CHARLES S. DUTTON
in
DEATH OF A SALESMAN
by
ARTHUR MILLER

directed by
JAMES BUNDY
Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* has become the American tragedy for the twentieth century. Written in 1949, this play is not the saga of noble kings from prominent families but instead the story of Willy Loman, the patriarch of a middle-class family from Brooklyn. Willy, a sixty-three-year-old salesman, embodies a new type of tragic hero, and his family—devoted wife Linda and adult sons Biff and Happy—are the players who surround him on his last day on earth.

The Loman family past unfolds—in snapshots from Willy’s memories—alongside the present. But are Willy’s imaginings truthful recollections, or does he distort the truth, remembering what he wishes had happened? Willy has assumed the burden of fulfilling the American Dream for his family, but, at the end of the day, what did he accomplish? What dream was he chasing? And in an America that values people who are “somebody,” where does that leave a regular guy like Willy Loman?

Miller packed the play with issues that many Americans had to deal with in 1949, a time of great change in our nation after two world wars and the Great Depression. Like Willy, who faces the end of his career, what was to happen to millions of Americans working in obsolete industries? What was a family to do on the brink of dire economic circumstances? How would one generation deal with the shifting values of the next? We find ourselves asking similar questions today. It should be no surprise, then, that *Death of a Salesman* continues to speak to us about our own condition. Set amidst a racially and economically diverse Brooklyn in the 1940s, the Lomans’ tale takes on a larger significance both then and now.
GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

Before rehearsals began for Death of a Salesman, production dramaturg Michael Walkup spoke with Charles S. Dutton, who plays Willy Loman, and director James Bundy about their collaboration.

MICHAEL WALKUP: Charles, is Willy Loman a role you’ve always wanted to play?

CHARLES S. DUTTON: Willy Loman was one of the great characters I read as a young theatre student. Back then I had the desire to play all the great parts in the theatre, but I got away from theatre for a while, and it dawned on me that I was letting all my good years go by. My style of acting is very physical, and I thought I better play the role now while I’m young enough, strong enough, and still have the vocal power to do stage work. It’s a challenge, and I like to think that I can bring something to a role which a lot of great actors have contributed to.

MW: This year marks sixty years since the premiere of Death of a Salesman on Broadway. How can students approach this play in 2009 and, in particular, the complicated character of Willy?

CSD: It will be easy for students to identify with many things that happen in the play. Willy Loman is a man who’s trapped in his own dreams and failures and desires. If I do my job and they experience the character’s tragedy, I don’t think Salesman will be a difficult journey.

JAMES BUNDY: One of the exciting things about Willy is you see him as a younger man, and you also see him at the end of his life. You have the whole scope of his family’s history packed into one evening. And the Lomans are a family that, for the audience, may sometimes seem very much like their own. If there’s an immediate identification with Willy and with the family in the theatre, it will lead to a powerful understanding of the play.
CSD: I think what first moves a young audience is the visceral aspect of theatre and that leads to understanding the play intellectually. If you’re feeling nothing at the theatre, then you might as well have stayed in the classroom and read the play.

MW: Our nation’s had bad news and good since Yale Rep scheduled this production of Death of a Salesman for 2009. The economy tanked, but we elected the first African American president. Will these new social and political realities impact the production?

JB: Charles and I were talking about doing this play even before Barack Obama gave his speech at the 2004 Democratic Convention. The premise wasn’t to do an all-African American Death of a Salesman to make a political statement; in fact, we didn’t decide the whole cast would be African American until last summer. So these external factors are much more about what an audience is going to bring to the play and the resonances they’re going to find with their own experiences.

CSD: I agree. Regardless of the political climate, regardless of what’s happening at the moment socially, there’s a play to be done. The minute I start thinking about how Obama’s going to fix the economy, I’m not doing Willy Loman.

JB: Doing an all-African American production, in a way, frees the play from being seen as a political statement about the African American experience. It allows there to be a world where the relationship of African American characters to white culture doesn’t get drawn into question. Through the casting we will see how the story deepens and resonates both specifically and universally.

CSD: I like to let the audience decide what the play means in the moment. The audience may walk away and say, “This is America, 2009.” But it’s my job to engage in the performance of the character; all of the other stuff, everything that will define the play politically, happens organically on its own.
WHO’S WHO?

In Death of a Salesman, the characters talk about themselves and each other. However, can we always accept what they say at face value? Look at the following quotes. Do these words actually describe the characters, or is there more beneath the surface? Think about the relationship of each speaker to the person they describe; what might be their motivation to embellish or distort the truth?

