding writes <i>Lord of the Flies</i> .
1955	Two one-act plays, <i>A View from the</i>	Bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama,

	<i>Bridge and A Memory of Two Mondays</i> , are produced together on Broadway.	protests segregated bus lines.
1956	Miller divorces Mary Grace Slattery and marries Marilyn Monroe. Miller is questioned before the <u>House</u> Committee on Un-American Activities. He denies that he is a communist and refuses to name other suspects. He is blacklisted, cited for contempt of Congress and then convicted the following year.	Revolt in Hungary against Soviet control is crushed by Russian troops. Martin Luther King Jr. emerges as a leader in the civil rights movement. Japan is admitted into the United Nations.
1957	Arthur Miller's <i>Collected Plays</i> is published. Short story "The Misfits" is published in <i>Esquire</i> . First television production of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> airs on Britain's commercial network, ITA. Directed by Ailvio Narizzano and features Albert Dekker as Willy Loman.	Violence erupts in Little Rock, Arkansas, over the racial integration of public schools.
1958	US Court of Appeals reverses contempt of Congress conviction. Miller is elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Filming begins on Miller's screen adaptation of <i>The Misfits</i> , directed by John Huston and starring Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable and Montgomery Clift.	The European Common Market is created. Nikita Khrushchev becomes premier of the Soviet Union. Edward Albee writes <i>The Zoo Story</i> .
1959	Miller receives the Gold Medal for Drama from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.	Fidel Castro leads a revolution and establishes a communist regime in Cuba. Cuban refugees seek shelter in the U.S.
1961	<i>The Misfits</i> released. Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe divorce. Mother Augusta Miller dies.	The Bay of Pigs, an attempted invasion of Cuba by 1,500 U.S.-trained Cuban exiles, is crushed. The Berlin Wall is built.
1962	Miller marries Austrian-born	U.S. military council is established in South

photographer Inge Morath.

Vietnam.

U.S.S.R. sends arms, including nuclear missiles, to Cuba, escalating Cold War tensions.

Andy Warhol paints “Green Coca-Cola Bottles” and “Marilyn Monroe.”

Marilyn Monroe commits suicide.

1963 Miller publishes *Jane’s Blanket*, a children’s book.
A daughter Rebecca is born.
Death of a Salesman is included in Tyrone Guthrie’s inaugural season with Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy as Willy and Linda Loman.

President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

The Minnesota Theater Company led by Tyrone Guthrie opens its first season in Minneapolis.

1964 *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy* premiere in New York.

The Civil Rights Act becomes law in the U.S.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

1965 Miller is elected President of P.E.N. (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) International. He holds the office until 1969.

U.S. Congress passes the Voting Rights Act.
Malcolm X is shot in New York.

1966 First American television version of *Death of a Salesman* airs on CBS and is seen by 17 million people. Directed by Alex Segal, features Lee J. Cobb and Mildred Dunnock.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and 4,000 demonstrators march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in support of civil rights.

Mao Tse-Tung institutes the violent Cultural Revolution in China.

1967 *I Don’t Need You Anymore*, a collection of short stories, is published.
The Crucible is presented on television.

World-wide student protests oppose military actions and demand respect of human rights.

Six-Day War in the Middle East. Israel in conflict with Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

1968 *The Price* opens on Broadway.
Miller attends the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Vietcong launch the Tet Offensive.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy are assassinated.

	<p>Book sales of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> reach one million copies.</p> <p>Miller campaigns against the Soviet ban on the works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.</p>	<p>“Prague Spring” is crushed: U.S.S.R. troops invade Czechoslovakia and impose compliance with Soviet policies.</p>
1969	<p>Miller denies Greek publishers the right to print his works in protest against the official oppression of writers there.</p> <p>Miller publishes <i>In Russia</i>, a study of Russian culture, with photographs by Inge Morath.</p> <p>Films <i>The Reason Why</i>, an anti-war allegory.</p>	<p>Apollo 11 astronauts walk on the moon.</p> <p>Hundreds of thousands of people across the U.S. demonstrate in protest against the Vietnam War.</p>
1970	<p><i>Fame</i> and <i>The Reason Why</i>, two one-act plays, produced at New York's New Theatre Workshop.</p> <p>In response to <i>In Russia</i>, The Soviet Union bans all of Miller's works.</p>	<p>Salvador Allende, a Marxist, is elected President of Chile.</p> <p>President Nixon appoints Harry A. Blackmun to the Supreme Court.</p>
1971	<p><i>The Portable Arthur Miller</i> is published.</p> <p>Televised productions of <i>A Memory of Two Mondays</i> on PBS and <i>The Price</i> on NBC.</p> <p>Miller is elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.</p>	<p>U.S. voting age is lowered from 21 to 18.</p> <p>Nixon orders 90 day freeze on wages and prices in an effort to curb domestic inflation.</p> <p>Tyrone Guthrie dies. (b.1901)</p>
1972	<p>Miller's <i>The Creation of the World and Other Business</i>, a comedy, opens on Broadway.</p> <p>Grants permission for all-black production of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> at Center Stage in Baltimore.</p> <p>Revival of <i>The Crucible</i> on Broadway.</p>	<p>Nixon aides break into Democratic Party Headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C.</p> <p>Nixon visits China and the U.S.S.R.</p> <p>Terrorists kill Israeli athletes in the Olympic Village, Munich.</p>
1973	<p>Revival of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> in Philadelphia – first time the play is performed within one hundred miles of Broadway since 1949. Directed by George C. Scott until artistic differences lead Miller to take over. Features Martin</p>	<p>U.S. troops withdraw from Vietnam.</p> <p>Oil embargo by Arab nations precipitates a world-wide energy crisis.</p> <p>U.S. Supreme Court rules that individual states may not prohibit abortions during the</p>

	Balsam and Teresa Wright. Miller is appointed adjunct professor at the University of Michigan for the academic year 1973-74.	first six months of pregnancy.
1974	<i>Up from Paradise</i> (musical version of <i>The Creation of the World and Other Business</i>) produced at University of Michigan. Televised production of <i>After the Fall</i> airs on NBC. Miller participates in a symposium on Jewish culture in which he asserts that Jewish writers live in an apocalyptic context and are all “dancing on the edge of a precipice.”	Nixon resigns U.S. presidency to avoid impeachment following the Watergate scandal. Riots erupt in South Africa in protest of Apartheid policies.
1975	Revival of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> in New York at Circle in the Square. Directed by George C. Scott who also plays Willy Loman. Other cast members include Teresa Wright, Harvey Keitel, James Farentino, Arthur French and Chuck Patterson.	John N. Mitchell, John D. Erlichman, and H.R. Haldeman – top staff members of the Nixon Administration – are convicted and sentenced to 2½ to 8 years in prison for their parts in the Watergate cover-up.
1977	Miller and Morath publish <i>In the Country</i> , a book of photographs depicting rural life in Connecticut. <i>The Archbishop’s Ceiling</i> premieres in Washington, D.C. at the Kennedy Center, Eisenhower Theater.	Shah of Iran is ousted and replaced by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Nuclear reactor accident releases radiation at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania.
1978	<i>The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller</i> is published. Visits China.	Middle East peace treaty is signed after negotiations with Jimmy Carter, Egypt’s Anwar Sadat and Israel’s Menachem Begin.
1979	Publishes <i>Chinese Encounters</i> , a travel journal with photographs by Inge Morath.	Shah of Iran is forced into exile and replaced by Ayatollah Khomeini, who heads Islamic fundamentalist government. Close to 100 U.S. Embassy staff and marines are taken hostage.
1980	<i>The American Clock</i> opens in New York,	Race riots in Miami follow the acquittal of

	with Miller's sister Joan Copeland playing the character based on their mother. <i>Playing for Time</i> , Miller's adaptation of Holocaust survivor Fania Fénelon's memoirs, airs on CBS. Directed by Daniel Mann. Features Vanessa Redgrave and Jane Alexander.	four policemen involved in the beating death of a black man. Attempted rescue of U.S. hostages held in Iran fails.
1982	<i>Some Kind of Love Story</i> and <i>Elegy for a Lady</i> , two short plays, are produced at the Long Wharf Theater in Connecticut.	British forces invade the Falkland Islands. Sam Shepard's <i>Fool for Love</i> opens.
1983	Miller directs a successful production of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> with a Chinese cast in Beijing, China. Revival of <i>A View from the Bridge</i> at the Ambassador Theatre on Broadway.	U.S. marines invade the Caribbean island of Grenada and oust leftist rulers.
1984	Miller receives the Kennedy Center Honors for Lifetime Achievement. Publishes <i>Salesman in Beijing</i> with photographs by Inge Morath. <i>Death of a Salesman</i> is revived on Broadway at the Broadhurst Theatre. Directed by Michael Rudman. With Dustin Hoffman, Kate Reid, John Malkovich, Stephen Lang, David Huddleston, and David Chandler. Miller disputes the Wooster Group's unauthorized use of scenes from <i>The Crucible</i> in their theater piece <i>L.S.D.</i>	Researchers announce the discovery of the virus that causes AIDS. Famine devastates Ethiopia.
1985	1984 Broadway revival of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> airs on CBS to 25 million viewers. Miller is one of fifteen writers and scientists invited to the Soviet Union to a conference with Mikhail Gorbachev discussing Soviet policies.	Mikhail Gorbachev unilaterally halts deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe.
1987	Miller publishes his autobiography, <i>Timebends: A Life</i> .	Oliver North acknowledges his involvement in the Iran/Contra scandal.

1989	Opening of The Arthur Miller Centre, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.	The Berlin Wall is dismantled. Students demonstrate for democratic reforms in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China.
1990	<i>Everybody Wins</i> , a film version of his play <i>Some Kind of Love Story</i> , is released.	Iraq invades Kuwait. The U.N. imposes sanctions and the U.S. and allies send military forces to Saudi Arabia. Saddam Hussein seizes hostages. The U.S. and Allied soldiers defeat Iraqi Army in 100-hour battle and liberate Kuwait.
1991	Miller receives the Mellon Bank Award for his lifetime achievement in the humanities. <i>The Ride Down Mount. Morgan</i> is produced in London. <i>Death of a Salesman</i> is produced at the Guthrie Theater with Mel Winkler and Isabell Monk O'Connor as Willy and Linda Loman.	Following the Persian Gulf War, A UN trade embargo remains in effect until Iraq would destroy its nuclear-, biological-, and chemical-weapons programs. U.S.S.R. dissolves into independent nations.
1993	<i>The Last Yankee</i> is produced in New York. It is awarded the National Medal of the Arts.	Terrorists bomb the World Trade Center in New York.
1994	<i>Broken Glass</i> opens on Broadway at the Booth Theatre. Miller is appointed Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University for one year.	Nelson Mandela is elected president of South Africa.
1995	Miller's 80 th birthday is celebrated worldwide. Tributes to the playwright are held at the National Theatre in London and Town Hall in New York. He also receives the William Inge Festival Award for distinguished achievement in the American theater. <i>Homely Girl, A Life and Other Stories</i> , a collection of short fiction, is published.	Terrorist bombing in Oklahoma City kills more than 50 Americans.
1996	Miller receives the Edward Albee Last Frontier Playwright Award.	Civil wars devastate central African nations.

