



# Death of a Salesman

by Arthur Miller

## Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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## Synopsis

### Act 1

Sixty-three-year-old Willy Loman returns from an abortive trip selling for the Wagner Company. Drifting into reverie past Yonkers, he lets his Studebaker go off the shoulder. Even after a Florida vacation, he can't escape fatigue. His wife Linda suggests rest and aspirin, then urges him to request a New York territory so he can give up travel. Willy, who misses working for old Mr. Wagner, insists that he is needed more in New England. The Lomans discuss the homecoming of Biff, their 34-year-old son, who has drifted about seven western states in a string of low-paying jobs. Linda hopes that Willy will not belittle him. Willy calls him a bum. He laments changes to their neighborhood, where apartment buildings loom over their small house. He recalls the beauty they enjoyed when the boys were small.

Upstairs in their old bedroom, Happy, Biff's 32-year-old brother, fears that Willy has had another car accident. The boys reminisce about girls they dated and discuss why Willy talks to himself. Biff describes his pleasure in ranch work, but laments that he has wasted his life working with horses. Happy, a philanderer and manipulator, hopes to manage a store. Biff longs to buy a ranch. Happy urges him to ask Willy about his peculiar behavior.

Downstairs, Willy withdraws into the past, when the boys washed his car and he promised to take them on his next trip to prove how well-liked he is. He is proud of Biff's captaincy of the football team; he gives the boys a punching bag. Biff displays the football he stole from a school locker room. Although Willy disapproves, he rationalizes that the coach wants Biff to practice with a regulation ball.

Bernard, Uncle Charley's boy from next door who helps Biff with homework, reminds him of the upcoming Regents exam. Bernard warns that the teacher, Mr. Birnbaum, will fail Biff if he doesn't improve in math. Biff ignores the warning and dreams of an athletic scholarship to the University of Virginia. Willy notes that, although Bernard is smart, it's more important to be well-liked.

The boys hang up wash for Linda; Biff summons three friends to help them. Willy brags about how much he has sold. Linda is happy that they can pay for appliances, the roof, and car repairs. After she calculates his commissions, Willy admits that he earned only \$70. He worries that people don't like him, but Linda refuses to believe him.

He fantasizes about a secretary in a Boston firm who admires his sense of humor. He repays her loyalty with stockings and promises to see her in two weeks on his next trip. Emerging guiltily out of his reverie, Willy grows angry because Linda must repair her old silk stockings.

Bernard reappears, reminding Willy that Biff risks failure. Linda wishes that Biff would settle down; Willy retorts that she wants a son like Bernard. Willy prefers Biff as he is, rather than spiritless

like Bernard. Returning to the present, Willy ponders why Biff steals. Happy promises to support his father. Willy scoffs at the notion.

Charley plays cards with Willy. He offers a job; Willy is insulted by the offer. Charley advises Willy to stop worrying about Biff, who plans to return to Texas. Willy unnerves Charley by carrying on a conversation with Ben. He angers Charley by accusing him of cheating. Charley leaves.

Ben explains that, when he was 17 and Willy was three, he left home in South Dakota for Alaska to



locate their father, who made and sold flutes. Instead, Ben ended up on Africa's Gold Coast. Four years later, he left with a fortune in diamonds. He spars with Biff, trapping him beneath the point of an umbrella, then is impressed that the boys steal supplies from construction sites. As Ben prepares to leave, Willy complains that he never knew their dad and that he doesn't know what to teach his boys.

The boys ask why Willy is taking a walk in his slippers. Linda observes that he is worse when Biff comes home. She chastises them for disrespect and reveals that Willy is exhausted because the company placed him on straight commission five weeks earlier. She divulges that he has been trying to kill himself with car mishaps. Behind the fuse box, he left a rubber hose that fits the basement gas pipe. Convinced that he plans to commit suicide, she is embarrassed to confront him and concludes that only Biff can save him.

As they discuss Willy, he denounces what they discuss behind his back. Biff promises to ask a former employer, Bill Oliver, to bankroll a sporting goods business. When Happy learns of Biff's plan, he dreams of joining his brother as a partner. Willy antagonizes Biff by yelling at Linda. The boys go to their parents' room to say good night. Biff returns to the basement to retrieve the rubber hose.

### Act 2

Willy sleeps late on Tuesday morning; his sons leave by eight. He dreams of a house in the country. As he leaves, Linda reminds him to get an advance to pay the insurance and the final mortgage payment. She informs him that Biff and Happy expect him at Frank's Chop House at six o'clock.

Willy asks Howard Wagner to take him off the road. Howard stalls by demonstrating a new tape recorder. He reveals that Willy is fired. To Willy's memories of his friendship with Frank, Howard's father, Howard pays no heed. He urges Willy to rest and let his sons support him. Ben reappears and offers Willy a job as overseer of his Alaskan timberland. Because Linda fears Ben and a loss of security, Willy remains a salesman.

Willy recalls going to Ebbets Field to see Biff play football. He becomes irate at Charley's teasing.

Returning to the present, Willy finds himself in Charley's office. Bernard welcomes him and asks why Biff didn't complete math in summer school so he could graduate. Bernard comments that Biff had planned to sign up for summer school until his trip to Boston with Willy. On his return, Biff gave up his dream of going to the University of Virginia. Willy accuses Bernard of blaming him for Biff's failure. Bernard leaves for Washington, where he will argue a case before the Supreme Court. Willy is happy for Bernard, but dismayed by the difference between him and Biff. After admitting that he has been fired, Willy accepts money to pay the insurance premium. He realizes that Charley is his only friend.

While waiting at Frank's Chop House, Happy orders lobsters and flirts with Miss Forsythe. Biff arrives, tells his brother that he failed with Oliver, who kept him waiting until five o'clock, then didn't recognize him. Biff admits that he is a phony and that he stole Oliver's gold fountain pen. Happy urges Biff to keep the matter to himself, but Biff needs to confess his failure to his father.

When Willy arrives, he won't let Biff confess. Willy, slipping into the memory of the day that Biff flunked math, insists on his own version of their meeting. At length, Biff abandons the truth and lies that he has a lunch appointment with Oliver the next day. Willy retorts that Biff would be successful if he hadn't failed math. Biff recalls the trip to Boston to explain why he wouldn't graduate. Accidentally interrupting Willy with a woman in his room at the Standish Arms, Biff learns that Willy gives her the stockings he was taking to Linda. Disillusioned, Biff calls Willy a fake, then rushes out. Willy, returning from the chop house washroom, finds that Biff and Happy have left with two girls. He falls to his knees, then hurries away to buy seeds at a nearby hardware store.

