

## Death of a Salesman: American Dream vs American Reality

Over the years, people have flocked from foreign nations to rejoice in the diversity of America. They come with the hopes and dreams of money and the silver screens. However, many are faced with the brutal reality of hardship, rather than the fairytale ending of a famous millionaire. A song by Toshihiko Takamizawa captures the generalized immigrant realization, "Chasing after the dream/ Pride goes before the fall/ In the end will I find/ It's a mirage after all?" (American Dream, Takamizawa) Takamizawa's quote questions the tangibility of the American Dream. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* examines the clashing of American Dreams against American Reality through the eyes of Happy, Willy, and Biff. Happy loses himself to the unattainable American Dream and therefore forebodes his own failure through his delusions. Happy, always living in the shadow of his brother, grows up to assume the role of his father. His warped concept of success is formulated by Willy's advice.

### 2. Death of a Salesman

When people accept an ideal to live by it can be a glorious and noble thing unless they become so obsessed with the ideal that it becomes a yolk and they are unable to realize their dream. This is especially true for Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*. In these two plays Miller portrays Willie Loman as a lower-middle class man who lives by an ideal that ultimately is self-defeating. Willie lived to pursue the American dream rather than living the American. He pursued his ideal rather than living it and thus he is unable to succeed.

Willie Loman, in *Death of a Salesman*, has lived his life in pursuit of the American dream. Traditionally the American dream meant opportunity and freedom for all, and Willie believed that. However, hard work could not earn him everything that he wanted or thought he deserved. Willy judged himself and those around him by their material accumulation, as is demanded by capitalism and the protestant work ethic. The ethic demands accumulation and work as signs of favour in the eyes of God. Thus in order to please God and himself he had to accumulate wealth and objects. The consumer oriented society in which Willy lives will not allow him to live the American Dream. Willy is fascinated by accumulating things. His desire for goods makes him want objects that he neither needed nor could afford. Willy thinks that he needs to buy his wife a new refrigerator and new stockings even though she is content with what they have. As he tries to live the American dream he venerates those who have been successful at doing so, like Thomas Edison, B.F. Goodrich, and Ben, his successful brother. Furthermore he punished those who did not work towards that ideal or accomplish it, such as Biff, his son, and most importantly himself. The extreme to which he followed the dream brought him to disillusionment and a loss of a sense of reality. Willy created a reality for himself where he "knocked 'em cold in Providence," and "slaughtered 'em in Boston."(p.33) The ultimate result of his disillusionment.

**Task: Read both extracts above and answer the following questions in detail**

- How can the American Dream be described as a mirage?
- What effect does chasing the Dream have on Willy and his family?
- How can the American Dream be linked with religious ideas of prospering?
- Look through the play so far. Write out five quotations spoken by Willy and explain how they can be linked with the American Dream

**Death of a Salesman – Character Chart.**

**Keep a log of the interesting characteristics of the main characters. Use references from the text to remind you of where their characteristics are seen**

<b>Character's Name</b>	<b>Characteristic Seen</b>	<b>Reference from text</b>
<b>Willy</b>		
<b>Linda</b>		
<b>Happy</b>		
<b>Biff</b>		
<b>Uncle Ben</b>		