	A film version of <i>The Crucible</i> is released.	British Prince Charles and Princess Diana divorce.
1998	<p><i>Mr. Peters' Connections</i> premieres at the Signature Theatre Company in New York City as part of a season dedicated to the playwright's works.</p> <p>Miller receives the Senator Claiborne Pell Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts, the Lucille Lortel Award for Lifetime Achievement and the first PEN/Laura Pels Foundation Award to honor an American dramatist.</p> <p><i>The Ride Down Mount Morgan</i> opens at The Public Theatre in New York.</p>	Federal investigations bring to light alleged White House scandals.
1999	<p>The Goodman Theatre's 50th anniversary production of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> moves to Broadway and wins four Tony Awards.</p> <p>Miller receives the Tony Lifetime Achievement Award. He is also awarded the prestigious Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, an award presented to "a man or woman who has made an outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind's enjoyment and understanding of life."</p>	N.A.T.O. troops intervene in ethnic wars in the former Yugoslavia.
2001	<p>Miller is named the 2001 Jefferson Lecturer in the Humanities, the highest honor the federal government bestows for distinguished intellectual achievement in the humanities.</p> <p>A film based on <i>Focus</i> is released.</p> <p>He receives the National Book Award's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Literature.</p> <p>He is honored as Praemium Imperiale Laureate by the Japan Art Association.</p>	<p>On September 11th, Al Qaeda terrorists hijack four civilian airliners. Two destroy the World Trade Center in New York City. One severely damages the Pentagon building in Washington D.C. The fourth crashes in rural Pennsylvania. Thousands are killed.</p> <p>U.S. and allied forces go to war in Afghanistan to defeat Taliban troops and Al Qaeda terrorists.</p>
2002	Miller's wife, Inge Morath, dies.	The Bush administration announces a new strategy on combating weapons of mass

Resurrection Blues premieres at the Guthrie Theater.

destruction. Explicitly warns foes that if such weapons are used against the United States, Washington will respond with “overwhelming force.”

Convinced that President Saddam Hussein of Iraq is harboring W.M.D., United Nations conducts inspections in Iraq. Hussein insists they will find nothing.

2003 Awarded the Jerusalem Prize.
Brother, Kermit Miller dies on October 17th.

Bush administration decides that an American-led invasion in Iraq to bring about a regime change is the only way to insure that Iraq would not use W.M.D against the U.S.

Hussein becomes a fugitive for 9 months during the invasions and is eventually found in an 8 foot hole at a farm near Tikrit and captured by U.S. forces.

2004 Revival of *After the Fall* at the Roundabout Theater, New York.
The Guthrie Theater opens its 2004-2005 season with *Death of a Salesman*. The production is scheduled to transfer to the Dublin Theatre Festival in the fall. This will mark the first time the Guthrie performs abroad.

Presidential election 2004. Incumbent President George W. Bush is challenged by Democratic Party’s candidate John Kerry.

Miller’s latest play, *Finishing the Picture*, is part of the 2004/2005 season at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago.

Arthur Miller on the Guthrie Stage

- 1963 *Death of a Salesman*
- 1974 *The Crucible*
- 1991 *Death of a Salesman*
- 1997 *The Price*
- 1999 *Mr. Peters’ Connections*
- 2002 *All My Sons* and *Resurrection Blues*



Hume Cronyn as Willy in the 1963 Guthrie production.



Hume Cronyn as Willy and Jessica Tandy as Linda in the 1963 Guthrie production.



Isabell Monk as Linda , Monti Sharp as Biff and Wayne Wilkerson as Happy in the 1991 Guthrie production.



Mel Winkler as Willy and Stephen Yoakam as Charley in the 1991 Guthrie production.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Arthur Miller In His Own Words

ON THEATER

To me the theater is not a disconnected entertainment, which it usually is to most people here. It's the sound and the ring of the spirit of the people at any one time. It is where a collective mass of people, through the genius of some author, is able to project its terrors and its hopes and to symbolize them. ... I personally feel that the theater has to confront the basic themes always. And the faces change from generation to generation to generation, but their roots are generally the same, and that is a question of man's increasing awareness of himself and his environment, his quest for justice and for the right to be human. That's a big order, but I don't know where else excepting at a playhouse where there's reasonable freedom, one should hope to see that.

Arthur Miller, "The Contemporary Theater," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Summer, 1967. From a speech delivered at the University of Michigan, February 28, 1967

Watching a play is not like lying on a psychiatrist's couch or sitting alone in front of the television. In the theater you can sense the reaction of your fellow citizens along with your own reactions. You may learn something about yourself, but sharing it with others brings a certain relief – the feeling that you are not alone, you're part of the human race. I think that's what theater is about and why it will never be finished.

Arthur Miller, quoted in Peter Lewis, "Change of Scene for a Mellow Miller," *The Sunday Times*, November 3, 1991

Life is not reassuring; if it were we would not need the consolations of religion, for one thing. Literature and art are not required to reassure when in reality there is no reassurance, or to serve up "clean and wholesome" stories in all times and all places. Those who wish such art are welcome to have it, but those who wish art to symbolize how life really is, in order to understand it and perhaps themselves, also have a right to their kind of art.

Arthur Miller, "The Good Old American Apple Pie," *Censored Books: Critical Viewpoints*, 1993

I suppose that to me a play is the way I sum up where I am at any particular moment in my life. I'm not conscious of that when I'm working, but when I look back at what I've written, it's quite clear to me that that's what I'm doing, trying to find out what I really think about life.

Like everybody else, I think I believe certain things, and I think I disbelieve others, but when you try to write a play about them, you find out that you believe a little of what you disbelieve and you disbelieve a lot of what you think you believe. The dramatic form, at least as I understand it, is a kind of proof. It's a sort of court proceeding where the less-than-true gets cast away and what's left is the kernel of what one really stands for and believes.

Arthur Miller, Address at the Guthrie Theater Global Voices, Forums on Art & Life, March 23, 1997

My plays are always involved with society, but I'm writing about people, too, and it's clear over the years that audiences understand them and care about them. The political landscape changes, the issues change, but the people are still there. People don't really change that much.

Arthur Miller, quoted in "Arthur Miller: A Dramatist for the Ages," Dan Hulbert, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 2000

ON THE PLAY

Writing in that form was like moving through a corridor in a dream, knowing instinctively that one would find every wriggle of it and, best of all, where the exit lay. There is something like a dream's quality in my memory of the writing and the day or two that followed its completion.

I remember the rehearsal when we had our first audience. Six or seven friends. The play working itself out under the single bulb overhead. I think that was the first and only time I saw it as others see it.

...To me the tragedy of Willy Loman is that he gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it. It is the tragedy of a man who did believe that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down for mankind by those clean-shaven frontiersmen who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices. From those forests of canned goods high up near the sky, he heard the thundering command to succeed as it ricocheted down the newspaper-lined canyons of his city, heard not a human voice, but a wind of a voice to which no human can reply in kind, except to stare into the mirror at a failure.

Arthur Miller, "The 'Salesman' Has a Birthday," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1950

I knew that something astounding was being made here. It would have been almost enough for me without even opening the play. The actors, like myself and Kazan and the producer, were happy, of course, that we might have a hit; but there was a good deal more. There was a new fact of life, there was an alteration of history for all of us."

Arthur Miller, "American Theater" *Holiday*, January 1955.

The first image that occurred to me which was to result in *Death of a Salesman* was of an enormous face, the height of the proscenium arch, which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of a man's head. In fact, *The Inside of His Head* was the first title. It was conceived half in laughter, for the inside of his head was a mass of contradictions. ... The *Salesman* image was from being absorbed with the concept in life that nothing in life comes "next" but that everything exists together and at the same time within us; that there is no past to be "brought forward" in a human being, but that he is his past at every moment and that the present is merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to.

I wished to create a form which, in itself as a form, would literally be the process of Willy Loman's way of mind. But to say "wished" is not accurate. Any dramatic form is an artifice, a way of transforming a subjective feeling into something that can be comprehended through public symbols. Its efficiency as a form is to be judged – at least by the writer – by how much of the original vision and feeling is lost or distorted by this transformation. I wished to speak of the salesman most precisely as I felt about him, to give no part of that feeling away for the sake of any effect or any dramatic necessity. What was wanted now was not a mounting line of tension, nor a gradually narrowing cone of intensifying suspense, but a bloc, a single chord presented as such at the outset, within which all the strains and melodies would already be contained. The strategy ... was to appear entirely unstrategic. ... If I could, I would have told the story and set forth all the characters in one unbroken speech or even one sentence or a single flash of

light. As I look at the play now its form seems the form of a confession, for that is how it is told, now speaking of what happened yesterday, then suddenly following some connection to a time 20 years ago, then leaping even further back and then returning to the present and even speculating about the future.

Arthur Miller, Introduction to *Collected Plays*, 1957

Willy is foolish and even ridiculous sometimes. He tells the most transparent lies, exaggerates mercilessly, and so on. But I really want you to see that his impulses are not foolish at all. He cannot bear reality, and since he can't do much to change it, he keeps changing his ideas of it.

Arthur Miller, *Salesman in Beijing*, 1984

The form of *Death of a Salesman* was an attempt, as much as anything else, to convey the bending of time. There are two or three sorts of time in that play. One is social time; one is psychic time, the way we remember things; and the third one is the sense of time created by the play and shared by the audience. ...The play is taking place in the Greek unity of 24 hours; and yet it is dealing with material that goes back probably 25 years. And it almost goes forward through Ben, who is dead. So *time* was an obsession for me at the moment, and I wanted a way of presenting it so that it became the *fiber* of the play, rather than being something that somebody comments about. In fact, there is very little comment really in *Salesman* about time. I also wanted a form that could sustain itself the way we deal with crises, which is not to deal with them. After all, there is a lot of comedy in *Salesman*; people forget it because it is so dark by the end of the play. But if you stand behind the audience you hear a lot of laughter. It's a deadly ironical laughter most of the time, but it *is* a species of comedy. The comedy is really a way for Willy and others to put off the evil day, which is the thing we all do. I wanted that to *happen* and not be something talked *about*.

Arthur Miller, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 1985

THE PLAY

Characters and Synopsis

CHARACTERS

Willy Loman
Linda Loman
Biff Loman
Happy Loman
Charley
Bernard
Jenny
Ben
Howard Wagner
Miss Francis
Letta
Miss Forsythe
Stanley

SYNOPSIS

Death of a Salesman takes place in and around the Brooklyn house of Willy Loman, a salesman who has traveled for more than 30 years up and down the New England coast. The action is confined within a 24-hour period, from Monday night to late Tuesday evening, much of it reflecting the tragic turmoil of Willy's mind. A requiem concludes the play, an epilogue at the funeral of the salesman.

The story is told through a complex montage of scenes interlocking the present with past events - memories, imagined moments, and flashbacks from the life of Willy Loman.

At 63, Willy Loman, a traveling salesman all his life, is becoming increasingly worried about his ability to make ends meet. Although his house is nearly paid for, and his sons are on their own, lately each sales trip is more exhausting and less satisfying. He feels drained and is losing his grip on his own existence: "I'm tired to the death" he tells his wife, Linda.

Their older son, Biff, estranged from his father for years, has moved away and has been drifting across the country: "I've had twenty or thirty different jobs since I left home before the war." Happy, his younger brother, stayed in New York and has his own place. He works in a warehouse and pursues his dream: "My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women." For the moment the two brothers are back home, visiting their parents. From the bedroom they used to share as boys, they overhear their parents and also talk about their own lives.

Willy has returned home from an aborted sales trip and Linda, worried about her husband's difficulties, urges him to ask his firm for a position that would not require traveling. He agrees to speak to his boss. Once she has gone to bed, however, Willy begins to talk to himself, troubled by a restless mind spinning out of control: "I have such thoughts, such strange thoughts," he had actually told Linda earlier.

In this tormented state Willy recalls his past, the young father he once was - an energetic and boasting

man, determined to properly raise his boys by sharing with them his strong business outlook and dreams of success. This whirlpool of memories replays snippets of the history of the Loman family leading up to the present. Through the play a recurring image haunts Willy's imagination – it's his older brother Ben, a model of entrepreneurial success. Other scenes reveal discrepancies between Willy's apparent optimism and the actual situation in which the Loman family finds itself.