**WILLY LOMAN**

* a salesman

“And they know me boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, there’ll be open sesame for all of us, ‘cause one thing boys: I have friends.”

—WILLY

“I get the feeling that I’ll never sell anything again, that I won’t make a living for you, or a business for the boys.”

—WILLY

“I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. ‘Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to... pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people.”

—WILLY

**LINDA LOMAN**

* Willy’s wife

“You’re my foundation and my support, Linda.”

—WILLY

“[It’s] enough to be happy right here, right now. Why must everybody conquer the world?”

—LINDA

**BIFF**

* Willy and Linda’s older son

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

—BIFF

“Like a young god. Hercules—something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him... God Almighty, he’ll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!”

—WILLY
HAPPY
Willy and Linda's younger son

“I don’t know what the hell I’m working for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment—all alone. And I think of the rent I’m paying. And it’s crazy. But then, it’s always what I wanted. An apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I’m lonely.”
—HAPPY

“I gotta show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade.”
—HAPPY

CHARLEY
Willy’s neighbor and friend

“A man oughta come in with a few words. One thing about Charley. He’s a man of few words, and they respect him.”
—WILLY

BERNARD
Charley’s son and friend to Biff and Happy

“Bernard can get the best marks in school, y’understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y’understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him.”
—WILLY, to BIFF

UNCLE BEN
Willy’s older brother

“Ben. That man was a genius, that man was success incarnate! The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into the jungle, and comes out, the age of 21, and he’s rich!”
—WILLY

OTHERS

THE WOMAN
HOWARD WAGNER, Willy’s Boss
JENNY, Charley’s Secretary
STANLEY, a waiter
MISS FORSYTHE, a model
LETTA, Miss Forsythe’s friend
Death of a Salesman begins at the Loman’s home in 1949 Brooklyn. Arthur Miller’s stage directions describe the small, single-family house as crowded on all sides by “towering, angular shapes.” Willy complains that the house is “boxed in” by “bricks and windows, windows and bricks.” He continues:

The street is lined with cars. There’s not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don’t grow any more, and you can’t raise a carrot in the backyard. They should’ve had a law against apartment houses.

Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them?...They should’ve arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighborhood.

The past Willy recalls is another important setting of Miller’s play—the early 1930s, when Willy’s two sons were in high school, Brooklyn was still green, and the neighboring structures didn’t impede the view from the yard. Through leaps in memory spurred by grief and confusion, Willy seems to live simultaneously in these two, disparate Broolkyns.

Willy’s nostalgic memories of the 1930s in America and pessimistic view of the boom years following the war contradict common accounts of the times. For most, the Great Depression, inaugurated by the Stock Market Crash of 1929, brought devastating hardship as jobs evaporated and capital froze. In the 1940s, the industry sparked by WWII launched America into prosperity that eventually secured the US’s place as a world power. But Willy’s romanticism reveres the past and scorns the present, and he seems caged in by the modern, much as his home is overshadowed by new, tall buildings.
Arthur Miller sets *Death of a Salesman*, his exploration of the ins and outs of the American Dream, in one of the most iconic of U.S. cities: Brooklyn. (The term “city” only properly applies to Brooklyn until 1898, at which time it became incorporated as one of New York City’s five boroughs.) Brooklyn’s many distinct neighborhoods offer a condensed experience of the American melting pot. The ethnic communities of Brooklyn were for decades synonymous with their neighborhoods’ names. Brighton Beach and Flatbush were primarily Jewish neighborhoods; Bedford-Stuyvesant and Brownsville became home to thousands of African Americans in the ’30s and ’40s. Italians congregated in Bensonhurst, and at one time you could find an area dubbed Irish Town near the Manhattan Bridge. These populations, often disenfranchised in the more sophisticated Manhattan, gave Brooklyn its reputation as the hard-scrabble borough of striving families.

The first half of the 20th century saw Brooklyn in ascendance: the Brooklyn Navy Yard brought in thousands of workers, and a spike in housing construction after WWI expanded Brooklyn’s residences so that by the mid-1920s it surpassed Manhattan as the most populous borough of NYC, a predominance it maintains to this day. Kenneth T. Jackson, a New York City historian, claims that as many as one-quarter of all Americans can trace their heritage to one-time Brooklyn residents.