## Death of a Salesman and Capitalism

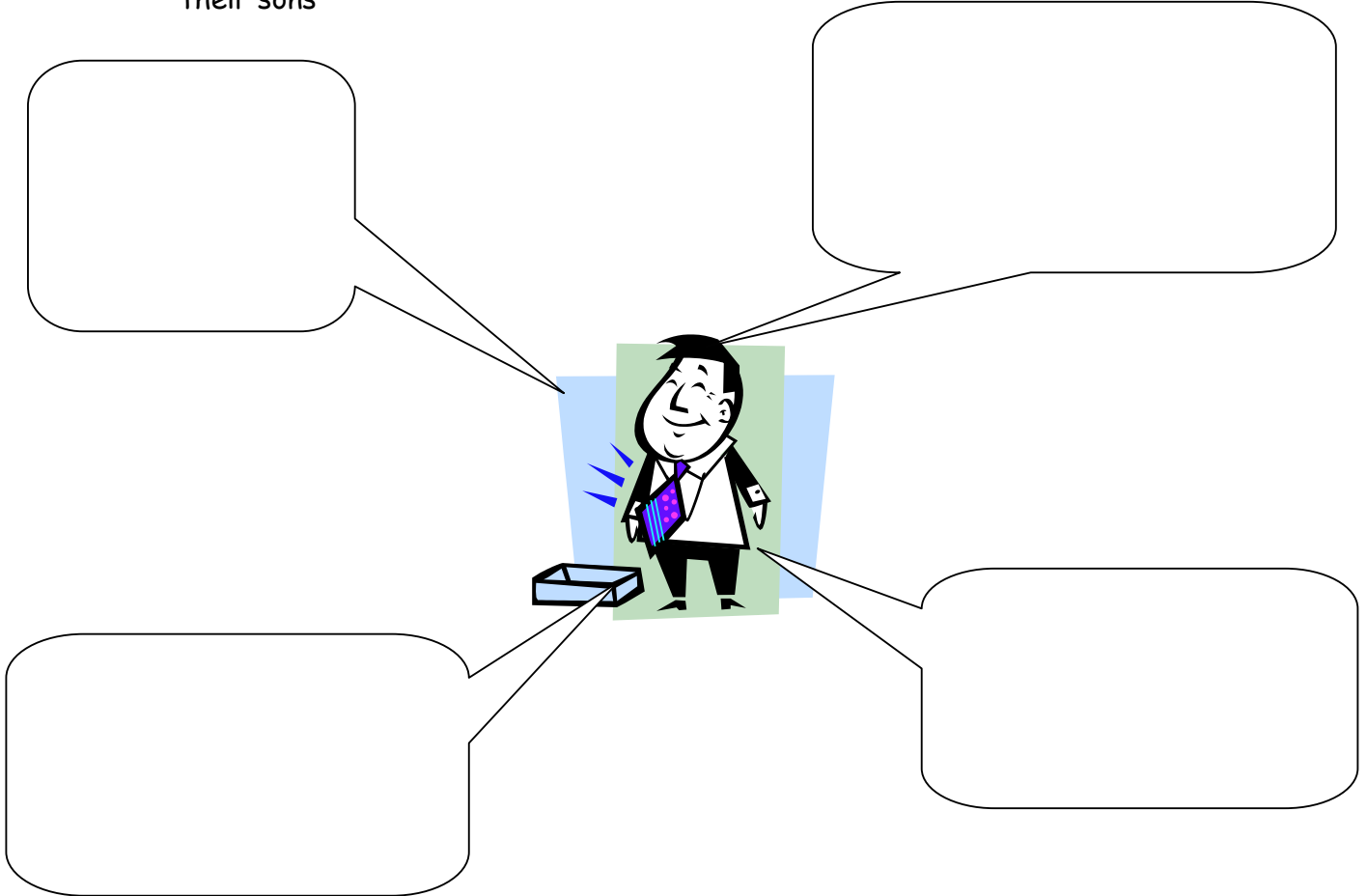
- ✦ Capitalism as a way of thinking is fundamentally individualistic, that is, that the individual is the centre of capitalist endeavour. This idea draws on all the Enlightenment concepts of individuality: that all individuals are different, that society is composed of individuals who pursue their own interests, that individuals should be free to pursue their own interests (this, in capitalism, is called "economic freedom"), and that, in a democratic sense, individuals pursuing their own interests will guarantee the interests of society as a whole.
- ✦ Capitalism as a way of thinking is fundamentally based on the Enlightenment idea of progress: the large-scale social goal of unregulated capitalism is to produce wealth, that is, to make the individual and national economy wealthier and more affluent than it normally would be. Therefore, in a concept derived whole-cloth from the idea of progress, the entire structure of capitalism as a way of thinking is built on the idea of "economic growth." This economic growth has no prescribed end; the purpose is for nations to grow steadily wealthier.
- ✦ Capitalism as a way of thinking divorces the production and distribution of goods from other concerns, such as politics, religion, ethics, etc., and treats production and distribution as independent human endeavours. In this view, the fundamental purpose and meaning of human life is productive labour.
- ✦ The economic world view treats the economy as if it were mechanical, that is, subject to certain predictable laws. This means that economic behaviour can be *rationally calculated*, and these rational calculations are always *future-directed*. So, the mechanistic view of the economy leads to an exclusively teleological world picture; capitalism as a manipulation of the "machine" of the economy is always directed to the future and intentionally regards the past as of no concern. This, in part, is one of the fundamental origins of modernity, the sense that the cultural present is discontinuous with the past.
- ✦ The fundamental unit of meaning in capitalist and economic thought is the *object*, that is, capitalism relies on the creation of a consumer culture, a large segment of the population that is not producing most of what it is consuming. Since capitalism, is fundamentally based on distributing goods—moving goods from one place to another—consumers have no social relation to the people who produce the goods they consume. In non-capitalist societies, such as tribal societies, people have real social relations to the producers of the goods they consume. But when people no longer have social relations with others who make the objects they consume, that means that the only relation they have is with the object itself. So part of capitalism as a way of thinking is that people become "consumers," that is, they define themselves by the objects they purchase rather than the objects they produce.

**TASK: Answer the questions below with reference to the play and to the information above:**

- How can we tell that Willy's world is capitalist?
- What clues does Willy give that his world is future-orientated?
- Is productive labour the main concern of Willy's life? How do you know this?
- Can capitalism be linked with the American dream? In what ways