When Happy and Biff wonder about Willy's behavior, Linda Loman sadly acknowledges the deterioration of their father's spirit, and reveals to them that he has lost his salary and is now working on commission only. She then insists to the boys not to turn their backs on Willy, but to show him respect and give him support: "Attention must be finally paid to such a person," she emphatically reminds them. When she also tells them that their father has even tried to kill himself, Biff agrees to move back home, find a decent job and help out his parents.

Next morning, encouraged by his sons' renewed support, Willy goes to see his boss. The young man, Howard, heir to the Wagner company, not only refuses Willy's request, but he eventually lets know the failing salesman that he is no longer needed as an employee. Willy turns to his neighbor Charley who offers him a job, but Willy's pride prevents him from accepting this reasonable proposition. Instead, as he has done before, he borrows more money from Charley to pay the latest round of bills and his insurance premium.

In a restaurant, as planned, Willy meets his sons for dinner. He finds out that Biff failed to have the intended interview with Oliver, his former employer, and was left waiting for hours with no other result than his helpless frustration. This circumstance lead him to steal the man's fountain pen, an irrational, impulsive, reprehensible act. Willy, anguished by his own predicament, refuses to hear any such facts because, as he shouts at his sons: "The woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around. I was fired today." They are quite shocked by the news. Meanwhile Willy is unable to acknowledge Biff's disappointment and refuses to listen to the uncomfortable truth why his son's plan didn't succeed. Together, Biff and Happy end up leaving Willy behind, as they walk out of the restaurant with two young women they had met there. Alone, and again tormented by his contradictions and confusing thoughts, Willy recalls figments of the past. Particularly disturbing is his guilty memory of an extra-marital encounter with a woman in a Boston hotel room, where Biff had once surprised him.

At night, later, when Biff and Happy return home, Linda chastises her sons for having abandoned their father in the restaurant. And she continues to fiercely defend Willy. But Biff can no longer live with lies and false hopes. He tells his father to "take that phony dream and burn it" and explodes with rage and bitter recriminations. Willy sees Biff's outburst as a sign of love. "That boy is going to be magnificent!" he exclaims as he clings to his resolve to make his dream of success possible for his sons. Counting on the money from his life insurance policy that will ensure the family's future prosperity and his sons success, he drives off into the night and is killed in an automobile crash.

After the funeral, when Biff concludes that his father had "the wrong dreams," Charley counters and defends Willy: "Nobody dast blame this man. [...] For a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. [...] He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back - that's an earthquake. [...] A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory."

Finally, Linda left by herself in her devastating grief, addresses Willy and wonders why did he do it, why did he kill himself just when the last payment on the house was made. Shaken by pain, she mutters, "We're free and clear. We're free..."

BACKGROUND

Few American plays of the 20th century hold as prominent a place in our collective imagination as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. A triumphant success on Broadway, the play won both the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1949 and immediately became a resounding affirmation of the author's distinctive voice. Drama critic Brooks Atkinson said of that first production, "Mr. Miller has looked with compassion into the hearts of some ordinary Americans and quietly transferred their hope and anguish to the theater." During the last 55 years, the play has been published and produced all over the world. Whether in America or Germany, Russia or China, Willy Loman's tragic struggle for dignity has echoed with the essential truth of the human condition in any society where dreams can be shattered by adversity. In 1983, Miller traveled to China to direct a production of *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing; it was the first American play to be directed by an American in that country. The enduring popularity of *Death of a Salesman* over five decades and across cultural boundaries supports Miller's own description of it as a play which raises "questions ... whose answers define humanity."

PLAYWRIGHT

Arthur Asher Miller was born October 17, 1915 in New York. His father was a clothing manufacturer in Brooklyn (the setting for *Death of a Salesman*). While many of his high school years were devoted to athletics, he took a growing interest in literature as he approached graduation. At the University of Michigan, he studied journalism and drama and started writing. Two plays written in college won prizes. Miller moved back East after graduation, continued to write and held a variety of odd jobs. In 1938, Miller joined the Federal Theater Project in New York City writing stage and radio plays. His first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, opened in 1944, but it was *All My Sons* (1947) that established his reputation. *Death of a Salesman* followed two years later and received extensive praise as "one of the finest dramas in the whole range of American Theater" (Brooks Atkinson, *The New York Times*). Among his other well-known plays are: *The Crucible* (1953), *A View From the Bridge* (1955), *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955), *Incident at Vichy* (1964) and *The Price* (1968). Miller has acknowledged the influence of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen on his own writing as well as on modern drama of our century. In 1950, he adapted a version of Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People*. Miller was called before the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities in 1956. In the same year, after the failure of his first marriage, he married Hollywood star Marilyn Monroe, for whom he wrote *The Misfits* which was filmed in 1961. His play *After the Fall* (1964) followed the failure of this marriage. In addition to other plays, Miller has written short stories, novels, an autobiography and many theater essays. Throughout his career he has also championed various causes of artistic freedom and human rights throughout the world.

Memorable Quotes From the Play

The rich language of the play speaks for itself. Reading the following selected quotes may help you better appreciate both the poetic resonance of Arthur Miller's dramatic literature and the actors' performance.

ACT ONE

Your mind is overactive, and the mind is what counts, dear.

Linda

I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts.

Willy

That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening!

Willy

I tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is. I don't know — what I'm supposed to want.

Biff

I've always made a point of not to wasting my life, and every time I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life.

Biff

I don't know what the hell I'm workin' for. ... See, Biff, everybody around me is so false that I'm constantly lowering my ideals...

Happy

Somebody with character, with resistance! Like Mom, y'know?

Happy

Never leave a job till you're finished — remember that.

Willy

...the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want.

Willy

I talk too much. A man oughta come in with a few words.

Willy

The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress!

Willy

Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich.

Uncle Ben

Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way.

Uncle Ben

... I still feel — kind of temporary about myself.

Willy

A man is not a bird, to come and go with the springtime.

Linda

Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. ... The man is exhausted.

Linda

...what goes through a man's mind, driving seven hundred miles home without having earned a cent?
...How long can this go on?How long?

Linda

You don't raise a guy to a responsible job who whistles in the elevator!

Happy

But remember, start big and you'll end up big.

Willy

It's not what you say, it's how you say it — because personality always wins the day.

Willy

ACT TWO

All I'd need would be a little lumber and some peace of mind.

Willy

'Cause you gotta admit, business is business.

Howard

You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away — a man is not a piece of fruit!

Willy

It's not what you do, Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face!It's contacts, Ben, contacts! ... and that's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked!

Willy

The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell.

Charley

After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive.

Willy

Willy, nobody's worth nothin' dead.

Charley

...I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been!

Biff

Dad is never so happy as when he's looking forward to something!

Happy

...the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around.

Willy

Don't you care whether he lives or dies?

Linda

I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman!

Willy

Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?

Biff

REQUIEM

He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong.

Biff

You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman there is no rock bottom to the life. ... He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. ... A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.

Charley

He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have — to come out number-one man.

Happy

I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. We're free and clear. We're free. We're free... We're free...

Linda

Witnessing the First Staging of the Play in 1949

The following testimonies are excerpted from comments made after the world premiere of Arthur Miller's work at the Morosco Theatre in New York City, staged by Elia Kazan, with Lee J. Cobb in the role of Willy Loman. Opening night was on February 10, 1949. These quotes reflect the strong impact of the play on its first encounter with the public.

A great play of our day has opened at the Morosco. *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller, has majesty, sweep and shattering dramatic impact. ... There is always pertinence to this tale of a defeated old drummer coming to the dead end of his career. A terrible documentation has been leavened with bursts of wild humor and more than one moment of touching grandeur, while the fluent scenes build inexorably to the climax. ... The offering is theater of the first order.

Howard Barnes, *Herald Tribune*

In Arthur Miller's *Salesman* there's much of *Everyman*. Bothered, bewildered, but mostly bedeviled, as Willy Loman is, he's not a great deal different from the majority of his contemporaries. He, even as you and I, builds himself a shaky shelter of illusion. ...

Willy has created an image of himself which fails to correspond with Willy Loman as he is. According to the playwright, it's the size of the discrepancy that matters. In *Salesman* Loman, the discrepancy is so great that it finally slays him. Ironically, by his own unsteady hand.

Robert Garland, *The New York Journal-American*

From every point of view, *Death of a Salesman* ... is a rich and memorable drama. It is so simple in style and so inevitable in theme that it scarcely seems like a thing that has been written and acted. For Mr. Miller has looked with compassion into the hearts of some ordinary Americans and quietly transferred their hope and anguish to the theater. ... *Death of a Salesman* has the flow and spontaneity of

a suburban epic that may not be intended as poetry but becomes poetry in spite of itself. ...

Writing like a man who understands people, Mr. Miller has no moral precepts to offer and no solutions of the salesman's problems. He is full of pity, but he brings no piety to it.

Brooks Atkinson, *The New York Times*

Mr. Miller has been praised before for the "naturalness" of his dialogue. His writing in *Death of a Salesman* is splendid - terse, always in character and always aimed toward the furtherance of his drama.

John Chaplan, *Daily News*

[Willy Loman] has lived on his smile and on his hopes; survived from sale to sale; been sustained by the illusion that he has countless friends in his territory, that everything will be all right, that he is a success, and that his boys will be successes also. His misfortune is that he has gone through life as an eternal adolescent, as someone who has not dared to take stock, as someone who never knew who he was.

John Mason Brown, *Saturday Review of Literature*

The death of Arthur Miller's salesman is symbolic of the breakdown of the whole concept of salesmanship inherent in our society.

Miller does not say these things explicitly. But it is the strength of the play that it is based on this understanding, and that he is able to make his audience realize it no matter whether or not they are able consciously to formulate it. When the audience weeps at *Death of a Salesman*, it is not so much over the fate of Willy Loman - Miller's pathetic hero - but over the millions of such men who are our brothers, uncles, cousins, neighbors. ...

Willy Loman never acknowledges or learns the error of his way. To the very end he is a devout believer in the ideology that destroys him. He believes that life's problems are solved by making oneself "well-liked" (in the salesman's sense) and by a little cash.

Harold Clurman, *Tomorrow*

The Universality of the Play

The following is a selected list of performances of *Death of a Salesman* (stage, television and videos), produced all over the world since the first staging of the play in New York. It covers some fifty years and makes an eloquent case for the wide popularity and universal appeal of Arthur Miller's work.

1949, New York, Morosco Theater
1949, London, England, Phoenix Theatre
1950, Vienna, Austria, Theater in der Josefstadt
1951, Dublin, Ireland, Gate Theatre Productions
1951, Cape Town, South Africa, Sarah Sylvia Company
1951, Rome, Italy, Eliseo Theatre
1951, United States, Columbia Pictures
1952, Mexico City, Palacio de Bellas Artes
1952, Madrid, Spain, La Compania Lope de Vega
1957, England, Granada Television, ITA

1958, Canada, Television, CBC
1958, Bucharest, Romania, Municipal Theatre
1959, Moscow, Russia, Vakhtangov Theatre
1962, France, Television, CBC
1963, Minneapolis, Guthrie Theater
1966, United States, Television, CBS
1972, Baltimore, Center Stage
1975, Pompeii, Italy, Teatro Grande
1975, New York, Circle in the Square
1979, London, England, The National Theatre
1982, Sydney, Australia, Nimrod Theatre
1983, Beijing, China, Beijing People's Art Theatre
1984, Tokyo, Japan
1984, New York, Broadhurst Theatre
1985, United States, Television, CBS
1986, Dublin, Ireland, Gaiety Theatre
1991, Minneapolis, Guthrie Theater
1992, Taipei, Taiwan, The Performance Workshop of the National Theatre
1999, Chicago, Goodman Theatre, restaged New York, Eugene O'Neill Theatre
2000, Bucharest, Romania, The National Theatre

The Parable of 20th Century America: A Montage of Comments About the Play

Death of a Salesman is a challenge to the American dream. Lest this be misunderstood, I hasten to add that there are two versions of the American dream. The historical American dream is the promise of a land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all. This dream needs no challenge, only fulfillment. But since the Civil War, and particularly since 1900, the American dream has become distorted to the dream of business success. A distinction must be made even in this.