Because of its role as a way station for such a large portion of our population, Brooklyn boasts a great number of iconic American landmarks. Ebbets Field—the home of Jackie Robinson and the Brooklyn Dodgers—bordered diverse neighborhoods in central Brooklyn until it was demolished to make way for high-rise apartment buildings. Just blocks away sits Prospect Park, a 19th-century city-beautification project conducted by the same architects who designed Manhattan’s Central Park. Coney Island, at the south tip of the borough, was home to such classic amusements as the Cyclone roller coaster and the Steeplechase, and every summer visitors elbowed each other on the boardwalk waiting in line for a Nathan’s hot dog.

Miller never writes in which of these Brooklyn neighborhoods the Lomans live; his play evokes an almost mythic Brooklyn. But then, if Willy’s dream is the American Dream, his hometown seems to be America itself. Miller’s lack of specificity in setting may be precisely the point. A Brooklyn native himself, Miller once quipped, “No one can know Brooklyn, because Brooklyn is the world.”
Arthur Miller’s life was splashed across the pages of newspapers for over half of the 20th century. In addition to marrying perhaps the most sought-after woman since Cleopatra, he was an impassioned advocate for his political principles and wrote some of the most successful and iconic plays of his time. But behind the headlines, Arthur Miller was a private, introspective man whose probing questions and ideas leapt from the page and into the American consciousness. Miller was at the forefront of issues facing America, including the right to privacy, the opposition to our involvement in Vietnam, and the right to freedom of expression. But like Willy, Miller was also a Brooklyner, a husband, and a father. He was a sports nut sidelined by injury and a nature lover who built his home in rural Connecticut. As the following timeline attests, there is much of Miller in Willy Loman, but there’s great divergence as well.
**1915:** Arthur Miller is born in the Lower East Side of Manhattan and lives in the Upper West Side, where his father maintains a successful tailoring business.

**1931:** Two years after the New York Stock Exchange crashes, the bankrupt Miller family moves to Brooklyn. Arthur plays football with other boys from Brooklyn including Julius and Philip Epstein, who will become the screenwriters of *Casablanca*, and goes on to play for James Madison High School’s football team. (A football injury that Miller suffers during high school later prevents him from serving in the military during WWII.)

**1933:** Miller graduates from Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn.

**1934:** Already rejected once, Arthur Miller re-applies to the University of Michigan. Upon receiving a second denial, Miller makes a personal appeal to the dean of the university to reconsider. Miller is ultimately admitted on a conditional basis; in order for him to remain at Michigan, he must consistently earn high marks. To pursue his college degree, Miller leaves his job at Chadwick Delamater, a Manhattan automobile warehouse formerly located where Lincoln Center now stands, and moves to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

**1938:** Arthur Miller graduates from the University of Michigan. During his college career, his writing had earned him two Hopwood Awards for Drama, in addition to a national scholarship from the Theatre Guild’s Bureau for New Plays. After returning home to Brooklyn, Miller begins writing radio plays for the Federal Theatre Project and, that summer, marries his high school sweetheart Mary Grace Slattery.

**1941:** Miller juggles several jobs to support his family: he is a worker in a box factory, a scriptwriter for US war bond advertisements, and a shipfitter’s helper in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He continues to write plays in his free time.

**1944:** Miller’s play *The Man Who Had All the Luck* premieres on Broadway and closes after only four performances. Miller’s first child, Jane, is born.
1947: *All My Sons* opens to great success. It beats Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* for the Drama Desk Award, and Miller celebrates by buying himself a Studebaker convertible. The play also draws interest from the F.B.I., who consider it to be Communist propaganda. Miller’s second child, Robert, is born.

1948: Miller builds a small cabin in Roxbury, Connecticut, and begins writing *Death of a Salesman* there.

1949: *Death of a Salesman* opens at the Morosco Theatre on Broadway. The play earns Miller a Pulitzer Prize, a Tony Award, and his second Drama Desk Award. Elia Kazan, a frequent collaborator with Miller, directs the play.

1953: Miller premieres *The Crucible*. The play, dealing with mass hysteria, is partly inspired by the conversations Miller had with Kazan, when Kazan confessed his intention to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and reveal individuals he believed to be Communist sympathizers. As a result Miller, believing that this was a betrayal of artistic collaborators, did not speak to him for many years.

1955: Miller premieres two new works in New York: *A View From the Bridge* and *A Memory of Two Mondays*.