## Fathers and Sons

In the thought bubbles, write down the things fathers often hope for their sons

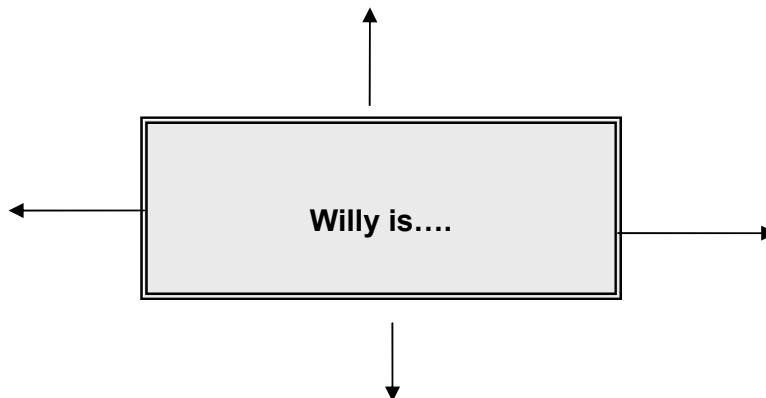
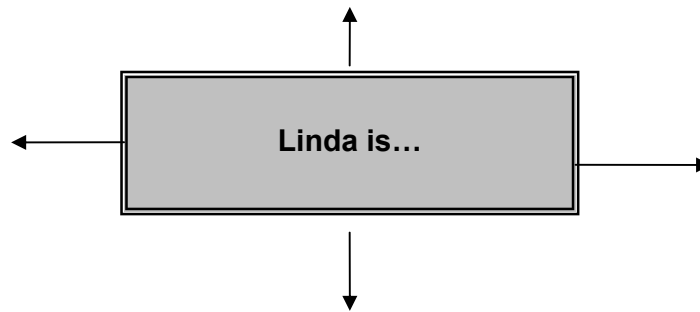


Q: Do you think Willy is happy or disappointed with his son Biff? Why do you think this is?

**Willy and Linda**

TASK: Use the words given below to complete a brainstorm for each character

<b>angry</b>	<b>impatient</b>	<b>worried</b>
<b>patient</b>	<b>Irritated</b>	<b>dreamy</b>
<b>loving</b>	<b>caring</b>	



Now see if you can add two more ideas of your own to each character brainstorm

## Biff vs. Happy

**Both of Willy's sons have different outlooks on what makes a happy and successful life. Use the chart below to help you discover what they value as important in life.**

Biff	Outlook on life	Happy	Outlook on life
' I tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is'		'Yeah that was my first time – I think. Boy there was a pig!	
'To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation'		'All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die'	
'There's nothing more inspiring than the sight of a mare and a new colt'		'I don't know what the hell I'm working for'	
'Naa. I'd like to find a girl – steady, somebody with substance'		'My own apartment, a car and plenty of women. And still, goddamit I'm lonely'	
'No, with a ranch I could do the work I like and still be something'		'Because I don't want the girl, and, still I take it and – I love it!'	

What Willy Wants

TASK: How important are these things to Willy? Give a reason for your answer

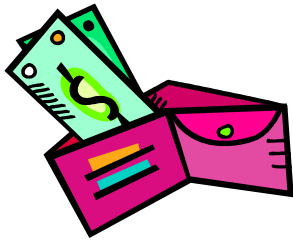


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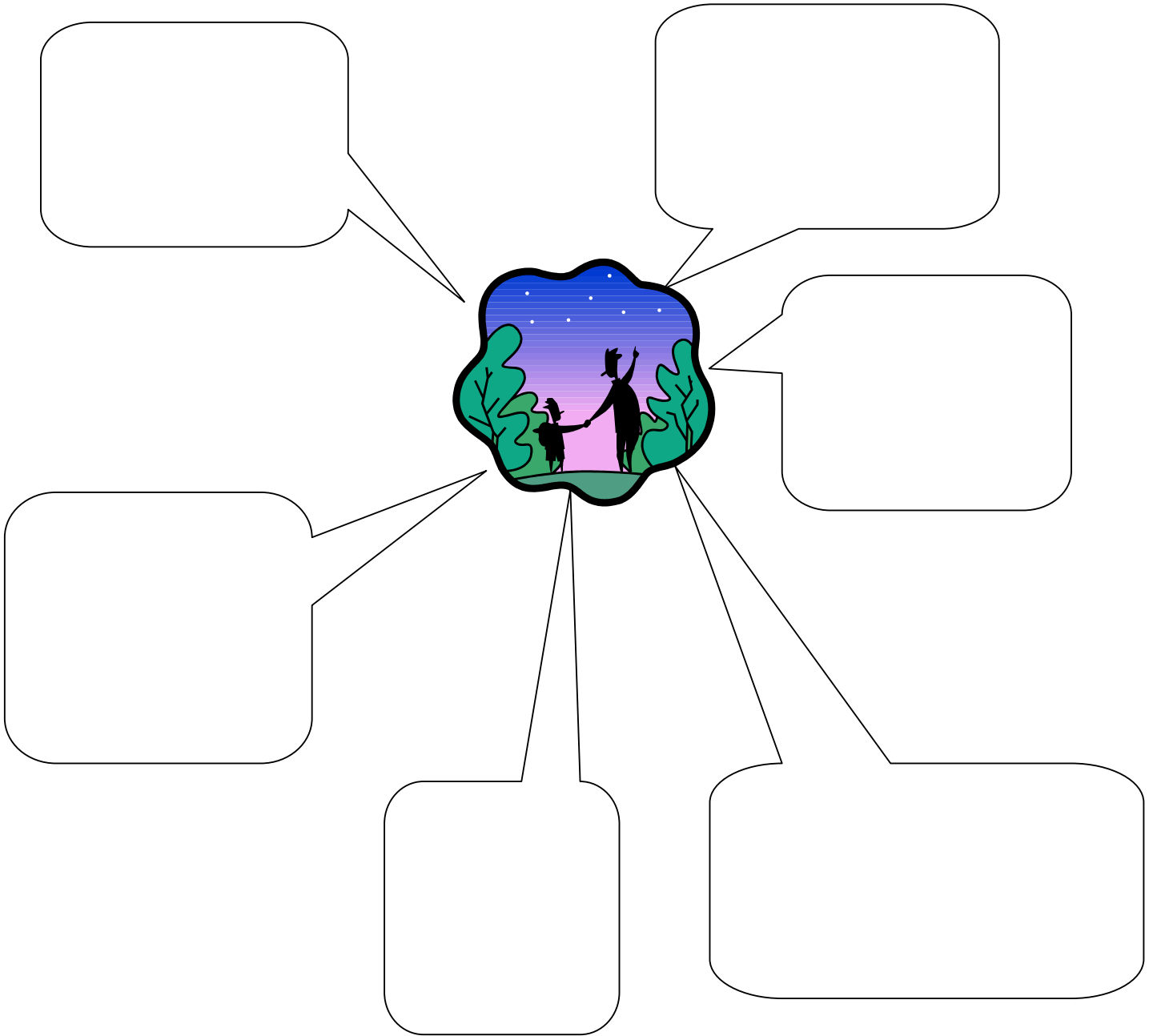
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Willy's Dreams