The original premise of our dream of success - popularly represented in the original boy parables of Horatio Alger - was that enterprise, courage and hard work were the keys to success. ... [But this] too has changed. Instead of the ideals of hard work and courage, we have salesmanship. ... The goal of salesmanship is to make a deal, to earn a profit - the accumulation of profit being an unquestioned end in itself. ...

When the connection is no more than an exchange of commodities, the man himself ceases to be a man, becomes a commodity himself, a spiritual cipher. This is a humanly untenable situation. The salesman ... sells his "personality" ... [which] becomes only a means to an end - namely, the consummated sale - a mask worn so long that it soon comes to be mistaken, even by the man who wears it, as his real face. But it is only his commercial face with a commercial smile and a commercial aura of the well-liked, smoothly adjusted, oily cog in the machine of the sales apparatus. This leads to a behavior pattern which is ultimately doomed. ...

Harold Clurman, *Tomorrow*, May 1949

This is an inspired play about a friendly but slightly bumptious little man who has foolishly founded his life on windy slogans and petty opportunism, desperately deceiving himself with the humbug of his times. He grows old in years, but he never reaches adulthood. By some instinct Mr. Miller has laid hold

of a common theme and written about it with the insight of a poet. ... His play gets painfully close to the basic truth.

Bruce Atkinson, *The New York Times*, March 12, 1950

We knew who Willy Loman was instantaneously; we recognized his milieu. ... Something has indeed gone wrong with at least part of the American dream, and Willy Loman is the victim of the detour. Willy had to be overwhelmed on the stage as, in fact, his prototypes are in everyday life. Coming out of his section of our great sprawling middle class, preoccupied with its own restlessness and displaying its obsession for the possession of trivia, Willy was indeed trapped. His predicament in a New World where there just aren't any more forests to clear or virgin railroads to lay or native American empires to first steal and then build upon, left him with nothing but some left-over values which had forgotten how to prize industriousness over cunning, usefulness over mere acquisition, and, above all, humanism over "success." The potency of the great tale of a salesman's death was in our familiar recognition of his entrapment which, suicide or no, is *deathly*.

Lorraine Hansberry, *Village Voice*, August, 1959

If we do a classic, it has to have a meaning for us today and it's got to be exciting. ... Everyone should see *Death of a Salesman* every five years.

Elia Kazan, An interview about the Lincoln Center, 1960

Willy Loman and his two sons ... are ruined by their belief in "the wrong dream," the mystique of salesmanship. "What are you building?" says Ben, Willy's millionaire brother. "Lay your hand on it. Where is it?" Unlike most hero-victims, Willy is not cynical about the values which are corrupting him; he is pathetic because, brightly and unquestioningly, he reveres them. ... In a series of beautifully welded interlocking flashbacks we pursue Willy's thoughts into the past, back to the germinal moment of calamity when he was surprised by Biff in a hotel room with a half-dressed tart. This encounter, ... stunted Biff's career and left Willy with a load of remorse redoubled by the fact that he, too, was the unsuccessful one of two brothers. Memory explodes the cocoon of illusions within which he preserves his self-respect, and (ostensibly for the insurance money) he commits suicide.

The play is Miller's triumph in the plain style; it rings with phrases which have entered into the contemporary subconscious. ... More memorably, there is Mrs. Loman's anguished rebuke to her sons for having scorned their father. ... Miller's prose sometimes slips into a sentimental rhythm of despair which could be convicted of glibness. But the theatre is an impure craft, and *Death of a Salesman* organizes its impurities with an emotional effect unrivalled in postwar [WWII] drama.

Kenneth Tynan, "American Blues: The Plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams," in *Curtains*, 1961

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is, perhaps, to this time, the most mature example of a myth of contemporary life. The chief value of this drama is its attempt to reveal those ultimate meanings which are resident in modern experience. Perhaps the most significant comment on this play is not its literary achievement, as such, but is, rather, the impact which it has on spectators, both in America and abroad. The influence of this drama ... continues to grow in world theater. For it articulates, in language which can be appreciated by popular audiences, certain new dimensions of the human dilemma.

Esther Merle Jackson, *College Language Association Journal*, 1963

[Miller's] play was chosen because it was American and, in our view, a very strong contender for eventual classical status.

Tyrone Guthrie, *A New Theatre*, 1964

One thought came to me: in the scenes where the salesman mentally goes back to the early years of his marriage, when his boys were young and the house was surrounded by trees and open country, I had to create something visually that would make these constant transitions in time immediately clear to the audience. My next thought was that, even if we ended up with a big stage, with plenty of stagehands, and I was able to design some mechanism for handling the large number of individual scenes, the most important visual symbol in the play - the real background of the story - was the salesman's house. Therefore, why should that house not be the main set, with all the other scenes - the corner of a graveyard, a hotel room in Boston, the corner of a business office, ... and so on - played on a forestage? If I designed these little scenes in segments and fragments, with easily moved props and fluid lighting effects, I might be able, without ever lowering the curtain, to achieve the easy flow that the author clearly wanted.

Jo Mielziner (creator of the 1949 Broadway set), *Designing for the Theater*, 1965

The sense of the victim is very deep in Miller. ... Individuals suffer for what they are and naturally desire, rather than for what they try to do, and the innocent are swept up with the guilty, with epidemic force. The social consciousness has now changed, decisively. Society is not merely a false system, which the liberator can challenge. It is actively destructive and evil, claiming its victims merely because they are alive. It is still seen as a false and alterable society, but merely to live in it, now, is enough to become its victim. In *Death of a Salesman* the victim is not the nonconformist, the heroic but defeated liberator; he is, rather, the conformist, the type of the society itself. Willy Loman is a man who from selling things has passed to selling himself, and has become, in effect, a commodity which like other commodities will at a certain point be discarded by the laws of the economy. He brings tragedy down on himself, not by opposing the lie, but by living it. Ironically, the form of his aspiration is again the form of his defeat, but now for no liberating end; simply to get by, to see himself and his sons all right. The connection between parents and children, seen as necessarily contradictory, is again tragically decisive. A new consciousness is then shaped: that of the victim who has no living way out, but who can try, in death, to affirm his lost identity and his lost will.

Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 1966

With all our efforts, money, and good intentions, we have not yet achieved a theater, ... I believe, because we do not see life in historic and dramatic terms. Even our greatest novelists and poets, sensitive and subtle though they are, do not think dramatically. ... But we have come close at moments to having great plays ... [for example] when Willy Loman, the salesman, plunges again and again into the past to search for the point where it all went irremediably wrong, and cannot find any fatal turning point.

Alvin B. Kernan, "Introduction" to *The Modern American Theatre*, 1967

America has to take her theatrical masterworks where she finds them. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* has always made the highbrow critics uncomfortable. It's not a real tragedy, some say. It's diluted Marxism, say others. It's an abstraction with cardboard figures, still others gripe. Such criticisms of this hugely popular play have a good deal of justice, but they miss the point. *Salesman* is a flawed play, but from O'Neill down all American playwrights are deeply flawed. In American theater imperfection goes with the territory.

Death of a Salesman is a great public ritualizing of some of our deepest and deadliest contradictions. It is a play about the misplaced energy of the basic human material in American society. The current revival at New York's Circle in the Square makes powerfully clear that this play, this public ritual, has not dated. The power of Miller's inspiration sears the audience into a shocked and chastened honesty. Tragedy, Marxism, abstraction – forget it. The audience recognizes this play. It knows Willy Loman, the poor slob who bought the phony dream of success and who is now spending his last day on earth refusing to awaken from it. ... After 25 years Miller's evoking of such self-selling delusion is still pertinent in the time of "The Selling of the President." That sell, finally, didn't work, and with even more finality Willy has sold himself into oblivion.

Jack Kroll, *Newsweek*, July 1975

When we see *Death of a Salesman* we are truly "guilty creatures at play." Willy's failure is our failure, for we are also involved in the cult of success, and we, too, measure men by occupational attainment rather than by some sympathetic calculus of the whole human being. We are all partners in the American Dream and parties to the conspiracy of silence surrounding the fact that failures must by definition outnumber successes, given our cultural ground rules and our singular interpretations of the words "success" and "failure." Surely part of the undeniable power Miller's play exerts is rooted in the author's audacity in breaking this conspiracy of silence, in revealing to us a failure almost too painful for audiences to bear. How many times has one heard contemporaries exclaim that Willy reminds them of their own fathers.

Robert N. Wilson, *The Writer as Social Seer*, 1979

For one Robert McNamara who "hated failure," who "had conquered it all his life, risen above it, despised it in others," we can count a million Willy Lomans: "I'll go to Hartford. I'm very well liked in Hartford," he tells his wife in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. "you know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me. ... I gotta overcome it. I know I gotta overcome it. I'm not dressing to advantage, maybe. ..." He's been on the road for his company for thirty-six years and here, suicide bound, is the dark side of the coin; "created free and equal" in his right to pursue happiness, he is racked by the shame and guilt of failure when the system itself goes sour.

William Gaddis, *Harper's*, April 1981

The [Chekhovian] theme of disillusionment through work, or work as a source of unfulfilled wishes and unrealized dreams, anticipates the disillusionment and thwarted efforts of Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. ... Miller's stock-in-trade, the critics tell us, is hard-boiled Ibsenism, not poetic textures or probing, still-life portraits of moribund men caught in moribund societies. But in *Death of a Salesman* Miller used precisely the same technique for exploring the spiritual implications of work to individuals as Chekhov did. ... In order to discuss work in its fullest human dimension he, like Chekhov, made certain that the audience see absolutely no work being done on stage. Instead all we see of the Lomans is the spiritual, psychological, and material wreckage that a lifetime of work has left behind.

As astute observers of two entirely different societies, both men saw two entirely different kinds of work crises. Chekhov saw a generation of people adrift in their own indolence because they did not need to perform productive work; Miller saw a generation of people frustrated because no one existed except to do productive work. But each man sensed that a society whose working life was out of balance with the other dimension of human life, whether at one extreme or the other, is a society peopled by struggling, purposeless souls. ... Miller and Chekhov took us into the homes and hearts of working people. They

knew that the true strength of a storm is measured most accurately not by the velocity of the winds but by the amount of damage it leaves behind. ...

In ... *Death of a Salesman*, the frustration of job failure has put such a strain on the male breadwinner's sense of his own identity that the entire family suffers. ... We meet Willy Loman, who holds a job for thirty-six years and is able to raise his children to adulthood. But Willy is lost and frustrated by his inability to understand the postwar world of upward mobility, in which he finds himself sliding downward.

Thomas Allen Greenfield, *Work and the Work Ethic in American Drama*, 1982

Willy Loman most certainly is a major *dramatic* character, and so he necessarily needs to be considered when we estimate who merits inclusion in the vital company of major American literary characters. If there is a legitimate tragic drama by an American author, then it must be *Death of a Salesman*. Arthur Miller's grand insight into Willy Loman is that his protagonist is slain by his need for love, for familial love. Insofar as Loman possesses tragic dignity, that eminence derives from his relation to fatherhood.