1956: While writing *The Crucible*, Miller begins to court actress Marilyn Monroe. After a costly divorce from his first wife Mary, Miller marries the Hollywood star; Miller refuses to cooperate with HUAC investigators.

1960: Miller works on his second screenplay *The Misfits*, starring his wife Marilyn Monroe. Their four-year-old marriage is already on shaky ground, and, by 1961, the couple divorces.

1962: After meeting on the set of *The Misfits*, photographer Inge Morath and the writer quickly develop a relationship and marry in 1962. Their first child together, Rebecca, is born later that year.

1964: *Incident at Vichy* and *After the Fall* debut in New York; both plays deal with Miller’s attempts to dramatize the events around the Holocaust. *After the Fall* also marks Miller’s reunion with Elia Kazan.

1965: Miller is elected to the Presidency of PEN International, an international association of writers whose mission is to advance literature worldwide and protect freedom of expression.

1965–1968: Miller works throughout the nation to raise awareness of and to protest American intervention in Vietnam. Highlights include a teach-in at his alma mater, the University of Michigan, as well as rallies across the northeast, including one on the New Haven Green.

1966: Miller’s youngest son, Daniel, is born. Shortly after his birth, Daniel is diagnosed with Down’s Syndrome. Following common medical advice at the time, Miller sends him to live in an institution. Miller’s distant relationship with Daniel has been shrouded in secrecy and has been a source of criticism and controversy.


1982: *Elegy for a Lady* and *Some Kind of Lady* make their premiere in New Haven at the Long Wharf Theatre, the first plays produced to inaugurate their new building. When the Long Wharf opened in 1965, they produced *The Crucible* as their first show.


1998: *Mr. Peter’s Connection* premieres in New York.

2002: *Resurrection Blues* opens in Minneapolis the same year that Miller’s wife, Inge Morath, dies.

Definitions of tragedy throughout history often dictate that only socially elevated figures, such as heroes and rulers, make appropriate protagonists (think of Sophocles’ King Oedipus, Racine’s Queen Phaedra, Shakespeare’s Prince Hamlet, and all the other doomed monarchs of the Western canon). For centuries, playwrights restricted the ranks of tragic characters to those with blue blood pumping through their veins.

Arthur Miller, writing a tragedy set in 1949 Brooklyn, alludes to and challenges this history in naming his play *Death of a Salesman*. In addition to containing a hefty plot spoiler, Miller’s title announces that his hero rises from less lofty stock than his tragic brethren and sets his play in opposition to theatrical traditions of tragedy which date back to ancient Athens. Around 330 BCE, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote *The Poetics* in which he sought to define two genres of plays: comedy and tragedy. In comedy, he says, we laugh at a character’s defects, while in tragedy we feel pity as we watch a character’s fortune change from good to bad. Aristotle further distinguishes between the genres by noting that comedy concerns itself with men who are “lower” than we, while tragedy deals in figures who are “higher.”

During the High Italian Renaissance (ca. 1450–1530 CE), Aristotle’s writings on tragedy, along with the plays he cites in *The Poetics*, were enthusiastically reread, and his observations took on the weight of hard-and-fast rules for playwriting for centuries to follow. In 1749, over 250 years after the rediscovery of Aristotle, the popular French satirist and playwright Voltaire easily dismissed the notion of writing a successful tragedy about a “low” character: “Indeed, what could a tragic plot between common men even be?”

But Voltaire was writing against the times. In the 1700s, shifting economic power in Europe brought to the theatre new middle-class audiences who wished to see their own sensibilities reflected onstage, rather than those of the increasingly impotent monarchs and nobles, whose demise was accelerated by the American and French Revolutions. It was the dawn of the bourgeois drama, comedies and tragedies that dealt in middle-class pleasures and problems. But the conversation between “high” and “low” tragedies didn’t end there.

In the same year Miller wrote *Death of a Salesman*, he claimed a stake in the debate, defending Willy Loman’s tragic status in his essay “Tragedy and the Common Man.” Some say that Miller created a modern-day Everyman in Willy, an average citizen whose story stands in for our own sometimes harrowing journey through the mechanisms of capitalism and the American Dream. Those who find this reading of the play pessimistic contend that in *Death of a Salesman* Miller intentionally reaches back to the classics and elevates his “low” character (as the pun on “Loman” might indicate) to the status of a tragic hero of old, asserting, like Linda Loman, that “attention must be paid” to the fall of a common man.
INSIDE WILLY’S HEAD: ARTHUR MILLER AND AMERICAN EXPRESSIONISM