Keep a log off all the important events that take place in Willy's dreams



## Essay Plan

**Essay Title: What do we learn about Willy's character and beliefs in the opening of the play?**

**Introduction** – Introduce some of the main ideas that the play deals with e.g. capitalism and the American dream

**Point 1** – Write about what you think Willy feels about himself and why (Use 3 short quotations)

**Point 2** – Write about what you think Willy thinks about his family and how you know this (Use 3 short quotations)

**Point 3** – Write about what you think Willy's ambitions and dreams are (use 3 short quotations)

**Point 4** – Write about why you think Willy has day dreams that take him back to the past (use 3 short quotations)

**Conclusion** – Describe the kind of person you think Willy is. Explain what you have found interesting about his character.

## Ben and Charley

TASK: These two characters both have some kind of influence over Willy's life. Choose words from below to write into the correct characters.

Uncle Ben



Charley



proud, friend, supportive, rich, sympathetic,  
judgemental, talkative, humble

Extended Question:

Why does Willy pretend/ lie about his achievements?

1. Write down three things that Willy lies about in the play.

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- 
- 

2. Write down three reasons that you think Willy lies about these things

- 
- 
- 

3. Use this example to help you write your ideas into a paragraph

'Willy Loman is the main character in the play. Some of the things he lies about are

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. He lies about these things because

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

4. Does Willy ever tell the truth in the play? Use steps 1 - 3 to help you write those ideas into a paragraph too.

## Metaphors in 'Death of a Salesman'

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another. An idea is expressed through the image of another object.

Metaphors suggest the essence of the first object by identifying it with certain qualities of the second object.

### Here are some examples:

- You are the sun in my sky
- You are the light in my life
- Life is a mere dream
- Love is a lemon - either bitter or sweet

**On pages 23 - 25, Willy is in the midst of a dream within a dream. He is remembering the affair he embarked upon with an unidentified woman.**

**Try to think about the aspects of this situation that act as metaphors for the deeper meanings behind the play. Write in detail and use quotations if you can.**

**TASK: Compare Willy to his dreams. How do Willy's dreams act as metaphors for his character?**

**TASK: Compare Willy's hopes for his life to the unidentified woman. How does the woman act as a metaphor for all that Willy wants in life?**

## Symbolism in Death of a Salesman

Symbols are elements of a story (dialogue, motifs, situations, etc.) that keep reappearing throughout. Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

In 'Death of Salesman', Arthur Miller uses several symbols.

### The woods/jungle and diamonds

Uncle Ben is the character who deals with the symbol of the jungle (sometimes referred to by Willy as 'the woods') and diamonds. The jungle is symbolic of life, and diamonds of success. As Willy's life is crashing down around him, he says, "The woods are burning! I can't drive a car!" At the end of the play (and many other places as well) Uncle Ben refers to the jungle: "You must go into the jungle and fetch a diamond out."

To Willy, diamonds represent tangible wealth and, hence, both validation of one's labor (and life) and the ability to pass material goods on to one's offspring, two things that Willy desperately craves. Correlatively, diamonds, the discovery of which made Ben a fortune, symbolize Willy's failure as a salesman. Despite Willy's belief in the American Dream, a belief unwavering to the extent that he passed up the opportunity to go with Ben to Alaska, the Dream's promise of financial security has eluded Willy. At the end of the play, Ben encourages Willy to enter the "jungle" finally and retrieve this elusive diamond—that is, to kill himself for insurance money in order to make his life meaningful.