The esthetic dignity of Loman is substantial, yet essentially is one of pathos rather than of ethos, of personality rather than of character. Loman needs the love of his family, and needs to love them. It is a terrible pathos that Loman has confused himself into the belief that without success he does not deserve to be loved. But this is a general pathos, and moves us profoundly. ...

Essentially a dreamer, Willy is fated to dream only dreams of guilt, the guilt of a bad father and a bad husband who wanted only to be the best of fathers and the best of husbands. The dreadful sadness is that love kills Loman – Linda's love, and Biff's love. ... Miller, whatever his own confusions about the nature of tragedy, has an immense capacity for the dramatic representation of the destructive sorrows of familial love.

Harold Bloom, "Introduction" to *Willy Loman - Major Literary Characters*, 1991

Contrary to the common feminist argument that *Death of a Salesman* paves the way for the displacement of women in contemporary plays, I think it cries out for a renewed image of the American woman. Feminists who claim that the play does not attempt to redefine women but instead contributes to the perpetuation of female stereotypes forget that Miller is accurately depicting a postwar American culture that subordinated women. He thus depicts America through the male gaze. We see everything from Willy's perspective and never from a female point of view. His mind becomes a vehicle through which Miller unveils the flaws of postwar American society. ... When we explore the play as Miller's requiem for an America with all the wrong dreams, it becomes clear that this flawed America is a male world, a locker room where women are voiceless, marginalized, or perplexed; they are either wives who mediate between fathers and sons, or objects of sexual exploitation. ...

I always take a vote in class about Linda as a character. How many think she is a strong character? How many think she is weak. We are all a bit torn. ... My students debate fiercely.

Jan Balakian, "Beyond the Male Locker Room," in *Approaches to Teaching Miller's Death of a Salesman*, 1995.

Willy has, as Biff alone understands, all the wrong dreams but, as Charley observes, they go with the territory. They are the dreams of a salesman reaching for the clouds, smiling desperately in the hope that people will smile back. He is "kind of temporary" because he has placed his faith in the future while being haunted by the past. Needing love and respect he is blind to those who offer it, dedicated as he is

to the eternal American quest of a transformed tomorrow. ... He sells hope. And to do that he must first sell himself. ...

However, the success of the play throughout the world, ... shows that if Willy's is an American dream, it is also a dream shared by all those who are aware of the gap between what they might have been and what they are, who need to believe that their children will reach out for a prize that eluded them, and who feel that the demands of reality are too peremptory and relentless to be sustained without hope of a transformed tomorrow.

Christopher Bigsby, "Introduction" to the Penguin Classics edition of the play, 1998

In February, it will have been 50 years since *Death of a Salesman* first opened on Broadway, with its immortal cry for attention for the failures in a country that worships success. Though Mr. Miller's own reputation may have fluctuated in the succeeding years, the place of *Salesman* as a dramatic masterpiece has remained secure. Yet to return to it is always to discover how much richer and bigger the play is than you remembered it. What's more, to revisit [it] is to realize that the work doesn't match its popular perception as a naturalistic social drama. As recent Miller scholarship has suggested again and again, the play's images and rhythms have the patterns of poetry. ... Mr. Miller has said that Willy is best understood as "a figure in a poem." In a notebook entry about *Salesman*, he wrote, "Life is formless. ... Its interconnections are concealed by lapses of time, by events occurring in separated places, by the hiatus of memory." ... The [play], so unlike its hero, seems only to grow larger with age.

Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*, November 1998

Fifty or so years is a difficult time for a play - a time that sorts out sheep from the goats, the men from the boys, the classics from the novelties. ... Fifty years ago to that day Miller's *Salesman*, carrying his two huge valises and his unknowable grief, had arrived wearily but triumphantly on Broadway for the first time. ...

As for the play itself, yes, seeing it once more 50 years after, it is indeed a classic. It is one of the major texts of our time, a watershed in drama, not just of historic value, but of sustained, if varying, pertinence. It is a play with two counter-balanced themes. There is what Harold Clurman discerned as "a challenge to the American dream," and there is also, more important, what Miller himself described as "a love story between a man and his son, and in a crazy way between both of them and America." ... So here it is, a play for our time and, as everyone must recognize, a play neatly bisecting our century - ironically, but prophetically, characterizing the second half even more incisively than the first.

Clive Barnes, *New York Post*, February 1999

Twenty-four hours in Willy Loman's life ... were compressed into subjective action which jumps fluidly from the present to the past, real and the imagined. It's a uniquely theatrical notion that exploits the theatre's poetic capacity to move between place and time, to make the present and the past co-exist in a compound metaphor. In *Death of a Salesman* Miller created a new verbal language and a new theatrical one - even if the emblematic American profession of salesman was familiar to theater-goers from Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh*. Miller provided Willy Loman and his drama with a vocabulary and syntax that blended the clichés of everyday life with self-deluding aphorisms ("America is full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding people"), with immigrant parables ("Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out"), and with slogans for success ("Be liked and you will never want"). These are repeated like a catechism for success, and are bound together by Miller's own vivid poetry ("The woods are burning, boys") and his sinewy rhetoric:

“Spite, spite, is the word of your undoing! And when you're down and out, remember what did it. When you're rotting somewhere beside the railroad tracks, remember, and don't you dare blame it on me!” ...

Death of a Salesman is unarguably an indictment of a society which repressively puts financial success at the heart of the American Dream and presumes that there is nothing of value which cannot be quantified. The salesman Dave Singleman is Willy's exemplar - "and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston - when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral." ...

It's Willy's sentimental dream that it is possible to reconcile unbridled free enterprise with benign humanity and it's his tragedy that he never realizes that this dream is a fantasy. Willy's defeat - and it is an utter one which leads to his suicide - is that he ends up believing that "After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive." ...

Each scene of *Death of a Salesman* is charged with feeling and theatrical energy; it's the parable of 20th century America, an indelible part of the American landscape. When I saw a New York revival, some years ago, I came out of the theater behind a young girl and her dad, and she said to him "It was like looking at the Grand Canyon." ...

Miller's heroes - salesmen, dockers, policemen, farmers - all seek a sort of salvation in asserting their singularity, their self, their "name." They redeem their dignity, even if it's by suicide. Willy Loman cries out "I am not a dime a dozen, I am Willy Loman...!", Eddie Carbone in *A View From the Bridge*, broken and destroyed by sexual guilt and public shame, bellows: "I want my name," and John Proctor in *The Crucible*, declaims "How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" In nothing does Miller show his Americanism more than in the assertion of the right and necessity of the individual to own his own life. ...

All his plays have commanded an audience and admiration in Britain that has been unbroken by changes in fashion or society. ... I think we admire Miller so much because we yearn for a figure of such authority and achievement in our own theatre.

Richard Eyre, "*An Englishman Explores the Work of Arthur Miller*," talk given at the Guthrie Theater, July 11, 2001

Before adapting [Ibsen's] *An Enemy of the People*, Miller wrote his most celebrated play, which is also about a lonely man up against society, but one who is crushed by it. *Death of a Salesman* supports the anti-realist-from-the-start thesis thanks to its remarkable form. ... What is original about *Death of a Salesman* is that Loman's memory is unreliable, and that we are invited to witness the way these unreliable memories provoke his present actions. The most dramatic example of this technique is Willy's highly mythologized memory of his brother Ben, whom he recalls entering the African jungle a pauper and coming out the owner of a diamond mine, and who becomes Willy's confidant as he decides to kill himself so that his favorite son Biff can build a business career (or rather, Willy's dream of Biff's career) with the life insurance money.

David Edgar, *London Review of Books*, March, 18, 2004

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Hunting the Customer - Traveling Salesman: Facts, Tips, Observations, Guidelines

The following excerpts come from a number of 20th century traveling salesmen handbooks. They address some foundations of salesmanship, provide a thought-provoking glimpse into earlier days of business "know-how," and illuminate the background, professional outlook and sale practices that may have contributed to shaping Willy Loman's world and his mentality.

The fourth profession? No, the first!

- I saw in print the other day, the statement that salesmanship is the "fourth profession." It is not; it is the first. The salesman must ... turn more sharp corners, "duck" through more alleys and face more cold, stiff winds than any other kind of worker I know. He must think quickly yet use judgment; he must act quickly and still have on hand a rich store of patience; he must work hard, and often long. He must coax one minute and "stand pat" the next. He must persuade – persuade the man he approaches that he needs *his* goods and make him buy them – yes, *make* him. He is a messenger boy, train dispatcher, department buyer, credit man, actor, lawyer and politician – all under one hat!

By "salesman" ...I mean the man who takes his grip or sample trunks and goes to hunt his customer – the traveling salesman.

- Marshall Field was once a traveling man; John W. Gates sold barbed wire before he became a steel king.
- The man on the road is an army officer. His soldiers are his samples. His enemy is his competitor. He fights battles every day. The "spoils of war" is *business*. The traveling man must use tactics just the same as does the general. He may not have at stake the lives of other men and the success of his country; but he does have at stake – and every day – his own livelihood, a chance for promotion, a partnership perhaps – and always, the success of his firm.
- To win the customer's good will is the aim of every successful salesman. ...The ways must be as many as the men he meets. The dispositions of men are as varied as their looks.
- With all of his power of enduring disappointment and changing a shadow to a spot of sunshine, there yet come days of loneliness into the life of the commercial traveler – days when he cannot and will not break the spell. There is a sweet enchantment, anyway, about melancholy; 'tis then that the heart yearns for what it knows awaits it.

From *Tales of the Road* by Charles Newman Crewdson. Chicago: Curtis Publishing, 1904.

Not a mere carrier of samples

- To know his goods is only the A.B.C. of a traveling salesman's technique. He must know human nature too, and how to deal with all sorts and conditions of men.

- The function of the traveling salesman has never yet been fully appreciated. He is usually treated as a mere carrier of samples, whereas he is no such thing. He is the business-getter and goodwill builder of his house or corporation. He is a creator of new business and a conserver of what has already been done.
- In the whole world of trade and commerce probably no one has so hard and baffling a job as a traveling salesman. He has to deal with other people, over whom he has no authority. He has to depend absolutely upon his own skill, likeableness, quickness and information. He has a little routine work – mere order-taking. But if he depends on this, he will soon find himself out of a job.
- Every call must be PERSONAL – that is the first rule in salesmanship. ... You must ask yourself, “What is he [the potential customer] thinking about?” “What are his fears – his hopes – his troubles?” You must fit into his present line of thought.
- Use more ear and less tongue. Give your customer the Center of the Stage. The main thing is not to talk, but to sell.
- Every traveling salesman carries samples, but how many carry service? ... Recently a few salesmen – not many – have ... formed a still better motto: "Study my customer's problems." ... Be active, not passive. Be positive, not negative. Lend a hand. Give a half-hour's actual service. Then bring on your samples.
- Mention quality before price. ... A salesman must not only TALK about quality. He must dramatize it.
- Just as a chess player works out new moves to beat his opponent ... so a salesman must work out new ways of showing the quality of his goods, so that, when he tells the price, the customer will prefer [the] goods to the money.
- Don't take "no" for a final answer. ...Salesmanship is persuasion. It is the overcoming of difficulties.
- A professional salesman conquers a customer by taking the customer's point of view.
- In every sale the fewer words the better.
- Build goodwill for you firm. Sell your Company as well as your goods.
- Constantly search for new markets.
- It is a strange fact that among traveling salesmen the oldest will bring in the fewest new accounts. When a traveler has been nine or ten years with a company he has become well acquainted with its customers. ... [They] listen to his stories; his business has become largely a matter of visiting friends. Consequently, he does not like to dig up new customers. ... A young

chap, on the contrary, who has no friends ... will usually bring in more new accounts than anybody else.