When Biff and Happy return home, Linda chastises them for abandoning Willy. She calls Biff a bum and demands that they leave. Biff admits his wrongdoing. He tries to talk with Willy, who is planting carrots, lettuce, and beets by flashlight. Willy, who discusses with Ben how he can commit suicide, enjoy a sumptuous funeral, and pass on \$20,000 to Biff, refuses to face Linda. In desperation, Biff promises to leave and never to write. Willy accuses him of failing just to spite his

father. Biff responds by showing him the rubber hose and promising not to pity his father if he commits suicide. Biff reveals that he spent three months in jail for stealing a suit. He cries out that his family depends on lies and that he and Willy are both mediocre. As Biff weeps, Willy perceives his son's love. He fantasizes how pleased Biff will be with the insurance money. Willy leaves in his car and dies in a crash.

**Requiem**

At the cemetery, after a sparsely attended funeral, Biff and Charley argue that Willy dreamed the wrong dreams. Biff decides to use his talents without glorifying them; Happy, unconvinced by his example, clings to the Loman fantasy. Linda, who is dry-eyed, realizes that Willy has provided the money to pay off their mortgage and regrets that she will have to live without him.

**Timeline**

- 1886** Willy is born.
- 1889** Ben leaves home and goes to Alaska.
- 1893** Ben returns from Africa, a wealthy man at 21.
- March 1913** Willy goes to work for Frank Wagner's firm.  
Howard Wagner is born.
- 1915** Biff is born.
- 1917** Happy is born.
- 1924** Linda and Willy buy a house.
- 1928** Willy averages \$170 per week in commission.
- 1932** Biff plays football at Ebbets Field and is wooed by three colleges, including the University of Virginia.  
Ben offers Willy a position as overseer of his Alaskan timberland.
- June** Biff fails math and does not graduate from high school.  
Biff discovers his father's infidelity at his hotel room in the Standish Arms in Boston.
- July** Biff is gone for a month, then returns and burns his sneakers in the furnace.
- 1933** Biff serves as stock clerk at Bill Oliver's sporting goods store.
- 1936** Willy pawns the watch fob with the diamond in it.
- 1939** Biff steals a carton of basketballs from Bill Oliver's store.

- Before World War II, Biff leaves home and tours the west.
- 1948** Willy begins having a series of car mishaps.
- 1949** Biff serves three months in a Kansas City jail for stealing a suit.  
Willy is forced to work on straight commission.  
Linda finds a rubber hose near the gas pipe in the basement.
- three weeks later** Ben dies in Africa.
- Monday, two weeks later** Willy's car strays onto the shoulder of the road past Yonkers.  
Biff returns home from Texas.
- Tuesday, 8:00 a.m.** Biff and Happy leave the house.  
Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. Willy prepares to visit Howard Wagner's office.
- later** Bernard leaves for Washington, where he will plead a case before the Supreme Court.
- Tuesday, 5:00 p.m.** Biff asks Bill Oliver for capital to start a business.
- Tuesday, 6:00 p.m.** Happy meets Biff and Willy at Frank's Chop House.
- at nightfall later** Willy commits suicide.  
Linda makes the final mortgage payment.  
Willy is buried.

**Author Sketch**

A native New Yorker, Arthur Miller, the son of Augusta Barnett, a public school teacher, and Isadore Miller, a prosperous Austrian-Jewish coat manufacturer, was born the second of three children on October 15, 1915, in Harlem and spent part of his youth in Brooklyn near Coney Island. By his teens, the Depression seriously stunted his outlook and self-assurance after his father lost his fortune in the 1929 Wall Street crash. To ease the family's poverty, Arthur worked as a waiter, farm laborer, dock worker at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, box factory worker, and truck driver.

An unimpressive student who preferred sports to algebra, he quit high school and worked in his father's business, where he met abrasive, pushy traveling salesmen, about whom he wrote his first story. For two years he stocked an auto parts warehouse, where he suffered anti-Semitism. While commuting on the subway, he read Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and decided to become a writer. After saving his money to finance a degree in journalism at the University of Michigan, he enrolled as a probationary student, paying his way by working as custodian of a research laboratory. In his sophomore year, he began writing radical, anticapitalist plays and earned the Avery Hopwood Prize for "Honors at Dawn" and "No Villain: They Too Arise."



After receiving his B. A. degree in 1938, Miller wrote for the Federal Theater Project. His first play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), closed after a four-day run in New York. Exempt from the draft during World War II because of a football injury, he produced radio scripts and short stories for *Collier's*, *New York Times*, *Theatre Arts*, *Holiday*, *Nation*, *Atlantic*, and *Esquire*. He also produced *Focus* (1945), a novel about anti-Semitism, and *Situation Normal* (1944), a treatise on military indoctrination. In 1947, he achieved success, a Tony, and a Drama Critics' Circle Award with *All My Sons* which ran over a year. A rather stiff, artificial cinema version, starring Edward G. Robinson, Burt Lancaster, and Howard Duff, was filmed the following year.

### Critic's Corner

In 1949, Miller won a Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics Award, a Tony, and international fame for *Death of a Salesman*, one of America's most enduring dramas. Established as a leading American playwright, he saw the play through 742 Broadway performances. The 1951 film version, from Columbia Pictures, received Academy Award nominations for the acting of Fredric March, Kevin McCarthy, and Mildred Dunnock, the music of Alex North, and Franz Planer's photography. A 1985 television production of the play, which starred Dustin Hoffman, earned an Emmy. A revival of the

play, which starred Brian Dennehy as Willy, won several Tony awards in 1999, including best revival. The same awards program saw Miller receive a lifetime achievement award.

Miller, his wife Mary Slattery, and their son and daughter moved to a farm in Connecticut. He earned a reputation for left-wing politics, which inflamed conservative elements who opposed his 1950 adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and *The Crucible*, a Tony-winning drama he wrote three years later.

The year 1956 brought notoriety and scandal to Miller. About the time that he divorced his wife and married actress Marilyn Monroe, he was fined \$500 and cited for contempt of Congress after he refused to identify participants at a Communist writer's meeting 19 years earlier. To escape the media, he resided temporarily in England. Two years later, he successfully fought the accusation in the Supreme Court.

Reestablished in New York, Miller served as president of PEN International and a delegate to the 1968 Democratic Convention. For Marilyn Monroe, in 1960, he adapted his novel, *The Misfits*, into a screenplay. The United Artists melodrama, directed by John Huston and starring Clark Gable and Montgomery Clift, faltered at the box office. The Millers never recovered from the blow and subsequently divorced.

