



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

BY ARTHUR MILLER



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Written by Lori White

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Research

Objectives: Placing a literary work within historical context
Refining research skills by consulting a variety of sources

Activity

Death of a Salesman was written by Arthur Miller in 1949, and is set both in Yonkers, New York, and in New England during the same time period. Explore the setting in detail using the following topics. If you can think of other research topics similar to these, you may use them as well.

Possible Topics for Research:

- Political climate (What major conflicts was the U.S. involved in? Who was president and how did he approach these conflicts?)
- News Events (Which events appeared in the national news at this time?)
- Family infrastructure (What roles did men and women have in the home or in society? Were these roles the way they had always been or were they changing?)
- Economy (Consider comparing costs of familiar items [milk, gas, food, rent, etc.] to help put things in perspective. Was the U.S. economy healthy or not?)
- Style and Fashion (What were some types of clothing, hairstyles, prevalent during the time period?)

After researching the United States during the late 1940s and early 1950s, present your findings to the class. You may give an oral report or present the information in a creative format, including (but not limited to) a collage or newsletter.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act One**Setting**

Objective: Using stage directions to describe a play's setting

Activity

In the stage directions that open Act One, Arthur Miller clearly delineates the setting of the initial scene. Using Miller's description, draw or make a model of the stage. Pay close attention to detail and be sure to include the following details in your model or drawing:

- Small home surrounded by towering cityscape
- Rooms: kitchen, an "unseen" living-room, master bedroom, boys' bedroom
- Door on left side of house
- Silver trophy
- Kitchen table and three chairs, refrigerator

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act One**Character****Objective:** Interpreting characterization of major characters**Activity**

After reading the first act of *Death of a Salesman*, you probably have a good sense of the personalities of the members of the Loman family. Follow the directions to complete a brief oral character sketch.

1. Imagine you are one of the characters from the play. You may choose one member from the Loman family: Willy, Linda, Biff, or Happy.
2. Go back through the first act and list all the details you can find about your character. Include any physical characteristics, mannerisms, your impressions of this character's voice, or traits revealed directly or indirectly (what other characters say or think about them).
3. Make a brief sketch of what you think your character looks like. You may wish to research clothing of the 1950s by looking at pictures or watching a film version of the play.
4. Write a one-half to one-page sketch from the perspective of your character that begins and ends with the same statement: "I am _____" Create a monologue about who this character believes him- or herself to be. Willy, for example, struggles with his worth as a salesman. Linda strives to be the perfect wife and mother. Biff worries about his future and about how his father sees him. All of these things should be incorporated into your monologues.
5. Create a costume that represents your character.
6. On the designated day, be prepared to dress like your character and deliver your monologue to the class. Use appropriate oral presentation techniques, such as speaking in a clear and audible tone, making eye contact, and using effective gestures.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act Two**News Article****Objective:** Writing about key events**Activity**

In Act Two, Biff reveals that he stole an ink pen from Bill Oliver. A bit later he shocks everyone with the revelation that he has been fired from every job he's ever had because he has stolen things and has served jail time for theft.

Pretend that Bill Oliver discovers the theft of his pen and accurately casts the blame on Biff, creating a very public stir. Imagine that you are a reporter for the Yonkers City Newspaper and you have been assigned the story on Biff Loman and his larcenous ways.

- A news article provides key information about a recent event. It should answer the questions of "Who?" "What?" "When?" "Where?" "Why?" and "How?"
- Most news articles are told in the inverted pyramid form. An inverted pyramid story begins with the most important information in the first paragraph and ends with the least important information in the last paragraph.
- The first paragraph should begin with a strong "lead," or a sentence that intrigues the reader and gives them a reason to keep reading.
- Paragraphs in a news article should be concise. Imagine them in print. A person reading a newspaper does not want to read huge blocks of dense text; rather, he or she would want to have the text broken up into smaller segments to provide some visual relief.

With these tips in mind, report an account of Biff Loman's past and present. Try to be as fair and impartial as you can. Articles should be approximately one page in length.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act Two**Review****Objective:** Increasing comprehension and retention through discussion questions**Activity**

Answer each question briefly and thoroughly.

1. Why is Willy in such a good mood at the start of Act Two? What event is he anticipating?
2. Who is Dave Singleman and how has he served as an inspiration for Willy?
3. What is Willy's impression of Bernard when he sees him in Charley's office? How is this ironic?
4. Why won't Willy work for Charley?
5. Explain Biff's realization that his life is a lie.
6. Why did Biff go to Boston? What does he discover there?
7. Why does Willy think Biff will be impressed with his funeral?
8. What does Biff intend to do when he tries to get his father to go inside and see Linda? Why does Willy refuse to do so?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act Two**Character Casting**

Objectives: Understanding the importance of casting
Identifying physical and psychological traits of a character
Identifying appropriate modern day actors/actresses for characters

Activity

You are a Hollywood producer and plan to produce a film version of Arthur Miller's stage drama *Death of a Salesman*. Since *Death of a Salesman* is a personal favorite, you are very concerned about how true it is to Miller's original vision. Therefore, you plan to oversee casting yourself. Using the CHARACTER CASTING CHART that follows, your job is to identify specific physical and psychological traits for the main characters in the novel. Then, choose a modern actor or actress for each character. In addition to physical and psychological characteristics, also think about how the actors you choose might interact with each other in various scenes.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Requiem**Eulogy****Objective:** Writing a eulogy**Activity**

In the requiem, the Loman family alternately shows grief, anger, and confusion over Willy's chosen mode of death. Linda, in particular, cannot understand why no one attends the funeral and why no one seems affected by her husband's suicide. Biff and Charley, perhaps, come closest to understanding who Willy was and why he made the choice he made, while Happy is in furious denial. Write a eulogy that either Biff or Charley might have read at Willy's funeral. Eulogies should offer some insight into who Willy was as an individual and why he ultimately chose to take his own life. Your eulogy should be approximately one page in length.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Entire Play

Viewpoints on Life

Objective: Comparing and contrasting mid-twentieth-century societal views with those of today

Activity

As the play progresses, the characters make a variety of statements that reflect both their own view and society's views of life. Some of these viewpoints have not changed significantly in the decades that have since passed, and some were not the views of a society at all, but rather were the products of delusional thinking.

1. First, select one of the statements from the list and think about its meaning.
 - What ideas come to mind when you read the statement?
 - What societal view is being expressed, or is this just one of Lomans' delusions?
 - How is this view similar to or different from our view today of a similar topic?
 - Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
2. Next, using the questions above as a guide, write notes on your reaction to the statement and prepare a short speech expressing your thoughts.
3. Give a three-minute speech on the statement to your classmates.
4. After each speech, discuss reactions to the statement as a class.

Statements that Reflect Societal Beliefs

- "To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always have to get ahead of the next fella. And still—that's how you build a future." (Pg. 22)
- "That's why I thank the Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want." (Pg. 33)
- "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." (Pg. 49)
- "...because it's not what you do, Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face! It's contacts, Ben, contacts!" (Pg. 86)
- "No man only needs a little salary." (Pg.138)
- "It's the only dream you can have—to come out the number one man." (Pg.139)