- Keep mentally and physically fit. Vaccinate yourself against worries. Your job is not a routine one. It is all creative work.
- Every day is a new day, to a traveling salesman. Every interview is a new adventure. He can no more afford to be careless than a lion-hunter can.
- If a traveling salesman's heart is not stout, it will very soon be broken. ... He perseveres, but he shortens his life. He becomes an old man at fifty. Often, a heartbroken salesman keeps on with his work and trudges about as a mere order-taker. He is no longer a salesman. ... A salesman's job is a very lonely and depressing one, unless he takes himself in hand and uses a great deal of self control.
- To the wives who read this, I would say: "If you are married to a traveling salesman, for Heaven's sake BUCK HIM UP. He has troubles you know nothing about, and unless you cheer him along, HE'LL FAIL and you will be the cause of it."
- A salesman cannot be thin-skinned. He must not take offense easily. He must not be a fragile flower.
- A salesman must be a good loser. ... In the course of a year, even the ablest salesman will, very likely, take more rebuffs than orders.

From *Tips for Traveling Salesmen* by Herbert N. Casson. New York: B. C. Forbes Publishing, 1927.

Salesmanship that makes money

- All there is to salesmanship ... is calling on people who are logical prospects for your product and knowing how to persuade them, most times against their will, to buy it.
- When a salesman knows that he is capable of always thinking one thought ahead of the buyer, because he understands his product backward and forward and inside out, he develops what may seem to a tyro, watching him in action, to be magnificent courage, especially in the way he strides in and batters down objections.
- To sell John Smith
What John Smith buys
You must see John Smith
Though John Smith's eyes.
- No real salesman ever outsmarts [a buyer]. ... The alert salesman gears his selling technique to fit each type of buyer as he meets up with him.

- About the only time you can apply pressure on a soft-boiled buyer, and then most judiciously, is when you have answered all his objections and feel that he is ready to buy.
- The hard-boiled buyer ... seems to know all the tricks. Like one magician watching another give a performance, he pays careful attention to all you say, but as to whether or not he is being impressed he gives you no inkling.
- Your two aces should be firmness and flattery – firmness, to show you can take anything calmly that is fired at you and still retain your equanimity; and flattery, for love of approbation is the weakest link in this prospect's armor.
- As any medical student will be glad to demonstrate, the optic nerve is about twenty times as large as the nerve which leads from the ear to the brain – so that what a man sees gets to his reasoning apparatus faster, influences him to a greater degree, and stays with him longer than does anything he hears.
- Three tried and proved tools: ... A staunch loyalty to the firm they represent; an unswerving faith in the soundness of the product they are selling; and a proud and unshakable belief in their own integrity.

From *Money-Making Salesmanship* by Michael Gross. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1945.

Testimonies From Sales People

More than thirty years ago, Studs Terkel, the master of American oral history, published a book of interviews with working men and women of many professions. The following quotes are taken from testimonies of sales people printed in that book.

Johnny Bosworth, car salesman. I'm not really a good salesman. The product sells itself. The only thing that makes me good is I try to put myself in the customer's place. If I was to purchase a car, I know how I'd want to be treated. I wouldn't want to be pushed. ...

Say I've been working at this place twenty years, okay? Most people's jobs, after twenty years you got seniority. You're somebody. After twenty years at this job, I go in tomorrow as if I started today. If I don't sell X amount of cars a month, I've gotta look for another job. It's not because they're bad people, but they're in business. ... I don't like it. ... For my family I'd like a little security. ...

Selling cars is a gamble. Every customer that walks in there, they've got a twenty-dollar bill or a fifty-dollar bill in their pocket. It's up to you to get it out of their pocket. The only way to get it out is to sell 'em a car. It's a gamble. ... Could the world survive without my work? No. There has to be a salesman. Oh, if a man put his mind to it - and I've thought about it myself - that could all be computerized. All a salesman does is find a car that suits you, which has the best features and which has the worst. ... Ninety-nine out of a hundred people are price-conscious. That's all they care about. ... You could sell 'em a 1948 Chevy if the price was right.

Jean Stanley, cosmetics saleswoman. I sell cosmetics to women who are trying to look young. They are spending more on treatment creams than they did years ago. ... Appearance. ... Years ago, women that sold cosmetics and perfumes made more money on the average than they do now. You could earn much more than girls working in an office. Today you hardly earn as much. The companies are spending so

much money on advertising. ... We work on salary plus commission. One of my children who's old enough said, "The lowest common denominator is the salesclerk on commission."

Tim Devlin, janitor, ex-salesman. "You're a bum" — this is [now] the picture I have of myself. I'm a flop because of what I've come to. ... In life you become a success to get ahead; money is the key to judge people by. That was my childhood thing — the big office, the big car, the big house. ... I was selling a photocopy machine for 1,250. My commission was \$300. The total value of the machine was \$480. I thought, Jesus Christ, there's something wrong here. ... I didn't feel proud of myself. I was one of their soldiers. I read the sales manual. If the customer says this, you say that. Turn him around, get him in the palm of your hand, and — boom! — get him to sign on the dotted line. You give him bullshit. You wiggle, you finagle, you sell yourself, and you get him to sign. Pow! You won a round. The next day is another round.

From *Working. People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* by Studs Terkel. New York: Pantheon Books. A Division of Random House, 1972

From *Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive* by Harvey Mackay

Successful Twin Cities businessman and columnist, Harvey Mackay, is the author of the popular book *Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive* (1988, William Morrow and Company, New York) from where the quotes below have been excerpted.

Marketing is not the art of selling. It's not the simple business of convincing someone to buy. It is the art of creating conditions by which the buyer convinces *himself*. And nothing is more convincing than hard evidence that others want the same thing.

It amazes me that so many salespeople are seized by inertia and act as if they can continue to cling to their jobs without having to exert themselves. ...

A salesperson really has nothing to sell but his time. His product exists independently of anything he adds to it; ... but if he isn't around to provide service and be accessible to his customers, he'll lose those accounts.

The mark of a good salesperson is that his customer doesn't regard him as a salesperson at all, but a trusted and indispensable adviser...

Entrepreneurs share a common trait with good salespeople: Both are able to communicate a sense of self-confidence and importance about their mission that is contagious to all around them.

The never-ending cycle of destruction and change inherent in a capitalist economy always provides new opportunities for those with determination, goals, and concentration. ... You don't learn to swim with the sharks in a single outing. High-stakes challenges demand practice and perseverance.

Harvey B. Mackay, 1988

Literary Connections

In the Introduction to the anthology *Closers*, the editor, Mike Tronnes, points out that "selling may be the defining activity of American society." Indeed, as any reader of literature can confirm, the figure of the salesman looms large in plenty of stories, novels, plays. Over the years it has established itself as an archetypal character, depicted in a diversity of circumstances and fictional accounts by major American

writers from Herman Melville to David Mamet, Sinclair Lewis to John Updike, Flannery O'Connor to Harry Crews, Erskine Caldwell to Raymond Carver, Philip K. Dick to Thomas Wolfe, Edna Ferber to John Cheever, and so on.

As an example and illustration, we have chosen for this study guide the opening of the first story published by the outstanding Southern writer Eudora Welty (1901-2001). It is titled "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and it appeared in the magazine *Manuscript* in 1936. The focus of this very short narrative is on the last moments in the life of a salesman who, lost on the road, wrecks his car near the shack of an unknown couple. It offers fascinating possibilities of parallel interpretations and links with Arthur Miller's play.

Eudora Welty was also a well known photographer. Not surprisingly, when reading the story (from which a short excerpt is reproduced below), one will notice a photographic technique in the storytelling. The author herself discussed this matter: "I began writing from a distance, but "Death of a Traveling Salesman" led me closer. It drew me toward what was at the center of it. ... In writing the story I approached [the cabin] and went inside with my traveling salesman, and had him ... figure out what was there. ... Writing "Death of a Traveling Salesman" opened my eyes. And I had received the shock of having touched, for the first time, on my real subject: human relationships."

Here is the excerpt:

R. J. Bowman, who for fourteen years had traveled for a shoe company through Mississippi, drove his Ford along a rutted dirt path. It was a long day! The time did not seem to clear the noon hurdle and settle into soft afternoon. The sun, keeping its strength here even in winter, stayed at the top of the sky, and every time Bowman stuck his head out of the dusty car to stare up the road, it seemed to reach a long arm down and push against the top of his head, right through his hat - like the practical joke of an old drummer, long on the road. It made him feel all the more angry and helpless. He was feverish, and he was not quite sure of the way.

This was his first day back on the road after a long siege of influenza. He had had very high fever, and dreams, and had become weakened and pale, enough to tell the difference in the mirror, and he could not think clearly. ... All afternoon, in the midst of his anger, and for no reason, he had thought of his dead grandmother. Then he forgot her again.

This desolate hill country! And he seemed to be going the wrong way - it was as if he were going back, far back. ... But now - what if in fourteen years on the road he had never been ill before and never had an accident? His record was broken, and he had even begun to question it. ...

Eudora Welty, from *Death of a Traveling Salesman*. Published by Harcourt Brace & World in *A Curtain of Green & Other Stories*, 1941.

THE GUTHRIE PRODUCTION

Comments from the Artistic Team

The following comments are edited from statements made by the design team and the actors playing Willy and Linda Loman during the rehearsal process for the Guthrie production of the play.

Richard Hoover, Set Designer

Arthur Miller's masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman*, although written about a period and about a certain location, achieves its timelessness by linking intense personal experience to a suggestive, often dream-like, larger world view. The play achieves power and classic longevity in its ability to speak to us even in our times, more than 50 years later. Willy Loman is a new "everyman" in an American idiom. Miller shows a Loman that may live within all of us. Thus there is a real and recognizable context that makes the play work in and on all of us. We form an affinity to the Loman family.

The world of the play to me is a Cartesian grid. It's an unforgiving three dimensional grid that's driving Willy crazy in the pursuit of his dream of success, and ultimately it kills him. The implacable inhumanity of it is something very American, but it also resonates everywhere in the world.

Here, in this tangible reality, Miller asks large questions, both socially and emotionally: Issues of psychological collapse due to "failed dreams," the pressure and lie of a work ethic that assumes that if you work hard you will get what you deserve, the consequences of being trapped in a dehumanizing world.

The conditions of Willy's tragedy make him memorable and recognizable beyond this specific aspect of American life. This is what enters our hearts, ties us to his pain, and brings Willy's fate closer to our own experience.

Visually, we wanted a stage reality to which an audience might relate directly, keeping mainly the characters in sharp focus. We wanted to start from a void, a total darkness, and then add on elements that, while real, may potentially achieve an expressionistic level and suggest archetypes. We wanted to teeter on the borderline of reality the way Willy moves in and out of real moments while experiencing growing delusional memory. There are real chairs, there are real stockings that Linda mends; we are in a stage space that allows the action to drift from a faded kitchen reality to a dream-like void.

These ideas have been the guide lines, as we experimented with how much we can take away from a visual reality and still keep the play anchored, with its focus on the actors.

The play takes place in Willy's mind so it travels through different definitions of reality, it keeps shifting. The heightened level of his emotional state due to his failure means that he's not able to be fully in the "present," so to speak. He's here now, but he's also in his memory and his imagination; and the set and lighting have to take the audience along in a parallel journey with him. Miller fully explored the theatrical idiom of shifting realities in this wonderful play. We are in a way welcomed into the experience of the shifts, warmly know the world he lives in, and share the fear he has of a world that is crushing him.

We began by reading the play which quickly led us to look for photographs (tangible reality) that might echo how we were feeling. Both Joe Dowling and I felt that the play needed an intensification and not a sentimentalization. We found portraits of working men and women shot in a black void. These images became the key for our treatment. I was interested in the idea of darkness and Joe discussed the idea of a

true stage void with set pieces being able to appear and disappear into the darkness. And so we began moving quickly to a series of models which held onto the concept of city surrounding a house. This moved us next to work out set movements (necessary in order to begin, return and end up in the void). We wanted Willy to enter into a void and end up there as if the stage was spitting forth the set and then sucking it back into its darkness.

