

Death of a Salesman Analytical Questions

1. In what ways does Willy not fit into the definition of an average working man building a secure home for his family? In what ways does he represent Everyman? How does Willy represent more?
2. How does Miller use tension in the family to underscore Willy's character? How does he use the stage set to influence the audience's perception of the tension?
3. What is the turning point in Willy's life? Is Willy the main character in this play or is Biff? Why? What does Biff discover about himself? How does this discovery affect his relationship with Willy? How is Biff's self-realization dramatic? What is the climax of the play?
4. Who suffers most from Willy's delusions? Why? How do the delusions and the response to them contribute to the themes?
5. Does Linda help or hinder Willy in overlooking his small sales and his dishonest attempts to make them seem bigger? How else does she influence Willy? Discuss Linda's remark, "Attention—attention must finally be paid to such a man!" What is the effect of the switch in Linda's speech to this very formal statement? Why does Miller use it?
6. How is Willy's killing himself for the insurance money symptomatic of the way he has lived? What legacy does Willy leave his family?
7. What is Willy's dream? What is he searching for throughout the play? Why doesn't he find it? Did he have a chance of fulfilling it? Did he have the wrong dream? Inappropriate attitudes? Is he a born loser, or does he stand in his own way to success? Explain.
8. Does Biff's antagonism cause Willy's failure or merely intensify the failure he already experiences?
9. How does what Biff learn in Boston influence his life? Why can't Biff be what his father wants him to be? Why does Biff steal things? Does Biff use Willy's behavior as an excuse for his own waywardness? What does he say to Willy about the way he wants to live and what Willy expects of him?
10. Discuss the significance of Willy's being a younger son with an absent father. How does that influence his behavior with his own sons? In what ways does Happy's situation reflect Willy's? How has Willy treated Biff? How is it different from the way he has treated Happy? Why is the athletic trophy in Willy's room instead of in Biff's?
11. Compare the way Biff treats his father with the way Happy does. Why is it hard for Biff to tell Willy the truth? Why doesn't Happy want him to?
12. From the author's description at the start of the play, what do we know about Linda? What can we guess? Does she know about the Woman in Boston? What makes you think she does or doesn't? Why does she repeatedly enter with a load of wash?
13. How does Ben affect Willy? How does he influence the events in the play?
14. Willy is proud of putting up the living-room ceiling and making a cement porch. How is the image of working with his hands carried through the play?

15. Why does Miller let us know in the title that Willy's death is coming? Why doesn't he make it a surprise? Is Willy's death in a car more or less appropriate than a suicide using the rubber hose on the water heater would be? Why? What harm does Willy's death do? What good?
16. Discuss the symbolism of the two heavy sample cases and the stockings. How does Miller use the characters' names as symbols? What do they mean? What is the significance of Loman? Why Willy instead of Bill? What other symbols does Miller use and to what purpose?
17. How are the angular shapes and the lighting described in the opening scene important to the meaning of the play? Why does Miller have the buildings closed in by other buildings? How does he use the stage setting as a statement about time? What do the leaves stand for? How is music used?
18. What is the effect of having scenes from the past staged in addition to the current action of the play?
19. What would you say are the false values which the play reveals? What are the true values which the play upholds?
20. Daniel E. Schneider, in "Play of Dreams,"* states that the play is really about a man and his sons. Do you agree that the primary theme of *Death of a Salesman* is the conflict between father and son and between first-born and second-born sons? Support your opinion.
21. Some reviewers believe that the play is a criticism of capitalism and the American way of life. Discuss your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with them. What are the social implications of the play?