by Jeff Rogers

In 1949, Arthur Miller’s friends convinced him that The Inside of His Head wasn’t a very good title for his new play about the weary life and unfortunate death of a salesman. This title was, for Miller, a literal description of how he envisioned the play: a glimpse into the troubled mind of Willy Loman. The style of the play descended from previous American experiments with expressionism—an artistic style that developed in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. Expressionist painters rejected the airiness and passive subjectivity of Impressionism (e.g. Degas, Renoir, and Monet) and argued instead for an aggressive style bursting with psychic vibrancy (a style apparent in works by Van Gogh, Beckmann, and Kokoschka). European playwrights, such as August Strindberg and Frank Wedekind, translated that style into their writing. Their plays often featured a protagonist’s frightening journey to discover his true self and his place in the spiritual cosmos.

More adventurous American playwrights like Eugene O’Neill and Elmer Rice used this expressionist style in dramas that criticized the domination of modern man by an increasingly mechanized and impersonal world. O’Neill’s The Hairy Ape (1922) features the journey of a poor coal stoker from the hot belly of a steamship to his death at the hands of an ape in a zoo, while Rice’s The Adding Machine (1923) follows Mr. Zero, a bookkeeper, on his path to find purpose in his life after he is replaced by an adding machine. These plays, like their European forebears, used all the means of the theatre—sound, lighting, scenery, and even smells—to evoke the mood and emotional tenor of the protagonist’s struggle. Decades later, Miller deployed this expressionist dramaturgy in a new American context—the struggle of the middle class to defend its moral integrity in the face of harsh economic realities.

In keeping with his original idea for the play’s title, Miller thought the scenery should look like a cross-section of Willy Loman’s brain. Designer Jo Mielziner (1901–1976) had his own ideas about how to convey Willy’s interior struggle. Mielziner abstracted Miller’s idea to create a cross-section of Willy Loman’s life. His design featured the wire-frame suggestion of a small house surrounded by towering apartment buildings. Green leaf patterns were projected onto thin gauze curtains, called scrims, allowing the towering apartments to dissolve away, as if in a dream or faint memory. This scenic picture was the very essence of the expressionist idea—its fluidity and emotional intensity lured the audience deep into Willy Loman’s psychic struggle. The design for the original production of Death of a Salesman represents a remarkable collaboration between a dramatist (Miller) and visual artist (Mielziner), and it crystallized the visual influence of expressionism on the American theatre.
It’s often taken for granted that *Death of a Salesman* has earned a place in the American canon, with countless productions in our nation’s theatres. But the appeal of *Death of Salesman* is not solely an American phenomenon; the play has found its way onto stages across the world including productions in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, South Korea, Russia, and England—among others. The tragedy of Willy Loman affects audiences regardless of cultural background, a discovery confirmed in 1983 when the play, directed by Miller himself, premiered in the People’s Republic of China. How would communist Chinese audiences react to a play that dealt with a capitalist society? When asked how this American play would translate for a Chinese audience, Miller stated, “It depends on the father and the mother and the children. That’s what it’s about. The salesman part is what he does to stay alive. But he could be a peasant, he could be, whatever.” The production, performed in Chinese, played to packed houses in Beijing. What became clear through the performances was that the relationships among the Loman family needed no cultural translation. The Chinese actor playing Happy wrote, “One thing about the play that is very Chinese is the way Willy tries to make his sons successful. The Chinese father always wants his sons to be ‘dragons.’”