On the floor we used dark gray and green carpets; they help absorb light (by reducing reflection). We designed two structures (“mansions”) that would be both tangible and invisible using steel and thin gauze with light treatment of paint. Light obviously would be absolutely critical, allowing for the “normal” appearing and disappearing of elements, as well as injecting fanciful color into a rather monochromatic world. In each case we tested the material under light in order to learn how it would respond and how we might act on it with paint.

At the opening of the play, there is a bare stage and then we have our “mansions” that will move in or out in a slow, fluid, motion. Inside each “mansion” we have a space that suggests abstractions of the Loman home, the bedrooms, or the restaurant, or the hotel room. They are engineered to become present as in a dream, although dressed with real beds, tables, lamps, etc.

The transfer of the play to the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin, for their 2004 theatre festival, is quite a challenge. Instead of a thrust stage such as at the Guthrie, The Gaiety has a rather small proscenium that is no more than two-thirds of the width of the Guthrie thrust at its widest point. At the same time, the auditorium there is very high, with balconies and rife with difficult sight lines. We decided to take the context, color and palate of the current design and rework it within a proscenium stage, so it will be a new rendition of the work done in Minnesota.

Thus the set, which we still need to “evaporate” in the course of the performance, became a large square room, a black room, into which furniture could be pushed on and off (by push stick) and would vertically define “limbo” and “void” in a contained space. We will engineer sliding doors on three sides and tracking that allows the furniture to slip on as if mechanically. Overhead we will still have our floating apartment frames made of the same gauze and an upstage catwalk for the arrival of Ben. The kitchen will appear from up center on a wagon moved on by stage hands.

The key difference here will really be in the nature of the walls of the “rooms” which we will build of steel, backed with black rear projection material, and fronted with a painted black scrim. The walls can be front- and back-lighted allowing both for a real location as well as an expressionistic back-lighted image reflecting the horror of the tragedy at hand.

Matthew Reinert, Lighting Designer

As the action of *Death of a Salesman* takes place mostly within Willy Loman’s mind and the play shifts back and forth through time and space, one essential aspect of the lighting design is the need to develop a visual consistency that can mark for the audience where and when a given scene is playing out. For example, the “present” action of the play might have all the scrim walls opaque, while they become transparent during the scenes that take place in the past. This is particularly crucial when Willy’s mind begins to unravel and we start to see moments of overlapping realities.

Lighting can try to suggest this, but until the lights are hung, the set is up and the actors are in their places on stage, it’s difficult to anticipate how the ideas will exactly come together. The initial design is just a point of departure which can all change.

The good news in this case is that having worked with Joe Dowling in the past, I think we have a bit of a shorthand in terms of communicating and understanding what he wants the lights to achieve in the production.

On the other hand, I think it's important to stay out of the way of the play, to not make our design seem more important than the play. Many contemporary plays require a lot of illustration, but *Death of a Salesman* really doesn't. The words provide the "where and when" and the primary focus is on the characters' dialogue and the story. My job is about supporting that. Shakespearean plays don't require much illustration either; you just have to illuminate them because everything you need is in the text – the where, the when, the emotions – all of the direct elements are in the text of the play. *Death of a Salesman* isn't quite as detailed as that because it was written in a time when illustrative stage tools have been available for the contemporary stage. But it's close in that it really provides so much in the words that you don't have to work especially hard to light the action. All you need is simply to illuminate it, be consistent, keep things simple and stay out of the way.

When we transfer the play to the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin, the lighting will be completely different because there it is a proscenium stage. The structure of the design will be the same because the lighting cues are very much tied to the words. But the angles and locations of the fixtures will change dramatically. I suppose most of the colors will stay relatively the same, but virtually everything else will be a complete do-over.

The terms "front light, side light, back light" mean totally different things on a thrust stage than they do on a proscenium stage. If you're sitting in the center of the Guthrie Theater then you have a front and center view as you would in a proscenium. But if you're sitting on the sides, you have a noticeably different view, and the lighting means different things to you – what is front light to those in the center is your side light. I think a successful lighting design in this theater is one that embraces the possibility that the performance is going to look differently depending on where you're sitting. As long as it feels like everybody in the audience shares the same emotional moment, the lighting can be considered successful. If a designer tries to make it look the same from all three sides of the thrust, it ends up looking like nothing because it is a sort of reduction to the lowest common denominator. In a proscenium theater on the other hand, there is a much more controlled viewing angle; and the front light is always front light.

Also, on a thrust stage, you see so much of the floor. It is the single biggest visual element on stage for anybody who sits in our balcony or on the slope. A designer has to consider how the floor is being lit. With *Death of a Salesman*, I thought about how changing the lighting of the floor around the acting becomes a tool for conveying the transitions between past and present.

Devon Painter, Costume Designer



Willy Loman

I had certainly seen productions of *Death of a Salesman* many times and believed that I knew fairly well the play. Still, when I went back and read it recently, I just sobbed the entire time as if it was my first encounter with Willy Loman's family. One of the things that struck me about the play after I got through this first emotional reading, is that there are a lot more costumes than I remembered.

By and large, two different periods are seen on stage, just as Miller has written them in this play. We have the immediate present of Willy's returning home at night, exhausted, and the next day from morning till late evening and the time-period is around 1949. And then we have the past recalled, mostly some 15 years earlier. This relates to two different aspects of the play's dramatic action. For the "present" it is important that we capture a certain reality and specificity in terms of the clothing. On the other hand, for the memory scenes, the scenes that take place let's say around 1934, the design is much more vivid, cleaner and fresher; in the way Willy remembers those moments. The colors are a little brighter, the lines are a little fresher, as his memory might have constructed them.



Willy Loman

One of the books that the set designer, Richard Hoover, used in his research and shared in our early production meetings was fascinating. It's a portrait book that actually has not much to do with the period of concern to us, but it has been extremely inspirational. Because those pictures show very ordinary people – like a policeman and a painter – just kind of your average, ordinary Americans, revealing notable details. They were all set on these black backgrounds and the details that you could notice in these people were very striking and inspiring.

Richard and I agreed that we wanted to make our design for the play connect to that kind of idea – offering details of people that set them apart. In selecting fabrics and the look of the clothing I've kept the example of those portraits from that book steadily in my mind. Since we have this black void of a bare stage within which Willy's mind meanders and his reality and memory mingle, appear and disappear, I've also concentrated on keeping the materials for costumes very textural, very rich, stressing very warm colors.



Linda Loman

But then at the very end, for the epilogue, we strip away the colors so that everyone at the funeral wears blacks and grays. By choice, just as the play's Requiem calls for, the final image is going to be in very stark contrast to what was seen before.



Linda Loman



Biff



Biff



Happy



Happy



Uncle Ben



Charley

Peter Michael Goetz and Helen Carey, Actors

HC: This is only the second Miller play that I've ever done. As with so many really great playwrights, you don't fully understand and experience what a powerful dynamic he sets up until you start working on it from the inside.

Miller to my ear always makes the individuals in the audience say, "Gee, I don't know what I would do if I were in that situation." And the best thing you can do for an audience is not say, "This is the problem, this is the answer," but rather, "This is the problem, here's how these people are dealing with it. Do you think you would deal with it this way?" He involves each audience in a way that challenges them and makes them think. He writes, as do the great classical writers, in a way that heightens the timelessness of his subject; that makes the work pertinent for families and couples, as for fathers and sons, husbands and wives.

PMG: There's true poetry in the language though it seems often down to earth. I think that's part of the reason why Miller reaches so many and has become universal. *Death of a Salesman* continues to be such a successful drama 50 years later, because its language is not dated, it doesn't seem particular to the late 1940s East Coast. Otherwise it might sound old, funny and melodramatic today. His writing outlasts a given generation.

Miller's intense drama makes one think of the Greek plays where we find those leading characters with tragic flaws. Willy suffers of this too. He's trying so hard to attain a better life, a better world, but never lives up to everything he believes he can live up to. And sometimes he can't or doesn't want to see that – he's in a steady denial. "Denial" looms huge in many Miller plays. And I think that speaks to people everywhere. Throughout our lifetime we're always trying to live up to something, but we don't always succeed. I think the people who think they've measured up are the ones who are most tragic.

HC: You know how, very often, when you're really mad at somebody but you don't have what it takes to confront them toe to toe, the anger or the frustration comes out directed at somebody else? You can take it out on them because the stakes aren't as high. Linda does that with the boys instead of Willy. She can sense the problem and she's dealing with it in her way; she calls things as she sees them, just not directly with Willy, the person that she really should be confronting. She does it with her sons, Biff and Happy, pointing to them their shortcomings and also sharing her fears and her love for her husband, her concerns about his mental state, his exhaustion, his depression.

PMG: One of the most interesting things for me as an actor playing Willy Loman is that I go on the road in my car like Willy – he drives out day after day and he has to sell to somebody; and we as actors have to sell ourselves when we audition for roles. So I can remember many times when I was discouraged driving home and having to say, "No I didn't get the part" or "It didn't work out." I lived my life like that, I can so totally identify with that kind of thing.

HC: Miller's plays contain such universal problems, universal topics that every audience in just about every country can say, "I recognize those people, I know those people or I've felt those things."

Since you asked: Backstage information about *Death of a Salesman*

Editor's Note. The following notes on the Guthrie production of *Death of a Salesman* were prepared by Community Relations Volunteer Jacque Frazzini for tour guides, volunteers and staff.

Introduction

In his introductory remarks to staff and volunteers, Artistic Director Joe Dowling stated that he couldn't choose a better play with which to start the season – it identifies with our time in society and who we are. Dowling went on to say that doing the play here at the Guthrie will be wonderful; taking it to Dublin will be a special treat – there is a hunger for Arthur Miller that is very strong in Ireland. (This is the first time that the Guthrie Theater has taken a production out of the United States).

Death of a Salesman brings part of American culture to light: dreams are sometimes misplaced. As is said of Willy Loman, "He has all the wrong dreams." *Death of a Salesman* is a memory play (the original title was *The Inside of His Head*), in which the character of Willy Loman moves from the present (1949) to the past (the 1930s). This aspect of the play calls for a nonrealistic setting which has been effectively created by Set Designer Richard Hoover by having the set "arrive," emerging from the wings and from the elevator. Starting with a bare stage, the set gradually appears and then is taken away at appropriate scenes in the show. It seems fitting to start the show as a blank canvas to tell the story of Willy Loman. Arthur Miller took an ordinary situation and made a compelling story: a man who has not found success and ends up taking his own life.

To create this powerful story on stage, let's go backstage and learn how the magic happens.

Craig Pettigrew, Assistant Technical Director

The set for this production looks deceptively simple, but according to Craig, it is one of the most complicated sets with which he has been involved. One of the challenges has been the lack of structure or framing to the wagons, and there are a lot of angles on the mansions (the pieces that move on and off the stage) without many right angles. The walls of the set are constructed out of a fabric called Cinenet which is very lightweight and very delicate. In fact, if it is torn, it cannot be mended but must be completely re-built. Its advantage is that it is a very versatile material for lighting. It doesn't have the opacity that scrim (a translucent or transparent theater drop) has, and it has the ability to morph (adapt to different effects) better. To create the desired urban look for the walls, the Cinenet has been painted to look like bricks.

