

English 102: Introduction to Literature
Study Questions for Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

1. How is the American Dream characteristic of American ideals and philosophy? What are the differences between the materialistic and the idealistic values associated with the American Dream?
 2. What is your definition of a salesman? How is a salesman different from someone in another occupation? What attitudes do you think a salesman should have to be successful? What attitudes would hinder him?
 3. What effect do the expectations of parents have on the behavior of their children? In what ways might parental expectations be beneficial? In what ways might they be detrimental?
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4. When the play opens, what is the reason that Willy is home? Why does Linda seem shocked?
 5. Why and when does Willy frequently become perturbed at Biff? Catalog the various scenes. What insights can you make about this father-son relationship and about Willy in particular?
 6. Throughout the play, we learn that Willy's neighborhood has undergone changes over the years. What's the significance of this evolving environment and of its effect on Willy?
 7. List the ways that Linda treats Willy. Contrast her behavior to Biff's and Hap's interaction with Willy.
 8. Is Miller's choice of Willy's name symbolic? If so, of what?
 9. What is the usual time of the year that Biff begins to feel anxious and that he is wasting his life? How is it significant?
 10. What role do Willy's flashbacks play in the understanding of the drama as well as him and his aspirations?

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11. In what ways does each of the characters represent aspects of Willy's failures? Cite at least 2 examples.

12. Why won't Happy go out West with Biff, and why won't Biff stay? Why doesn't either son get married and settle down?

13. What are Willy's thoughts about the physical appearance of a person?

14. Willy praises and then curses the Chevrolet; he tells Linda that he's very well liked, and then says that people don't seem to take to him. What do these inconsistencies tell us about Willy?

15. What triggers Willy to scold Linda over mending her stockings? What's this scene's relevance to the play?

16. Who is Ben? Why does Ben appear? What does Willy think about the future? About the past? What does Ben teach Biff? Why does Willy feel "kind of temporary" about himself and want Ben to stay?

17. What kind of relationship does Willy have with Charley? With Bernard?

18. What is Willy's philosophy?

19. Why does Biff go to Boston, and what does he discover there? What effect does that discovery have on Biff?

20. Why is it so important to Willy that Biff succeed in life? What does Willy benefit from it?