Miller married photographer Inge Morath in 1962, fathered two children, and returned to Broadway in 1964 with Elia Kazan's staging of *After the Fall*, a poorly conceived drama based on Marilyn Monroe's suicide. He continued producing plays, following with *Incident at Vichy* in 1964, *The Price* in 1968, *The Creation of the World and Other Business* in 1972, *Fame and The Reason Why* in 1970, *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, which appeared on the Kennedy Center stage in 1977, and a musical, *Up from Paradise*, in 1978. In 1980, Miller introduced *The American Clock* at Charleston's Spoleto Arts Festival. Two years later he wrote *Elegy for a Lady* and *Some Kind of Love Story* for New Haven's Long Wharf Theater.

Still productive in old age, in 1983, Miller directed *Death of a Salesman* in China with a native cast. In more recent times, he wrote a second Emmy winner, *Playing for Time* (1981), *I Can't Remember Anything* and *Clara*



(1987), and *Everybody Wins* (1990). His collected works and papers reside at the universities of Michigan and Texas and at the New York Public Library.

## Other Works by Arthur Miller

*After the Fall* (1980)  
*All My Sons* (1947)  
*The American Clock* (1989)  
*The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1989)  
*Chinese Encounters* (1979)  
*Collected Plays, Volume One* (1957)  
*Collected Plays, Volume Two* (1981)  
*The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1973)  
*The Crucible* (1953)  
*Danger: Memory!*  
*Elegy for a Lady* (1984)  
*Everybody Wins* (1990)  
*Fame* (1971)  
*Focus* (1945)  
*Home Girl* (1992)  
*The Hook* (1975)  
*I Don't Need You Any More* (1967)  
*In Russia* (1969)  
*In the Country* (1977)  
*Incident at Vichy* (1985)  
*Jane's Blanket* (1963)  
*A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955)  
*The Misfits and Other Stories* (1987)  
*Playing for Time* (1985)  
*Poetry and Film: Two Symposiums* (1973)  
*The Price* (1969)  
*The Reason Why* (1970)  
*Salesman in Beijing* (1984)  
*Situation Normal* (1944)  
*Some Kind of Love Story* (1984)  
*Spain* (1989)  
*Timebends: A Life* (1988)  
*Up for Paradise* (1978)  
*A View from the Bridge* (1955)

## Related Reading

James Agee, *A Death in the Family* and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*  
 Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio*  
 W. H. Auden, "The Unknown Citizen"  
 Ketti Frings, *Look Homeward, Angel*  
 Robert Frost, "The Death of the Hired Man" or "Out, Out—"  
 Judith Guest, *Ordinary People*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Felix Randal"  
 Randall Jarrell, "The Woman at the Washington Zoo"  
 Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*  
 Robert Lowell, "Skunk Hour"  
 Arthur Miller, *All My Sons*  
 Edward Arlington Robinson, "Richard Cory" or "Mr. Flood's Party"  
 Karl Shapiro, "The Leg"  
 John Updike, "Ex-Basketball Player"  
 Tennessee Williams, *Summer and Smoke* and *The Glass Menagerie*

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<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/litlinks/drama/miller.htm>  
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 Griffin, Alice. *Understanding Arthur Miller*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1996.  
 Hayman, Ronald. *Arthur Miller*. New York: Ungar, 1990.  
 "The Kennedy Center Honors Arthur Miller,"  
<http://kennedycenter.org/honors/1984/miller.html>  
 Kopald, Meredith. "Arthur Miller Wins a Peace Prize: Teaching, Literature, and Therapy," *English Journal*, March 1992, pp. 57-60.  
 Murphy, Brenda. *Death of a Salesman*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995.  
 Ram, Atma. *Perspectives on Arthur Miller*. Columbia, Mo.: South Asia Books, 1988.  
 Roudane, Matthew C. *Approaches to Teaching Miller's 'Death of a Salesman.'* New York: MLA, 1995.  
 Schlueter, June, and James K. Flanagan. *Arthur Miller*. New York: Ungar, 1987.  
 Weales, Gerald, ed. "Death of a Salesman," *Text and Criticism*. New York: Viking Press, 1996.  
 Welland, Dennis. *Miller the Playwright*. Portsmouth, New

Hampshire: Heinemann, 1986.  
Zogland, Richard, "American Tragedy," *Time*, Feb. 15, 1999.

## General Objectives

1. To discuss the value of meaningful work, family, and friends
2. To describe the effects of stress
3. To explain how children mature through responsibility
4. To acknowledge the importance of honesty
5. To list the elements of tragedy
6. To enumerate methods of staging, particularly flashback
7. To examine the importance of self-knowledge
8. To discuss the difficulties of commissioned sales
9. To explain the effects of alienation and doubt
10. To list examples of lies, delusions, and dreams

## Specific Objectives

1. To describe how Willy relates to his wife and sons
2. To analyze the realistic attitudes of Charley, Bernard, and Howard
3. To characterize Willy's relationships with women
4. To comprehend the geography of Willy's route
5. To evaluate Willy's decision to die so that Biff will receive his insurance money
6. To account for Willy's desire to be well-liked
7. To define realistic aspects of the drama
8. To analyze crucial symbols of Willy's failure
9. To analyze the effect of Willy's death on Linda and her sons
10. To discuss Happy's shallowness and vanity
11. To comprehend the changes in the Lomans' neighborhood
12. To rate Charley as a friend
13. To contrast Ben and Willy in terms of ambition
14. To note Willy's role in Biff's repeated failures
15. To project what lifestyle Biff will choose for himself

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Arthur Miller's style, present the following terms and applications to the drama:

**Characterization:** the creation of full-fledged human motivation, behavior, and response in fictional people. Significant to the salesman's death is the failed relationship with his family. Willy's self-delusion through big talk leads to a dramatic fall after he examines his sons at close range. Their personal failures through application of Willy's sham hopes and dreams echo the family's diminished stature and loss of hope. Only Linda maintains a realistic outlook in her hopeless struggle to save Willy's life and preserve family honor.

**Dream Vision:** an imaginative, impressionistic literary motif or framework through which the author presents a dreamscape. By surmounting the hard edges of reality, Willy returns to earlier times to talk with his aggressive, successful brother Ben, the male authority figure in Willy's life. Willy's persistent flashbacks to difficulties he never resolved spill over into daily life, causing consternation in people like Jenny, who wonders why he appears to debate with himself. Through repeated journeys into the past, Willy displays the ambivalence and ethical bankruptcy that leads to his downfall as a salesman, father, and human being.

**Symbol:** a concrete object that stands for a complex or abstract idea or relationship and implies more than the literal meaning of the word or words, as with the brick apartments that tower over Willy's home, intimidating him with the constancy and relentlessness of change. Significant to Biff's disillusionment with his father are stockings that Willy gives a woman in his hotel room when he intended to bring them home as a gift for Linda. In the final slide into defeat, Willy plants vegetable seeds with only a flashlight to illumine the dark. In the third segment, a requiem for the dead, darkness surrounds Linda, who returns from burying Willy with questions about his death and her empty home. In the last scene, the tantalizing lilt of the flute and the indomitable apartment towers threaten the remaining domesticity of the Loman home.