Low-pile carpeting has been installed over sub-flooring to create the deck, and tracks in the sub-flooring are used for moving the pair of mansions on and off the stage. Two wagons are used in the show – one is Willy and Linda's bedroom and reconfigured to be the Chop House; the other is the boys' bedroom and later adapted for the hotel. An elevator is used to raise the kitchen pallet onstage after the wagons have retracted. At one point in the play, a house set piece made of Cinenet is flown in. Additional set pieces include two signs – one built locally is made of Neon and remains on the wagon throughout the show, thought not always lit. The second is a light box which flies in for the hotel sign of which the audience can only see the "tel" ending of the word.

Patricia Olive, Props Master

In order to insure that the props for this production were authentic, Patricia and her staff researched Sears and Roebuck Catalogs, purchased online through eBay, from the years 1920 through 1940. Most of the props have been built from scratch as opposed to having been pulled from stock.

Furniture pieces such as the bed for the master bedroom suite, the twin beds for Biff and Happy and the kitchen chairs were purchased. The kitchen set was purchased at a local antique store, but the stove and refrigerator were from stock and were painted to match the kitchen set. The props department installed lights inside the fridge and added prop food so that when the door is opened, the effect is “real.”

Props Craftspersons Nick Golfis and John (Linus) Vlatkovich built special additional pieces for the set. Golfis created Howard's desk based on Set Designer Richard Hoover's designs for the office. Vlatkovich built the end tables and turned the legs to match those on the purchased furniture.

Smaller props used in the show are the whipped cheese, which would be very similar to our Cheese Whiz and was a popular food item in the 1940s. The Props Department researched the types of cigarettes that were popular at that time and made packs for the cigarettes. Because filtered cigarettes were not on the scene at the time of this play, Props purchased modern filter cigarettes and removed the filters. The wire recorder that is used in the scene with Howard was purchased through eBay and has been rigged with a wireless speaker by the Sound Department. Willy's sample cases as well as the percolator and the cups were pulled from stock.

Because the walls of the set are scrim, there are no pictures or any set decoration on them. The painted kitchen floor is based on a real linoleum pattern, and the rug for the boys' bedroom was purchased at a local art fair in Bemidji. The bench in Charley's office was rented from a local supplier.

Amelia Cheever, Costume Design Assistant

Audience members may notice the changes between the beginning of the play in 1949 and the flashbacks that occur in 1934. Linda Loman's costumes, in particular, change considerably. The 1934 look is fresher, perkier while the look in 1949 becomes more somber with subdued, softer colors. Using Costume Designer Devon Painter's sketches as a guide, vintage dresses from the '30s and '40s were purchased from local vintage stores. Other dresses were pulled from stock or built, as in the case of the cotton gingham dress. Linda's bathrobe was purchased and then washed several times to give it a worn look.

Three of the suits for the men were built using a light wool suiting fabric and two were pulled from stock. The trench coat for Uncle Ben was built using a light, cream-colored wool gabardine fabric. His suit coat was purchased, but the pants were built by the Costume Department.

All the men's hats were pulled from stock except for Uncle Ben's, which was specially built to coordinate with the overall color scheme of his costume. A local knitter made the letter sweater for Biff with the design dictated by the script. Women's shoes were purchased locally except for a 1930s pair for Linda and two pairs of pumps from the 1940s, that were pulled from stock.

Scott Edwards, Sound Supervisor

According to Edwards, this is a straight-forward show as far as sound design is concerned.

Overall, there are 35 sound cues in the show, including one for the wireless speaker in the wire recorder, the telephone wireless speaker, traffic noises for a couple of transitions and a knock at the door. Body mikes are used to create a reverberation effect for the character of Uncle Ben and an enhanced sound of laughter for the character played by Sally Wingert.

Music is based on the original score by Alex North for the 1949 Broadway production. Music Adaptor Andrew Cooke listened to the music, transcribed it and had musicians play the new arrangements for the Guthrie production. The 26 music cues are used for transitions and underscoring during the performance.

Ivy Loughborough, Wigmaster

In costuming, it is important to create the right look for the period in the characters' hair styles. Wigs for the show are the result of a collaborative effort between the costume designer and the wigmaster.

Research is done by the costume designer to find the looks that they think are appropriate, and then that vision is shared with the wigmaster. When the play begins, Linda Loman starts out in a nightgown, and the wig for this scene is casual. Later on in the play, when the flashbacks occur, her look will be more finished, which will require a different wig. A formal, more controlled look will be conveyed by the wig she wears in the funeral scene.

Overall, there are seven wigs in the show: the three that Linda wears, two wigs for the two characters played by Carena Crowell, one wig for Tracey Maloney's character and one for The Woman played by Sally Wingert. Stephen Yoakam's portrayal of Uncle Ben requires a hair piece. There is no facial hair for the men except Peter Michael Goetz's natural mustache. All the wigs are built from materials that are in stock or which have been purchased locally.

Ray Steveson, Lighting Design/Assistant

According to Steveson, the lighting for this show is conventional. To the standard repertory of 170 lighting instruments, 310 have been added. To achieve the transitions from Willy's present life and his past life, two basic lighting designs have been fashioned. For the memory sequences, gobos are used to create the look of trees and branches on the stage floor, giving it the appearance of a backyard as you might see in a small town. To establish the feeling of the present, the lighting is more stark to give an urban, industrialized look to the stage. This effect is enhanced by the telephone wires which are strung over the stage throughout the show. These "wires" are basically ropes which have been painted black.

To create the appearance of Willy's silhouette with his sample cases at the beginning and at the climax near the end, three very intense, bright lights are used. Lighting for the bedroom and hotel room scenes is very tight and focused to light the actors while not "spilling" into the surrounding areas.

The Cinenet walls provided a challenge for the lighting staff. It has to be lit from a certain angle to make it opaque, so, audience members will not all see the same effect, depending on where they are seated in the house. This situation is due mainly to the nature of the thrust stage. The Cinenet is in layers with structures behind it, so when it is lit, the light doesn't stop and "spills" over into other structures as well. This is particularly challenging for the designer who wants clean, tight area lighting.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Suggested Topics

How would you describe the essence of the American Dream in light of the play? What is your own definition of the American Dream? How does it match or contradict the views and ideas about career and life achievement expressed by Willy, Linda, their two sons and other characters?

In what way do you think about personal success? How important is it to you to be appreciated, recognized and rewarded for your accomplishments? What criteria confirm to you that indeed you are succeeding?

How do you interpret Bernard's line to Willy "If at first you don't succeed..."? Also, in relation to Willy Loman's outlook, discuss the popular verse from Rev. William Holmes McGuffey's *Second Reader* (1836): "If at first you don't succeed,/ Try, try again;/ Then your courage should appear;/ For, if you will persevere,/ You will conquer, never fear;/Try, try again."

What aspects do you find significant in the Loman family dynamics as shown in Arthur Miller's drama? What events of their life resonate with you in particular? How do you compare them with an average American family, past or present?

What part is played by love, affection, deep personal attachment in the Loman family? Who is the linchpin holding everything together in their relations? How are the dramatic events in the play anchored by this emotional core?

Discuss similarities and differences you may notice between the two families depicted by Arthur Miller in *All My Sons* (the Kellers) and *Death of a Salesman* (the Lomans).

How important is it to be liked by other people (family, friends, teachers, co-workers)? Is "being well liked" an important condition only in salesmanship or in other settings of social interaction as well? Support your answer with examples from the play and your own experience.

What is happening to Willy in the course of the play? Discuss the dramatic situations that reveal the tormented state of his mind. What makes him claim that he's "tired to the death" when he first appears in the play? What explains his restless, shifting moods?

Discuss the tragic dilemmas that Willy struggles to overcome. If you have experienced similar difficulties how have you handled them?

Do you consider Linda to be a strong or weak woman, and why? To what extent do you find her behavior particular to the time of the play's action? How might a woman facing similar difficulties and responsibilities today, act differently?

How might be Linda seen as part of the problem too, when she condones and/or feeds Willy's pipedreams? Support your view with examples.

Why does Willy become so angry when he sees Linda mending her stockings?

Do you think the Loman family should intervene and help Willy stop working? Why don't they take action when it becomes clear that he is suicidal? What would you do if you were in their shoes? By what means could Willy's suicide have been prevented?

What does Willy mean when he says to Howard: "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit!?" What other similar statements do you remember from the play? Who speaks them? How do they enforce the playwright's treatment of the dramatic material?

Is Willy's failure due to his age, inability to attain his goals according to his own ambitions, the stress he experiences in his business routine, or patterns imposed on him by the society?

Do you think Willy's suicide is a form of self-punishment and an admission of failure, a clear-sighted acceptance of defeat, a cowardly way to escape his crisis, or a last attempt to transfer his dreams onto his sons? Explain why.

What does Linda mean when she insists to her sons that: "Attention must be paid."?

What conclusion is suggested in the play by the journey of the young characters, Biff, Happy and Bernard? What makes Bernard evolve in a different way than Biff? Do you identify with any of them? In what ways?

Describe how different characters overstate their case, even lie to themselves and each other, and how that affects their relationships.

If you could advise each of the characters on how to handle their problems, what would you say?

Why does Biff, who went away to "find himself," return home time and time again? Why does Biff repeatedly steal? How are his trespasses dealt with by his family?

What is the root of the anger that explodes between Willy and Biff? How do their recurrent clashes heighten the dramatic stakes in the course of the play?

Why does Biff give up all of his ambitions and college plans after his encounter with his father in Boston? Why doesn't Biff tell Linda about Willy's affair?

Comment on the Loman brothers' behavior toward each other and their parents. In what way do you find them contrasting or complementary within the dramaturgical structure of the play?

In what way is athletic ability a valuable sign of success in our culture? Discuss both Willy's and Biff's attitude toward studying and achieving success.

Why does Ben loom large in Willy's mind at the particular moment of his life captured by Arthur Miller in the play? How would you describe Ben's image in the play?

Describe the relationship between Willy and Charley. Why does Charley continue to help Willy even though Willy often doesn't respond in kind? How is their friendship marked by support and/or competitive spirit? Give examples from the play to illustrate your answer.

In what way does the relations of the Loman brothers with Bernard mirror their fathers' interaction?

How are parent-child relationships explored in the play? Discuss not only Willy and Linda as parents, but also Charley, and Howard's references to his son.

What do you make of the following comment made by Charley about his relationship with Bernard: "My salvation is that I never took any interest in anything."

Is Howard justified in his decision to let Willy go? Make a case to support your view.

Consider Miller's language in the play. What metaphors, poetic motifs, phrases and key-words in the dialogue do you find memorable? Explain why. How do they sustain, echo, and highlight the themes of the play?

What do you consider to be the climax of the play? How do the characters respond, act, and undergo change as a result of that moment?

How do you think Biff is justified in saying that Willy had all the wrong dreams?

Comment on Charley's point that "Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory." If Willy ought not to be blamed, where should blame be placed?

Originally, Arthur Miller thought to give his play the title "*The Inside of His Head*." How would you link this impulse of the playwright to the presentation of the work in the Guthrie production?

How do the Guthrie set, lighting and costumes function to transport the audience into the world of the play? Discuss those aspects of the performance that illuminate, in your estimation, the major ideas set forth in Arthur Miller's play.

Discuss the sound-track of the production and particularly the significance of the flute music that recurs in key scenes.

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See Unit 2: Defining Success: Exploring *Death of a Salesman*

<http://guweb2.gonzaga.edu/faculty/campbell/en1102/dsquizc.htm>

Test Yourself: *Death of a Salesman* multiple choice quiz

<http://cte.jhu.edu/techacademy/web/2000/kajder/wqmain.html>

American Dreams: A Virtual Museum Webquest

Geared Toward College-Level Students: Literature Courses That Include Units on *Death of a Salesman*:

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1983/5/83.05.01.x.html>

The American Dream and Experience in Literature

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1986/1/86.01.05.x.html>

Literature as a Mirror of Reality: The Family in Historical and Sociological Perspectives