

# ***Death of a Salesman***

Prompts for First Semester Final

Address ONE of the following prompts in a formal, multi-paragraph essay. This essay should demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the play and your ability to draw appropriate meaning that can then be applied to our modern society.

1. Some critics have said that *Death of a Salesman* is a condemnation of our culture's relentless pursuit of the American dream. Certainly several of the play's characters demonstrate their willingness to betray and/or do mental harm to others as they chase down their dreams. What effect does this reality have on these characters' relationships with others? What comment is Arthur Miller making about those in our society who pursue their dreams so relentlessly? What "lesson" is Arthur Miller suggesting that American culture needs to learn about itself?

2. The passing of dreams and aspirations from one generation to another is an important component of *Death of a Salesman*. Willy Loman inherits his dream from his father and his brother, Ben, and also instills his dream in his own two sons, Biff and Happy. What effect does attempting to achieve the dreams of others have on Willy, Biff, and Happy? What comment is Arthur Miller making about those in our society who instill their own dreams in younger generations? What "lesson" is Arthur Miller suggesting that American culture needs to learn about itself?

## Generating Ideas for Your Thesis:

In *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller explores the idea of

\_\_\_\_\_

to suggest that American society needs to

\_\_\_\_\_.

**Because this essay is serving as the semester final for this course, I also need to see you demonstrate your skill and ability to do the following:**

- Create a clear and focused thesis that explains the argument you are making about the play
- Use quotations from the play as evidence to support your ideas
- Explain the relevance of those quotations to the argument you are making in your thesis
- Use formal language (no "I" or "you," no contractions, no slang, etc.)

- Use an elevated vocabulary that reflects your intelligence and high level of insight into the play
- Write in the literary present tense
- Express ideas smoothly and fluently
- Use appropriate punctuation, capitalization, spelling, grammar, usage, and paragraphing
- Follow MLA format (MLA heading, doublespace, blue or black ink, etc.)
- Format and cite your quotations correctly in MLA style (see back)
- Include a MLA-styled Works Cited page to document the source of any quotations you use

## MLA Rules for Quoting Dramatic Works

- 1. For short quotations (less than four lines in your essay) from a single character, follow standard quoting procedures just as you would when quoting a piece of fiction. Example (but double-space this in your essay):**

Early in *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman comments on his difficulties driving the car, stating, "Suddenly I realize I'm goin' sixty miles and hour and I don't remember the last five minutes" (3).

- 2. For long quotations (four or more lines in your essay) from a single character, follow standard quoting procedures just as you would when quoting a piece of fiction. Example (but double-space this in your essay):**

Later, Willy Loman explains the situation that prompted his difficulties in driving the car:

I was driving along, you understand? And I was fine. I was even observing the scenery. You can imagine, me looking at scenery, on the road every week of my life. But it's so beautiful up there, Linda, the trees are so thick, and the sun is so warm. I opened the windshield and just let the warm air bathe over me.

And all of a sudden I'm goin' off the road! (3)

- 3. If you quote dialogue between two or more characters in a play, set the quotation off from your text. Begin each part of the dialogue with the appropriate character's name indented one inch from the left margin and written in all capital letters: WILLY. Follow the name with a period, and start the quotation. Indent all subsequent lines in that character's speech an additional quarter inch. When the dialogue shifts to another character, start a new line indented one inch from the left margin. Maintain this pattern throughout the entire quotation. Example (but double-space this in your essay):**

Arthur Miller establishes Linda Loman's displeasure with her husband's current career early in *Death of a Salesman*, when she argues for how she believes Willy should handle the situation:

LINDA. Willy, dear. Talk to them again. There's no reason why you can't

work in New York.

WILLY. They don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm

vital in New England.

LINDA. But you're sixty years old. They can't expect you to keep traveling

every week. (4)

- 4. When quoting stage directions, do so as described in numbers 1 and 2 above; however, be sure to identify the quotations as part of the stage**

**directions in the context information of your sentence. Example (but double-space this in your essay):**

In the stage directions at the very beginning of the work, Arthur Miller describes the setting of the majority of the play's action, "As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality" (1).