## The Importance of Setting

The settings in *Death of a Salesman* connect Willy Loman to a variety of scenes, many of which take place in his memory. He recalls the children growing up, simonizing his car, and playing ball in the yard. The innocence of these scenes carries a kernel of fault that grows into a major character flaw in Biff, Happy, and Willy. The most painful of these remembered places and events is the trip to Boston, where Biff learned that his father was unfaithful to Linda by bringing a woman to his hotel room. The setting suggests the spare, lonely hours of a job on the road and Willy's method of coping with despair through casual sexual encounters.

Willy's financial and emotional downfall occurs in the office of Howard Wagner, the son of Willy's long-time business associate. Enhancing the images of modernity is a typing table that holds a tape recorder, the owner's current delight. The counterpoint of Willy's pleading for easier work and Howard's whistling "Roll out the Barrel" to entertain his children concludes at the height of Willy's begging. To his pleas for \$40 a week, Howard replies that Willy won't be representing the company in Boston or anywhere else. The shaken character suffers insult to injury at Bernard's office and Frank's Chop House, both impersonal settings where commerce is more important than human need. To Charley's offer of charity and Biff and Happy's abandonment of their father, Willy has little emotional stamina to fight back with his former panache. A pathetically meager self-enhancement comes from planting seeds by the light of a flashlight in his own yard. The humble scene touches Linda, who struggles with the vision of a rubber hose in the basement and Willy's attempts to kill himself. With a touch of Greek decorum, the play allows Willy a moment of privacy to drive away and end his life in traffic.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about Arthur Miller, drama, values, depression, suicide, delinquency, sales, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

- Acting on Your Values*, Rosen Publishing Group
- Actor's Book of Contemporary Stage Monologues*, Vintage
- After a Suicide*, Putnam
- The American Dream: Myth or Reality?*, Center for Humanities Counseling, Vocational Biographies, Inc.
- The Delinquency of a Minor*, Social Studies School Service
- Depression Workbook*, New Harbinger
- Elderly Suicide*, National Public Radio
- Getting the Order*, Coronet
- Grief Recovery Handbook*, HarperCollins
- Handling Criticism*, Coronet
- It Did Happen Here: Coping with Suicide*, Guidance Associates
- Moral Reasoning, Opposing Viewpoints*
- Ordinary People* (audio cassette), Recorded Books
- Private Conversations on the Set of Death of a Salesman*, Zenger
- Video
- The Pursuit of Happiness: Man's Search for the Good Life*, Center for Humanities
- Retailing*, Zenger Video
- "Tragedy and the Common Man," *New York Times*, February 27, 1949.
- Twentieth-Century Fiction: Alienation and Self-Discovery*, Center for Humanities
- Understanding Suicide*, Zenger Video
- Undoing Depression*, Little, Brown & Co.



Also, consult these websites:

Crisis, Grief, and Healing

<http://www.webhealing.com>

Depression Homepage

<http://www.depression.com>

Preventing Suicide

<http://syz.com/spsrd/index.html>

Suicide Facts

<http://www.afsp.org/suicide/suicide.html>

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- competition
- self-delusion
- remorse
- guilt
- conflict
- reunion
- failure
- suicide
- separation
- honor

### Motifs

- perpetuating a network of self-inflating lies and delusions
- asserting control over a potential suicide
- grasping at atonement and forgiveness
- escaping through dreams
- reconciling an inevitable death

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the play. Explain each. Act and page numbers allow you to reread the passage from which the item is taken.

1. Most often jovial, she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to WILLY'S behavior—she more than loves him, she admires him, as though his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, served her only as sharp reminders of the turbulent longings within him, longings which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end. (Act I, p. 2)

(*Mercurial*, a term describing Willy's demeanor, derives from the Greek messenger god or the planet Mercury. People astrologically influenced by Mercury display rapid and unpredictable changes in temperament. Willy's unstable mood becomes evident early in the play as he struggles to maintain his life-long optimism and bluffery. An additional significance of Mercury is his symbolism as the god of commerce, which is also given to ups and downs without warning or justification.)

2. Well, dear, life is a casting off. (Act I, p. 5)  
(Linda refers to a basic human fact, that the young grow up and leave home. Willy complains that he has worked a lifetime to pay the mortgage and now there is nobody to live in the house. He is unrealistic to expect Biff to remain as close as he was in boyhood. Linda, the realist in the family, recognizes the natural desire of children to live on their own rather than rely on family.)
3. Be liked and you will never want. (Act I, p. 21)  
(Willy's advice summarizes his conviction that popularity is the road to success. He believes his words with an almost religious fervor. The doctrine of popularity criticizes an aspect of American society—the attitude that getting ahead requires putting on a false face and cultivating the right people rather than developing a talent or skill.)
4. A carpenter is allowed to whistle. (Act I, p. 44)  
(Happy criticizes Biff for whistling whole songs in the elevator when he worked for Harrison's. In Happy's opinion, such behavior prevents success because whistling suggests a lighthearted attitude. Biff, who rejects the business world, prefers working outdoors and being himself. The variance in the Loman brothers' philosophies characterizes a major theme in the play, that people must be right for their jobs to be happy and successful.)
5. Because he's only a little boat looking for a harbor. (Act II, p. 56)  
(Linda's nautical metaphor expresses Willy's helplessness. Life storms ultimately batter him to death. He has tired of the road and tired of struggling to earn a living in sales. Her use of "little" parallels "Loman," a name that suggests a modest everyman rather than the great tycoon that Willy portrays in his dreams.)
6. 'Cause you gotta admit, business is business. (Act II, p. 60)  
(Howard justifies refusing to take Willy off the road and give him a job in New York. The philosophy implies that compassion has no place in economics. To Howard, Willy's only value is his ability to produce. When he notes Willy's deteriorating mental and emotional condition, he decides that Willy can no longer represent the company. Through Howard's cold estimation of worth, Miller criticizes American business for a heartless, inhuman grasp at money to the detriment of employees.)



7. You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—A man is not a piece of fruit! (Act II, p. 61-62)  
*(Willy's anger denounces Howard's lack of humanity. Willy, like the orange, is past being squeezed for profits. To exalt profits above his needs is to disavow the higher values.)*
8. Come on inside, drummer boy. (Act II, p. 91)  
*(Willy, the hard-working drummer, follows a trade that once required the beating of a drum to draw a crowd of potential customers. The term characterizes his exhibitionism through loud talk, false optimism, and self-promotion.)*
9. A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something. (Act II, p. 99)  
*(To Ben, Willy expresses his disillusion in shattered dreams. At sixty-three, he is too depleted to start again. He fears that his worth adds up to zero because he has accomplished nothing big. All he has left is a life insurance policy, which implies that he is worth more dead than alive. His tragedy is an inability to content himself with small accomplishments, like the stoop he added to the house.)*
10. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory. (Requiem, p. 111)  
*(Charley defends Willy against Biff's criticisms. To Charley, the life built on smiles, personality, and hustle was a flawed persona, which Willy pursued to become a big shot. Typical of the American dream, the hotshot seller bases his self-image on wealth and position rather than self-worth.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the play.