### The garden

The idea of planting a garden is a major symbol in the play. Willy is always discussing the idea of planting a garden, in Act I on he says, "The grass don't grow anymore, you can't raise a carrot in the backyard." At the end of the play, one of his last acts in life is his futile attempt at planting seeds in the backyard of his fenced-in house. The garden is symbolic of Willy needing to leave something behind for people to remember him by. Something that people will think about and remember him as a great man. Willy never achieved success in life, and he also never planted his garden. (He does in the end of the play, but it is assumed that will not grow.)

Seeds represent for Willy the opportunity to prove the worth of his labour, both as a salesman and a father. His desperate, nocturnal attempt to grow vegetables signifies his shame about barely being able to put food on the table and having nothing to leave his children when he passes. Willy feels that he has worked hard but fears that he will not be able to help his offspring any more than his own abandoning father helped him. The seeds also symbolize Willy's sense of failure with Biff. Despite the American Dream's formula for success, which Willy considers infallible, Willy's efforts to cultivate and nurture Biff went awry. Realizing that his all-American football star has turned into a lazy bum, Willy takes Biff's failure and lack of ambition as a reflection of his abilities as a father

### **Moon and Stars**

Willy is often seen looking and commenting on the stars or the moon. This is seen in the first act after a fight with Biff when Willy says, "Gee, look at the moon moving between the buildings." This symbol is also seen elsewhere in the play.

### **Linda's and The Woman's Stockings**

Willy's strange obsession with the condition of Linda's stockings foreshadows his later flashback to Biff's discovery of him and The Woman in their Boston hotel room. The teenage Biff accuses Willy of giving away Linda's stockings to The Woman. Stockings assume a metaphorical weight as the symbol of betrayal and sexual infidelity. New stockings are important for both Willy's pride in being financially successful and thus able to provide for his family and for Willy's ability to ease his guilt about, and suppress the memory of, his betrayal of Linda and Biff.

### **The Rubber Hose**

The rubber hose is a stage prop that reminds the audience of Willy's desperate attempts at suicide. He has apparently attempted to kill himself by inhaling gas, which is, ironically, the very substance essential to one of the most basic elements with which he must equip his home for his family's health and comfort—heat. Literal death by inhaling gas parallels the metaphorical death that Willy feels in his struggle to afford such a basic necessity.

**Theme/ Symbolism/ Triggers**

**This sheet has been designed to help you recap on some key terms and definitions.  
Use the words in the grid to help you write three paragraphs on symbolism, themes  
and triggers**

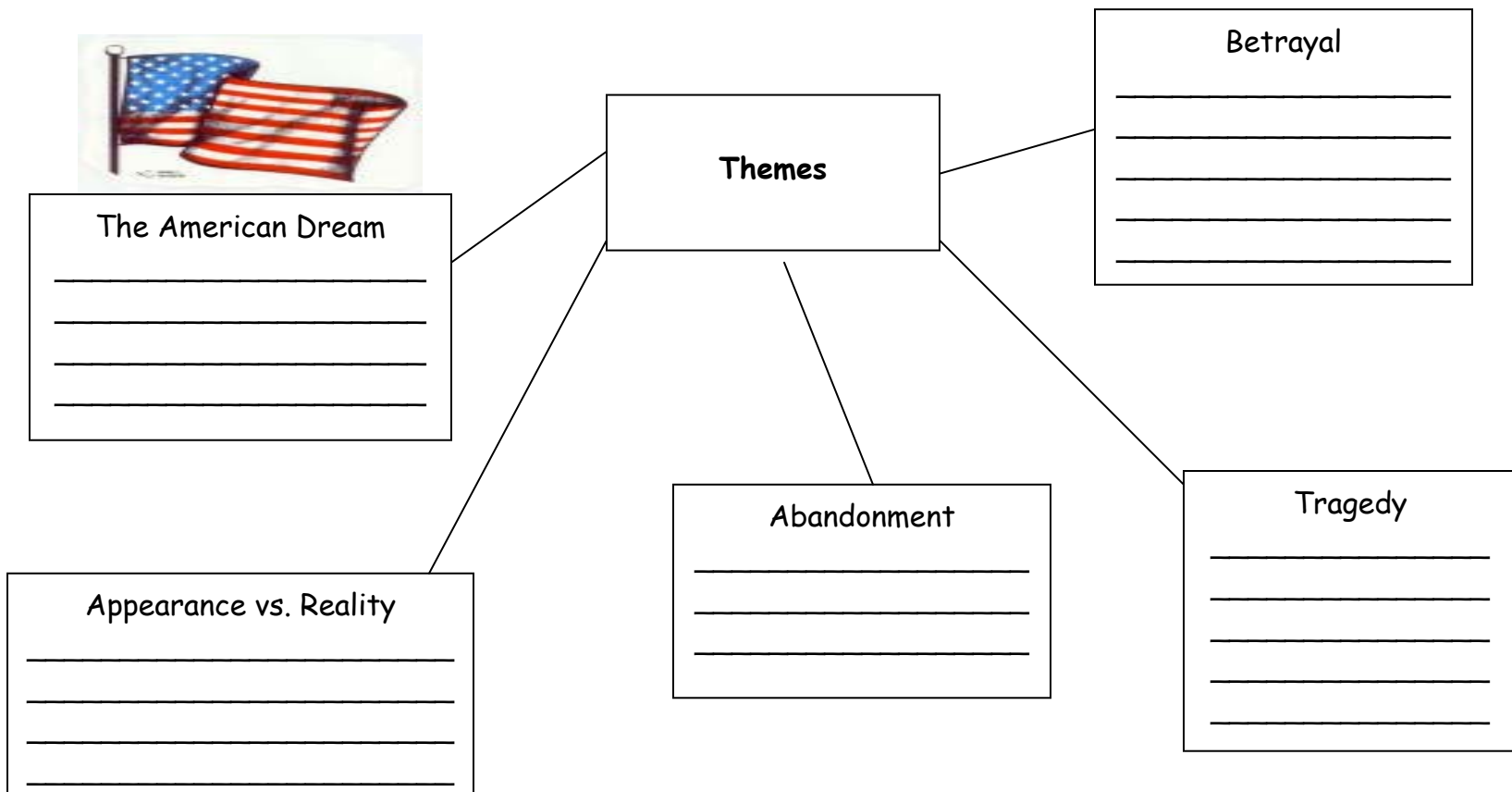
Theme	The flute and ladies stockings are both examples of symbols in the play. They represent _____	An object, phrase, character, setting or mood that kick starts a reaction in a particular character
Symbols are elements of a story that keep reappearing throughout the narrative. Symbols are objects, characters, figures or colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts	Symbolism	A theme is an idea or message that runs through a text. The theme of a text is what the author wants the reader/ audience to think about as a result of understanding the characters and events.
Loneliness and low self-esteem are both triggers for some of Willy's delusions and dreams. This is because _____	The American Dream and betrayal are both examples of themes in the play so far. They can be seen where _____	Trigger