But can these relationships continue to resonate with audiences as we enter the 21st century? The play’s presence on stage is as strong as ever today, with many productions that assume the task of re-examining it. Can new themes and elements be discovered through these fresh re-imaginings of *Death of a Salesman*? A recent production at the Schauspielhaus Bochum in Germany grappled with this issue, exploring the play in contemporary terms. The director Jürgen Kruse created a set design that packed as much American kitsch onto the stage as possible. Images of Native American Indians, 1950s milk men, and Uncle Sam dominated the space. A Bob Dylan quote was pasted next to a Shell Oil sign, in front of which Biff and Happy parodied classic films including *The Godfather* and *Taxi Driver*. The question at the center of the production: has *Death of a Salesman* become a piece of Americana like everything else on stage? Kruse took this a step further transforming the elegiac end of the play into a grotesque pageant complete with Marilyn Monroe, her white skirt billowing up, and a Statue of Liberty carrying a toothbrush instead of a torch. While this production attempted to critique American culture, reviews still focused on the powerful story at the play’s center. The Loman family and their relationships superseded the jabs at pop culture and remained stronger than ever. It seems Linda Loman has had it right all along, “Attention must be paid to such a person,” or in this case, such a play.
When *Death of a Salesman* premiered in February of 1949, the United States was in the midst of a recession, facing many of the same economic challenges that loom in 2009: a bear market, plunging housing prices, dwindling consumer confidence, rising unemployment. Some feared that another depression was at hand. Miller makes no direct references to the 1948–49 recession in *Death of a Salesman*, just as he omits or glances over more momentous historical events such as the Great Depression and the Second World War. Nonetheless, a palpable sense of economic anxiety hangs over the play—anxiety that will likely feel all too familiar to today’s audiences. The Lomans endure difficulties akin to those currently afflicting countless Americans: the family struggling to make mortgage payments, the long-time employee laid off without warning, the ill and aging parent afraid of becoming a financial burden to grown children.

Miller draws attention to the plight of those trapped on the margins of what the economist John Kenneth Galbraith called “the affluent society” (in his 1958 book of the same title), those for whom the American promise of opportunity remains unfulfilled. Indeed, the play is set on the margins of New York City: Brooklyn. In 1949 (as now), Brooklyn drew those unable to afford Manhattan rents: working and lower-middle class families, Russian, Polish, and Jewish immigrant communities, and African Americans recently arrived from the South in search of work. The borough harbored those striving for both economic gain and social acceptance, often with limited success. The Lomans believe themselves to have achieved the sense of security and inclusion implied by the term “middle” class. They discover too late that the boundary between middle and periphery is more fragile than they had imagined. Sixty years after *Salesman* premiered, millions of Americans still confront the same unpleasant truth.
Discussion Questions

BEFORE

1. Relationships are an important theme in *Death of a Salesman*. Identify the different relationships the Lomans have with each other and with people outside of their family. Which of those relationships do you feel are the strongest? The weakest? Which relationship feels the most real to you and why? Find lines from the play to support your answers.

2. *Death of a Salesman* was first produced in 1949 and continues to be staged all over the world. After reading the play, are there parts you feel are no longer relevant? Which parts of the play affected you the most? Why do you think the play lives on?

3. Written in the late 15th century, *Everyman* is a Medieval morality play. The story follows a character named Everyman as he takes his final journey to death; he must face characters like Strength, Beauty, and Knowledge on his way. The play tries to illustrate how a single person can find a path to a good life—and to a Christian heaven. Some people say that Willy Loman is an “Everyman.” In what ways can you see that Willy represents people in general, and in what ways is his story very specific and unique?

AFTER

1. After reading the play, which character did you most strongly connect with? Write a paragraph discussing why. After seeing the play, revisit this paragraph. Did what you see on the stage reinforce your choice? Or have you changed your mind? Did the actor change what you thought about the character from reading the script?

2. *Death of a Salesman* has many moments where you, as the audience, see the past as Willy Loman remembers it. Be prepared to discuss how the actors, in concert with the director and designers, achieved these memories of the past. How does the use of memory make the play feel more or less realistic? How might these memories demonstrate expressionism? (The article “Inside His Head: Arthur Miller and American Expressionism,” on page 14, may guide you in this process.)

3. Arthur Miller said during an interview with Charlie Rose in 2006 that “characters are projections of the author.” After seeing Yale Repertory Theatre’s production, which character or characters do you feel are a reflection of Arthur Miller? (You may find it helpful to go back and reread Miller’s bio on pages 10–13.)

Jo Mielziner’s painting of the set showing the leaf effect for the Broadway production (From Peter L. Hays’s Miller: Death of a Salesman, 1995).
Sources

BOOKS


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DVDS


A DVD of a 1985 TV version of Death of a Salesman starring Dustin Hoffman and John Malkovich.


Miller, Arthur. Death of a Salesman (Broadway Theatre Archive). DVD. Directed by Alex Segal. New Jersey: Kultur Video, 2002. (120”)

A 1966 film adaptation of Death of a Salesman starring Lee J. Cobb.


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WEBSITES ON THE AMERICAN DREAM:

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www.rd.com/national-interest/americandream
www.socialstudieshelp.com/Lesson_1_Notes.htm
www.economicmobility.org/assets/pdfs/EMP%20American%20Dream%20Report.pdf
For more information on Yale Repertory Theatre and

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