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What does Willy want from Howard Wagner?  
*(After 36 years as a route salesman for the same company, Willy wants a position close to home so he can enjoy a normal home life rather than travel a wearying itinerary throughout New England. Howard is not interested in Willy's fatigue and claims that there is no spot for him in New York. As Willy insists on a job off the road, he loses control by pleading and shouting. His rambling about past experience and past promises convinces Howard that Willy is no longer capable of representing the company even as a traveling salesman. Neither Willy's need, his long*

*service to the firm, or family ties mean anything to Howard. He coldly fires Willy.)*

2. What kind of adults are Biff and Happy?  
*(As Willy and Linda are aware, Biff at 34 and Happy, his younger brother, fail to thrive. Biff drifts aimlessly over 20 or 30 jobs since he left home before the war. His choice of short-term day labor herding cattle in Nebraska, the Dakotas, Arizona, and Texas waste his life and deny him security.*

*Happy, still trying to succeed, dreams big like his father. He intends to "show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade." Willy condemns Happy for wasting money on women, a car, and an apartment while his dreams elude him.*

*At Willy's funeral, both sons decide a course for their lives. For the first time, Biff accepts himself for his enjoyment of humble jobs and goes back to itinerant ranch work. Happy, trapped by the false entrepreneurial dream that killed his father, intends to stay in the city and "beat this racket." The outlook for either son falls far short of Willy's ambitions and their uncle Ben's success.)*

3. How do Charley and Bernard contrast the Lomans?  
*(Charley, Willy's neighbor, has built up a reasonably prosperous business. Even though Willy insults him repeatedly, Charley remains a friend, lends him substantial amounts of money, and offers him a job. Unlike the brash, volatile Lomans, Charley makes no pretense of greatness and is the strongest voice of praise at Willy's funeral. His quiet, unassuming son Bernard echoes the father's mature attitudes. Quiet and studious, he becomes a successful attorney.*

*Compared to the Lomans, Charley and Bernard are calm, serene, and perhaps a little dull. They pursue no great ambitions, but they find a measure of peace, contentment, and material success. Because of his flawed outlook, Willy is incapable of understanding his neighbors. When he learns that Bernard is about to present a case before the Supreme Court, he is surprised that Bernard made no mention of the honor. In his last days, Willy fails to value a sustaining friendship that has lain at his doorstep like Ben's diamonds in Africa.)*

4. What does Ben represent to Willy?  
*(Ben, Willy's father-like older brother, dies in Africa two weeks before the play opens. His appearance in Willy's fevered imagination fills in information about Willy's refusal to go to Alaska. He regrets his lost opportunity because Ben migrated to Africa and discovered a fortune in diamonds. To Willy, Ben stands for fulfillment and monetary reward that is forever beyond Willy's grasp.*

*In Willy's exaggerated dreamscapes, Ben speaks for himself the good fortune that made him a tycoon. According to his repeated claims, he went to the jungle and left at age 21 with a fortune. His oversimplification suggests that he put in no hard work to achieve what appears to be blind luck. Willy falls prey to the refrain, which exacerbates his failure. He pleads for a hint of Ben's seemingly simple method of enriching himself. Ben supplies no answer. Willy's response is suicide, which leaves his only asset—insurance money to start Biff on his way to success.)*

5. What is the function of flashbacks in the play? (Flashbacks, which Miller indicates with special lighting and scrim, serve the traditional function of exposition of facts and motivations. In another sense, they represent Willy's suspect memories of the past. The first dreamscape pictures the boys polishing Willy's car. Willy's amused tolerance of Biff's larceny foreshadows the boys' evident failure to recognize honesty as a necessary quality. The scene attests to a closeness between father and sons and emphasizes Willy's conviction that being liked is the prime consideration in getting ahead.)

*The scene shifts to Willy's guilt for a casual, meaningless affair with the woman in Boston. A later flashback explains why Biff loses his regard for Willy. When Biff discovers the infidelity, he evolves a hostility toward his father that clouds his own character and behavior. Thus, Willy's tormented memories account for the father's decline and his inability to cope with sons who echo his failure.)*

**Questions 6-8 (Interpretive Level)**

6. How does Linda contribute to Willy's tragedy? (From the beginning, Linda's practicality contrasts Willy's romanticism. Even though she can never understand his grandiose dreams, her love and admiration restrain her from nagging. She docilely submits to his boasting and tirades. Although she is aware of his limitations, she is ready to soothe and reassure, to reject a bribe of roses, and to defend him from their sons' crass behavior at Frank's Chop House.)

*To Linda's detriment, her acquiescence to Willy's flaws suggest weakness and indulgence toward a man who needs firm direction. She appears to think of him as a child who is incapable of choosing wisely or of accepting retirement and old age as natural parts of life. Her strength in the face of her sons' weaknesses indicates that it is easier for her to understand their needs than to strike at the root of family deterioration, which results from Willy's lifetime of fakery and bluster.)*

7. What kind of parent is Willy? (Willy once enjoyed a close relationship with Biff and Happy. He obviously loves them and takes pride in their growth and vigor. The opposite of Bernard, who appears anemic and namby-

*pamby, the Loman boys seem to bear the seeds of greatness to a father who can ignore their obvious lack of character. Just as Willy mars his career with bragging and exaggerated joviality, he ruins his relationship with the boys by reinforcing the wrong values and behaviors.*

*Willy appears to adore Biff for his prowess in football. Willy's failure to instill morals in Biff reaches larcenous proportions when he brags that his son stole valuable lumber from the construction site of the new apartment building. He leaves the impression that being the likable go-getter is more valuable to a man than honesty. Biff's continued thievery and Happy's philanthropy suggest that neither son has acquired a strong commitment to values.)*

8. Discuss the symbols that undergird themes. (Symbols express the faults of the Loman family and the coming doom of Willy. Biff's sneakers, which bear the lettering "University of Virginia," indicate the boy's absence of realism. He appears to grasp at the reward of an athletic scholarship without intending to pay the price of a passing math grade and high school diploma. Representing Biff's dream, the shoes pass from trophy to ashes after Biff burns them.)