## Themes in Death of a Salesman

A theme is an idea or message that runs through a text. The theme of a text is what the author wants the reader/ audience to think about as a result of understanding the characters and events.

Write some short notes on where you see the following themes in the play





**What triggers Willy's dreams?**

A trigger is an object, character, mood, phrase or setting that kick starts a particular reaction in a character. Willy is a dreamer and spends much of Act I in a trance-like state talking to himself.

Look back over these page numbers, read the events before and after the line given and see what triggers Willy's dreams.

Page No.	Trigger	Significance
pg3 'I opened the windshield...'		
pg6 'When he smiled at one of them...'		
pg14 'You gonna wash the engine Biff?'		
pg24 'Cause I get so lonely'		
pg29 'I'm getting awfully tired Ben'		

## Willy's Life

Willy has lots of big ideas about what his life is like. He tells other characters this in the hope of impressing them; however Willy's life is not as successful as he says.

Think about the things Willy wants to be true about his life, and then write in some ideas for what his life is really like? Write in some short quotations that you think are important.

What does Willy want to be like?	What is Willy really like?

## Homework Sheet: Themes

Write in detail about any two of the themes that you think are present in the play.

Brainstorm some ideas about each of your chosen themes before you begin writing.

Theme 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Theme 2:  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Quotation Exercise on Uncle Ben's character

TASK: Read through the following quotations and decide what they tell the audience about Uncle Ben's character.

Quotation	Significance
'Opportunity is tremendous in Alaska William. Surprised you're not up there'	
'I have many enterprises William and I have never kept books'	
'Yes my dear. But I've only a few minutes - '	
'Why boys when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich!'	
'With one gadget he made more in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime'	
'Hit that , boy - hard as you can'	
'Never fight fair with a stranger boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way'	
'William, you're being first rate with your boys. Outstanding, manly chaps'	

## Themes in Death of a Salesman

*Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.*

### The American Dream

Willy believes wholeheartedly in what he considers the promise of the American Dream—that a “well liked” and “personally attractive” man in business will indubitably and deservedly acquire the material comforts offered by modern American life. Oddly, his fixation with the superficial qualities of attractiveness and likeability is at odds with a more gritty, more rewarding understanding of the American Dream that identifies hard work without complaint as the key to success. Willy’s interpretation of likeability is superficial—he childishly dislikes Bernard because he considers Bernard a nerd. Willy’s blind faith in his stunted version of the American Dream leads to his rapid psychological decline when he is unable to accept the disparity between the Dream and his own life.

### Abandonment

Willy’s life charts a course from one abandonment to the next, leaving him in greater despair each time. Willy’s father leaves him and Ben when Willy is very young, leaving Willy neither a tangible (money) nor an intangible (history) legacy. Ben eventually departs for Alaska, leaving Willy to lose himself in a warped vision of the American Dream. Likely a result of these early experiences, Willy develops a fear of abandonment, which makes him want his family to conform to the American Dream. His efforts to raise perfect sons, however, reflect his inability to understand reality. The young Biff, whom Willy considers the embodiment of promise, drops Willy and Willy’s zealous ambitions for him when he finds out about Willy’s adultery. Biff’s ongoing inability to succeed in business furthers his estrangement from Willy. When, at Frank’s Chop House, Willy finally believes that Biff is on the cusp of greatness, Biff shatters Willy’s illusions and, along with Happy, abandons the deluded, babbling Willy in the washroom.

### Betrayal

Willy’s primary obsession throughout the play is what he considers to be Biff’s betrayal of his ambitions for him. Willy believes that he has every right to expect Biff to fulfill the promise inherent in him. When Biff walks out on Willy’s ambitions for him, Willy takes this rejection as a personal affront (he associates it with “insult” and “spite”). Willy, after all, is a salesman, and Biff’s ego-crushing rebuff ultimately reflects Willy’s inability to sell him on the American Dream—the product in which Willy himself believes most faithfully. Willy assumes that Biff’s betrayal stems from Biff’s discovery of Willy’s affair with The Woman—a betrayal of Linda’s love. Whereas Willy feels that Biff has betrayed him, Biff feels that Willy, a “phony little fake,” has betrayed *him* with his unending stream of ego-stroking lies.

## Uncle Ben

**TASK:** Decide if the following statements are true or false about Uncle Ben

	TRUE	FALSE
1. Uncle Ben is a lot younger than Willy		
2. Uncle Ben is Willy's brother		
3. Uncle Ben has lots of exciting stories to tell		
4. Willy does not think very much of Uncle		
5. Uncle Ben is a very busy business man		
6. Uncle Ben has never been to the jungle		
7. Uncle Ben believes that you must play fair in business		
8. Willy treats Uncle Ben with lots of respect		

### **Extension**

See if you can make up eight of your own true and false questions for Willy. Test your neighbour's knowledge of his character



**What is the nature of Willy's relationship with Ben?**

**Step One**

**Write down four things you know about Uncle Ben and Willy's relationship**

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- 
- 
- 

**Step Two**

**Look for four short quotations that prove the ideas you have about their relationship**

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- 
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- 

**Step Three**

**Use the frame below to help you write four separate paragraphs about Willy and Uncle Ben's relationship. See if you can make the words in each of your paragraphs slightly different.**

The relationship between Willy and Ben is \_\_\_\_\_( idea from step one).

This can be seen where \_\_\_\_\_(character)\_\_\_\_\_ says \_\_\_\_\_(quotation from step two)\_\_\_\_\_.

This is important because\_\_\_\_\_ ( your own ideas) \_\_\_\_\_.

**Death of a Salesman - Act One - Overview**

**Type of play:**

**Main characters:**

**Relationship between characters:**

**Biff's Character:**

**Willy's Character:**

**Linda's Character:**

**Happy's Character:**

**Ben's Character:**

**Other minor character:**

**Main type of action:**

**Location of main action:**

**Pattern of Dramatic Tension (Diagram):**

## Death of a Salesman - Act One - Overview

Choose the correct response from the symbols and words scattered around the page

Type of play:

- Lost
- Angry with his father
- Doesn't know what to do with his life

- Lost in dreams
- Believes the American Dream
- Wants to be the best

Main characters:

Biff's Character:

Willy's Character:

Ben's Character:

**Biff**  
**Willy**  
**Ben**



Location of main action:



- Proud of himself
- Believes in being the best
- Thinks money = strength

## Brutus - The Tragic Hero

The following is a breakdown of a character called Brutus from one of Shakespeare's plays called 'Julius Caesar'. Brutus is a member of the Senate, the ruling body of Rome.

Throughout many of Shakespeare's plays, a tragic hero is identified; a heroic figure that possesses a character flaw that leads to his defeat. In The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, there have been controversies over who is actually the tragic hero. Many people agree that Marcus Brutus is the tragic hero. However, others argue and identify Julius Caesar as the tragic hero. After examining these two characters, a conclusion is easily drawn. Brutus is the tragic hero of this play because when a person who possesses such heroic qualities dies, it is a true tragedy.

The main reason that Marcus Brutus deserves the title of tragic hero is his noble personality. First of all, throughout the play, he never deceives anyone. Although he did murder Julius Caesar, it was for the good of Rome, not to deceive Caesar. Everything that he did was for the benefit of someone else. Even though he killed Antony's best friend, Antony still recognized Brutus as "the noblest Roman of them all." He does this in Act 5, Scene 5, after Brutus' death because Brutus the only conspirator that actually killed Caesar because he was not envious and he actually did care about the good of Rome. He cared more about others than he did himself. For instance, in the process of killing Caesar, he could have easily backed out because he knew he might have been punished, but he knew in the long run, that it would help the plebeians most. Another example of his selflessness is in Act 2, Scene 1. Brutus decides not to tell Portia his plans for the murder of Caesar. He feels she already has enough stress in her life and does not need to worry or deal with his plans.

Brutus also frequently demonstrated many acts of affection toward others. In Act 1, Scene 2, he is reluctant to join Cassius's conspiracy because he did not want to betray Caesar. He had to weigh his choices and in Act 3, Scene 2, Brutus kills Caesar only because he is afraid of what will happen to Rome if Caesar remains ruler. He knew the commoners life would be difficult with the ruling of Caesar. He realizes what a honorable man Caesar was. This is shown again in the same Act and Scene when Brutus allows Mark Antony to speak at Caesar's funeral even though Cassius highly disagreed. Brutus realized Caesar deserved an proper ceremony, and that the best way to do that would be to let

Caesar's best friend speak. Finally he shows his endearment for others in Act 5, Scene 5. This is the scene in which Brutus kills himself partly because Cassius, his best friend, died.