*An aural symbol, the recurrent flute music, establishes a nostalgic mood linked to Willy's father. Ben reminds him that their parent was wild-hearted and rootless. Because he led the family about the country to sell handmade flutes, he established in Willy the call of adventure and freedom and the challenge of an earlier age. The get-rich-quick mode served Ben, but jilted Willy, the mediocre salesman who lacked the moxie and luck of a fortune-hunter.*

*A third symbol, Ben's diamonds, are hard, irrefutable evidence of success. In contrast to Willy's boasting and lies about being liked, diamonds stand for sudden wealth of unusual proportions. Willy equates them with the \$20,000 life insurance policy, his only remaining asset. To the phantasm that only Willy can see, he exults, "I see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand." The pathos of the image lies in Willy's life of puffery, which requires only bold words to flesh out his accomplishments in his imagination.)*

**Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)**

9. How does Willy fit the definition of tragic hero? (According to Aristotle's definition of the hero—a good man of high position who falls to destruction or death because of a great error or tragic flaw—Willy lacks the traits of classic tragedy. He has no high estate or noble origins. He is a mediocre salesman. To Linda, he admits that he is fat and foolish and that a salesman at F. H. Stewarts called him a walrus.)

*Another aspect of Willy's tragedy is the short distance of his fall. Because he never rose to greatness, his decline to an ignoble death and poorly attended funeral robs him of the greatness that mark noble characters. His only redeeming trait is love for his sons and wife. Even that worthy trait fails him because he is incapable of loving and honoring himself.)*

10. How does the play criticize modern American society?

*(The play holds up to scrutiny the ideal of material success through hard-charging enterprise. Willy has indoctrinated his sons with the message that fulfillment derives from a rapid rise in business and acquisition of fame and fortune at the expense of others. Because of their limitations, the Lomans are unable to achieve these goals and accomplish little more than inadequate incomes, low self-esteem, frustration, and failure. Consequently, all three men feel compelled to lie about achievement.*

*A second criticism is the ruthlessness of American business. The competitive drive that lifts a salesman results from cutthroat tactics and the chicanery that moves the product at all costs. Ben stresses the jungle quality of hustling by urging Biff, "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy." Ironically, Miller never names the product that Willy has borne about New England for his long career.*

*The final criticism of American success is the preoccupation with superficial and trivial rewards at the expense of lasting worth. Willy lauds popularity over more substantial qualities in a route man. Biff's patrimony of shallow values appears in the overblown importance of a football game. Howard moves from one gimmick to another and stifles Willy's pathetic plea with nonsense recorded on his tape machine. Ironically, Miller suggests that material success is no guarantee of contentment. Happy's merchandise manager is miserable in spite of his salary of \$52,000 a year. The image of Willy scratching out a vegetable patch in the shadow of urban towers is a powerful reminder that size and splendor of American cities robs the individual of the simple joy of gardening in the backyard and rearing a family that thrives on sensible, practical goals.)*

**Questions 11 and 12 (Creative Level)**

11. In a descriptive theme, summarize Willy's faults as a husband and father, particularly fakery, self-promotion, and lies. Explain how he can help Biff and Happy develop into a responsible adult and how he can make up to Linda his life of betrayal and falsehood.
12. Outline the effect of separation and alienation on Linda and Willy. Show how his suicide destroys his family and compromises their ability to cope with his violent end.

Comment on the importance of the retired mortgage.

**Across the Curriculum**

**Art**

1. Draw a storyboard or cartoon strip depicting a scene from Biff's childhood, such as his preparations for the game at Ebbets Field, the classroom imitation of Mr. Birnbaum, or theft of a carton of balls from Bill Oliver or sand and wood from the construction site.

**Business and Economics**

1. Interview some professional salespersons. Ask pertinent questions about commission sales, territories, relationships with customers, sample kits, wardrobe, transportation, appointments, courtesy, aims, and competition. Write up your notes in outline form.
2. List the qualities that lead a salesperson to success, for example, self-control, persistence, order, knowledge, hard work, and cheerfulness. Discuss with a small group why the job alienates Biff and exhausts Willy.

**Cinema**

1. View a filmed version of *Death of a Salesman*. Lead a panel discussion of the players' interpretation of their roles. Comment on settings, costume, and the manner in which the director deals with Willy's fantasized conversations.

**Drama and Composition**

1. Write a speech explaining how frustrated and despairing people talk themselves into suicide. Explain the contributing factors in Willy's death. Note how he helped and harmed his family financially and emotionally.
2. Record some of the most crucial discussions of the play, for instance Willy's talk with either the adult Bernard or Howard Wagner, Charley's arguments with Willy, Happy's flirtation with Miss Forsythe, or Linda's discussions with her sons.
3. Compose a letter to Linda in which you ask questions that the play does not answer, such as how she will manage financially without Willy, how she will hold her family together, and how she will honor Willy's memory.

Create a reply giving likely answers to your questions.

**Education**

1. Propose methods of helping a failing student complete a summer course in math. Include one-on-one tutoring and other strategies to keep the student focused on the task.

**Geography**

1. Mark a road map with names of cities that Willy visits, including Boston, Providence, New Haven, Hartford, Portland, Yonkers, and Bangor. Point out the area in which Arthur Miller grew up and the places he lived in adulthood.

**History and Social Studies**

1. Compose a paragraph in which you explain how childhood experiences, the Depression, acquaintance with route salesmen, interest in socialism, and menial jobs in an auto parts warehouse and the Brooklyn Navy Yard influenced Arthur Miller's focus on the ordinary working man. If you need help finding facts, refer to biographical sources mentioned in the bibliography.

**Law**

1. Using the Lomans as examples, lead a debate about the culpability of family members who know that a suicide is imminent.
2. Determine how death by auto accident defrauds insurance companies.

**Journalism**

1. Compose a newspaper account of one of the following incidents: Ben's success in diamonds on the Gold Coast of Africa, Willy's car accident on the bridge, Biff's appearance at Ebbetts Field, Biff's arrest in Kansas City for stealing suits, or Bernard's pleading a case before the Supreme Court.

**Language Arts**

1. Keep a list of crucial terms and phrases from the play that fit under the following headings: slang, adages, historical events, American culture. Determine roughly the dates of important events in the story, such as the three gold rushes in Alaska, the invention of

the tape recorder, or the nomination of Al Smith for the American presidency.

2. Select an action-packed paragraph. Underline all action terms.

For example: "Hap, I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of jobs since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same. I just realized it lately. In Nebraska when I herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now in Texas. It's why I came home now, I guess, because I realized it. This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt. And it's cool there now, see? Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around the horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future. That's when I come running home. And now, I get here, and I don't know what to do with myself. I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life."

3. Compose an extended definition of maturity and explain how a worker achieves it through honesty, hard work, acceptance of reality, and self-knowledge. Relate Biff's maturation to events in your own life when you learned a valuable lesson through disappointment, loss, alienation, or frustration.
4. Write a report on major American dramatists, particularly Arthur Miller, William Inge, Tennessee Williams, Thornton Wilder, Lillian Hellman, and Eugene O'Neill. Explain what each contributed to theater. Keep a record of your sources.
5. Write an extended definition of symbolism. Explain how the following details attain symbolic significance: brick apartments, seeds, flute, simonize, stockings, watch fob, tape recorder, mortgage payment, gold fountain pen, diamonds, jungle, the coming darkness.



6. Contrast Willy's despair with that of other characters from literature, including the title characters from *Ethan Frome*, *Job*, *King Lear*, *Madame Bovary*, *Hamlet*, *Anna Karenina*, or Wang Lung from *The Good Earth*, Marguerite Johnson from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Brutus from *Julius Caesar*, George Milton from *Of Mice and Men*, Scarlett O'Hara from *Gone with the Wind*, Tom Blackbull from *When the Legends Die*, Henry Fleming from *The Red Badge of Courage*, or Celie from *The Color Purple*. Discuss your findings with a small group.
7. Listen to audio recordings of *Death of a Salesman* or *The Crucible* or watch filmstrips detailing Miller's role in the history of American theater. Discuss his emphasis on realism.
8. Lead a debate concerning whether or not Biff has profited from his father's death. Contrast his decision to improve his life to Happy's refusal to abandon his dreams.

#### Logic and Mathematics

1. Work with a partner to create a series of analogies based on terms from the novel. For example: thief : Biff :: gigolo : Happy.
2. Create a web page of graphs illustrating changes in the expectations and earnings of traveling salespeople who survive on commission.

#### Psychology

1. Lead a discussion of how families allow their dreams to get out of control. Discuss why Willy, Happy, and Biff lapse into the habit of dishonesty, such as Willy's claim that the woman in his hotel room is a buyer who needs a place to shower or Happy's insistence that Biff is a famous football player. Use examples from the novel to support your thinking.
2. Draw up a wall chart of lines illustrating Willy's role as husband, father, friend, and salesman. Contrast with similar lines illustrating Linda's role.
3. Lead a panel discussion of how stress changes people. Discuss how Biff relates to indoor jobs, how Happy responds to Willy's firing, how Linda reacts to finding the rubber hose, and why Willy avoids the subject of Biff's visit to his room at the Standish Arms.

### Student Involvement Activities

1. Sketch genealogies of the families of Charley, Willy, and Howard. Include Willy's father and mother, Ben and his wife and seven children, Howard's wife, son, and daughter, Frank, Bernard, and Bernard's children.
2. Draw a significant symbol or action from the novel for use as a cover, for instance Willy digging a vegetable bed by flashlight, Biff simonizing Willy's Studebaker, Happy flirting with Miss Forsythe at Frank's Chop House, Charley and Willy playing cards, Stanley helping Willy from the floor of the restaurant, or Linda darning a silk stocking or kneeling by Willy's grave. Emphasize symbolic items.
3. Make an oral evaluation of the Loman family's beliefs, hopes, fears, and dreams. Explain how these elements change from the time the boys were young. Discuss how Ben influences their values.
4. Write a diary entry or resumé describing your life as a route salesperson. Discuss what product you would prefer selling and what personal skills and interests you bring to the job.
5. Make an oral report on friendship as it applies to the Loman family. Discuss how Willy relates to Charley and how Biff relates to Bernard and other friends. Comment on Happy's friendly overtures to Charlotte, Miss Forsythe, and Letta.
6. Keep a list of significant adjectives, adverbs, and verbs from crucial parts of the play. Give antonyms and synonyms of each. If you need help, refer to a thesaurus.
7. Read Karl Shapiro's "The Leg," Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," E. A. Robinson's "Mr. Flood's Party" or "Richard Cory," Robert Lowell's "Skunk Hour," Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Felix Randal," Rudyard Kipling's "Danny Deever," Randall Jarrell's "The Woman at the Washington Zoo," Thomas Hardy's "The Man He Killed," Richard Wright's "Between the World and Me," Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man" or "Out, Out—," John Updike's "Ex-Basketball Player,"

W. H. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen," or Amy Lowell's "Patterns." Discuss major human flaws which bring these poetic characters discontent or unhappiness. Compare their methods of coping during difficult phases of their lives with Willy's decision to commit suicide.

8. Write a report to Howard Wagner explaining why Willy feels he needs and deserves a New York job. De-emphasize emotional issues, such as the fact that he gave Howard his name or that Frank Wagner made him vague promises in the early years of Willy's employment.
9. Role-play or draw a Venn diagram of the responses of Howard, Bernard, Jenny, Linda, Biff, Happy, and the woman in Boston to Willy's suicide.
10. Discuss the role of compassion in the story. Explain why Linda bolsters Willy's ego, Charley lends him money, Howard offers advice about retirement, and the woman in Boston flatters him. Comment on Willy's response to these acts of compassion.

## **Alternate Assessment**

1. List examples of fear, insecurity, loyalty, lies, poor judgment, and manipulation in Willy's past.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate how Linda attempts to correct wrongs in her family's lives.
3. Compose a scene in which Biff and Happy determine how to provide for Linda.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including Willy's insecurity, Biff's dishonesty, Bernard's superiority, Happy's inability to settle down, Howard's callousness, and Linda's fear to face her husband.
5. Account for the international popularity of a play about a failed traveling salesman.

**Vocabulary**

Using the words in parentheses, compose a sentence about each name, item, event, or place listed below.

- 1. Biff (crestfallen) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Ben's music (idyllic) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Ben's air (stolid) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Charley (knickers) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. executives (pompous) \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. house (forestage) \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Linda (jovial) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Willy's nature (mercurial) \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. longings (turbulent) \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. exam (Regents) \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Lomans (self-reliance) \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. Bill Oliver (carte blanche) \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. Bernard (candidly) \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. chop house (raucous) \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. Stanley (sotto voce) \_\_\_\_\_
- 16. firing (gist) \_\_\_\_\_
- 17. Willy (drummer) \_\_\_\_\_
- 18. insurance policy (gilt-edged) \_\_\_\_\_
- 19. funeral (dead march) \_\_\_\_\_
- 20. Willy (reminiscences) \_\_\_\_\_

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

Briefly describe each of the following characters and explain their significance to the play.

1. Biff
2. Stanley
3. Miss Forsythe
4. Dave Singleman
5. Mr. Birnbaum
6. Happy
7. Linda
8. Bernard
9. Howard
10. Charley

### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Linda accuses her son of being a woman-chaser.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Happy is unaware that his life is shallow and unfulfilling.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Willy made his greatest commission in 1928.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Ben offers Willy a position as overseer of his Alaskan timberland.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Linda makes the final payment on the house shortly before Willy's death.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Bill Oliver accuses Biff of stealing a gold fountain pen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Jenny complains that Willy is difficult to manage.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Biff prefers the University of Virginia because it offers him the largest athletic scholarship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Willy chooses not to follow Ben because Willy must search for their father in Alaska.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Willy plants vegetable seeds by flashlight in his backyard.



## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: Completion (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase to complete each of the following sentences.

1. Biff realizes how much of himself Willy put into the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Linda rejects a gift of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Willy leaves \_\_\_\_\_ and goes to the hardware store to buy seeds.
4. Willy comments that people who own a \_\_\_\_\_ must be fine people.
5. Biff admits that he took a ball from the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Willy brags to his sons that police officers all over \_\_\_\_\_ protect his car.
7. Willy introduces Miss Francis as an employee of \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Willy's father earned his living making and selling \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Harold claims he receives his nickname at \_\_\_\_\_.
10. While Willy is in the \_\_\_\_\_, the boys leave with Letta and Miss Forsythe.
11. Linda is ashamed to ask Willy about the rubber hose she found in the \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Ben threatens his nephew with his \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Biff steals lumber and sand from local \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Miss Francis claims that something in the \_\_\_\_\_ startled her.
15. Biff plans to signal his father by removing his \_\_\_\_\_.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Willy quarrels with Biff.
2. Discuss why Biff grows up dishonest.
3. Describe how Willy copes with disillusion.
4. Compare Ben and Willy.
5. Describe Linda's success as wife and mother.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Short Answer (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Explain the significance of each.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What does Biff steal from Bill Oliver's store?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. In what year did Willy make his best commissions?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Who tells Biff that Willy wants to commit suicide?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What gift does Willy leave behind for Biff after Willy's death?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Whom does Willy consult shortly before his death?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What machine is Willy unable to turn off?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What food does Happy order?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Who fires Willy?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. What car does Willy recall from the good times?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Whom does Willy blame for Biff's failure to graduate?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Where does Ben plan to search for his father?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Which character is the father of seven children?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Who claims to have attended West Point?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Who realizes that Willy might have enjoyed working with his hands?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Whom does Willy accuse of taking an ace?

### Part II: Completion (20 points)

Complete each of the following statements with a pair of names.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ appreciated Willy, who named his son \_\_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ asks Willy why \_\_\_\_\_ returned from Boston and stayed out of sight for a month.
3. As \_\_\_\_\_ darns her stockings, she is unaware of the guilt that \_\_\_\_\_ feels about his affair with Miss Francis.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ telephones \_\_\_\_\_, who cannot stay out late because of jury duty.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ compares Willy unfavorably with \_\_\_\_\_, who was an inventor and flute-maker.

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the word or phrase which will complete each statement below.

1. Willy returns home from an abortive trip to **(Ebbets Field, Yonkers, Charley's office, J.H. Simmons)**.
2. At the **(Standish Arms, locker room, sporting goods company, Kansas City jail)**, Biff realizes that his father is a fake.
3. Several weeks before Biff's arrival from Texas, Willy and Linda receive word of **(the flute-maker's disappearance, Bernard's trip to argue a case before the Supreme Court, Howard's replacement of Frank, Ben's death)**.
4. Happy tries to grab his father's attention by **(stealing lumber, working as a stock clerk at Bill Oliver's sporting goods store, losing weight, becoming captain of the All-Scholastic Championship)**.
5. Willy's personal philosophy is based on a need to be **(rich, well liked, known in New England, father of successful sons)**.
6. Linda stops Willy from **(going to Alaska, moving to the country, using the rubber pipe, taking a vacation in Florida)**.
7. The night he dies, Willy is thrilled to learn that **(Biff is not going back to Texas, Happy plans to marry, Biff loves him, Ben disapproves of suicide)**.
8. At the Standish Arms, **(Willy admits that he is lonely, Miss Francis is eager to meet Biff, Biff believes that Miss Francis' room is being painted, Biff hides the fact that Mr. Birnbaum will not pass him in math)**.
9. At Bill Oliver's office, **(the secretary gives Biff an immediate appointment, Willy asks for a New York job, Biff conceives the idea of Loman Brothers, Biff waits for six hours)**.
10. When Willy fights with Biff, he accuses his son of **(spite, stealing lumber, chasing women, traveling aimlessly around the west)**.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how Charley contrasts with Willy.
2. Describe Willy's delusions.
3. Discuss the life and death of Dave Silverman.
4. Account for Willy's decision to commit suicide.
5. Discuss the theme of fathers and sons as it relates to Willy, Charley, Howard, Ben, and the flute-maker.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Identification (20 points)

Answers will vary.

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F  |
| 2. F | 7. T  |
| 3. T | 8. F  |
| 4. T | 9. F  |
| 5. F | 10. T |

#### Part III: Completion (30 points)

- |                       |                        |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. stoop              | 9. West Point          |
| 2. roses              | 10. washroom           |
| 3. Frank's Chop House | 11. basement           |
| 4. tennis court       | 12. umbrella           |
| 5. locker room        | 13. construction sites |
| 6. New England        | 14. bathroom           |
| 7. J. H. Simmons      | 15. helmet             |
| 8. flutes             |                        |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Short Answer (30 points)

- |                          |                  |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1. carton of basketballs | 9. red Chevy     |
| 2. 1928                  | 10. Mr. Birnbaum |
| 3. Linda                 | 11. Alaska       |
| 4. \$20,000 in insurance | 12. Ben          |
| 5. Ben                   | 13. Happy        |
| 6. tape recorder         | 14. Biff         |
| 7. lobster               | 15. Charley      |
| 8. Howard                |                  |

#### Part II: Completion (20 points)

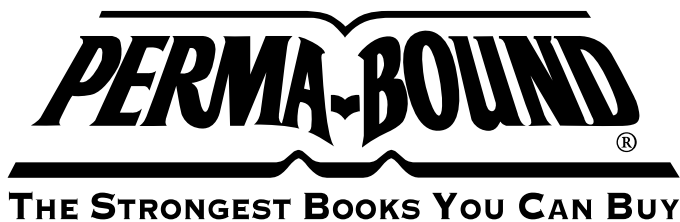
1. Frank, Howard
2. Bernard, Biff
3. Linda, Willy
4. Miss Forsythe, Letta
5. Ben, their father

#### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |                  |                                   |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Yonkers       | 6. going to Alaska                |
| 2. Standish Arms | 7. Biff loves him                 |
| 3. Ben's death   | 8. Willy admits that he is lonely |
| 4. losing weight | 9. Biff waits for six hours       |
| 5. well liked    | 10. spite                         |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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