All tragic heroes possess a character flaw that leads to their defeat. Brutus' tragic flaw was being naive. He thought that everything was good in the world, and that all men were honorable. He believed all that people told him and felt no one would lie or deceive him. Just because he did not betray anyone, he believed the world would return this act. This characteristic led him to his death. All that he trusted deceived him at one time or another during the play. He allows others, like Cassius and Antony to betray him. He is too trustful and does not realize what people are capable of doing to him after making them his friend. Due to this tragic flaw, a downfall of the character occurred soon after. The events that occurred because of Brutus' naiveness led to his downfall and death. His first mistake was in Act 2, Scene 1. This was when the fake letters are sent to him from the conspirators. This was all a lie, a trap, to get Brutus to join in on the conspirator for Cassius knew he could not do it without Brutus' support. Brutus believes these letters are from the people of Rome and agrees to the death of Caesar. Another example of this naiveness is in Act 3, Scene 2. Brutus decides to allow Antony to speak to show honor to Caesar. In the end, this decision ruins him. Antony riles the crowd into believing that the conspirators are all evil and they must get revenge. In result, a war breaks out. His last error, was not so much because of his naive trait, it was just pure desire in Act 5, Scene 2. This fault occurred when he starts the battle without telling Cassius about it. Brutus realizes it is the time to strike and knows that he must start the battle. There is no time to tell Cassius. This choice, in the end, was the main reason for his suicide. He kills himself because he realizes it is nobler to commit suicide than become captured and dragged through Rome. With all of Brutus's characteristics, he is obviously the tragic hero of this play. Throughout this drama, he demonstrates the quality of honor many times. He is a noble man and I think Antony sums in up well in his last part in the play, which reads:

"This was the noblest Roman of them all.  
All the conspirators save only he  
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;  
He, only in general honest thought  
And common good to all, made one of them.  
His life was gentle, and the elements

So mixed in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, "This was a man!"

In the end, Brutus is defeated because of his tragic flaw. Brutus was naive and did not realize the real ways of the people he trusted.

Task
Using the criteria given above, summarize how Brutus fits the conventions of a typical tragic hero?

## Writing a good GCSE English Literature/Drama essay

1. Read the essay points below and label them with one of the following titles:

- CHARACTER
- THEME
- PLOT
- SYMBOLISM

2. See if you can find quotations that would support these essay points. Write them on the back of the sheet, stating which heading they would be organised under.

'Death of a Salesman' is play about the American dream and the effect that the pursuit of it has on the life of one main character, Willy Loman. Willy is disillusioned with what he considers to be his failed life and chooses to spend most of his time dreaming about times when he really was 'somebody', times when he was still in a position to possibly achieve the dream.'

Happy Loman is a minor character in the play. He is Willy's youngest son and although it appears that he has his life well-planned, Miller leaves clues as to how Happy has to deal being the son of a dreamer. Happy is described as a competitive womaniser. He believes he has a gift with the 'ladies' and also has a convicting belief that because he is bigger than everyone else, he is also somehow better than everyone else. This is clearly symptomatic of growing up with a father who believed that looks, size and personality were what guaranteed success in life.

Dreams and ambitions are both very important themes in the play. This is because most characters in the play have to deal with these ideas at some point. Willy, Biff and Happy all dream about improving their lives and somehow reaching their predestined fortunes. Ambition is what keeps them dreaming. Willy obviously takes this theme further, as he reflects on what he has made of his life he begins to lose sight of the lines that separate reality and dreams.



The flute is a moving symbol that is key to understanding the messages tied up in the play. The flute acts as a symbol of hope, dreams and Willy's past. The audience is introduced to the flute in the opening pages of the play, its melody rising above the turmoil that resides in Willy's house and mind. It also symbolises a time in Willy's life when he was not under pressure to perform and be the best, a time when he looked up to his own father and was not desperate to be looked up to.

**Year 11 Character Questions - Death of a Salesman Act One**

Answer either question. You are advised to spend 45 minutes on each question.

**Q1. Selected Scene – Act One - Pg 8 - 12**

From - **Happy:** *He's going to get his licence taken away...* to **Biff:** *I'm tellin' you, kid, if you were with me I'd be happy out there.*

Discuss in detail, how you would play the character of **Biff** in the selected scene. You will need to refer to voice, movement, gesture and facial expression as well as to how your chosen character responds to others on stage.

**Q2. Selected Scene – Act One - Pg 27 - 31**

From - **Charley:** *Everything all right?* to **Willy:** *Ignoramus!*

Discuss in detail, how you would play the character of **Willy** in the selected scene.

You will need to refer to voice, movement, gesture and facial expression as well as to how your chosen character responds to others on stage.

## Following Dramatic Tension

It is important to be able to plot the dramatic tension of particular scenes in the play. This is a good skill to have for the exam.

This sheet will give you some help on analysing the pattern of dramatic tension in particular scenes.

### Step One - Pick a short section of a scene

e.g. pg 21 - 23

### Step Two - Organise the main five events in the scene

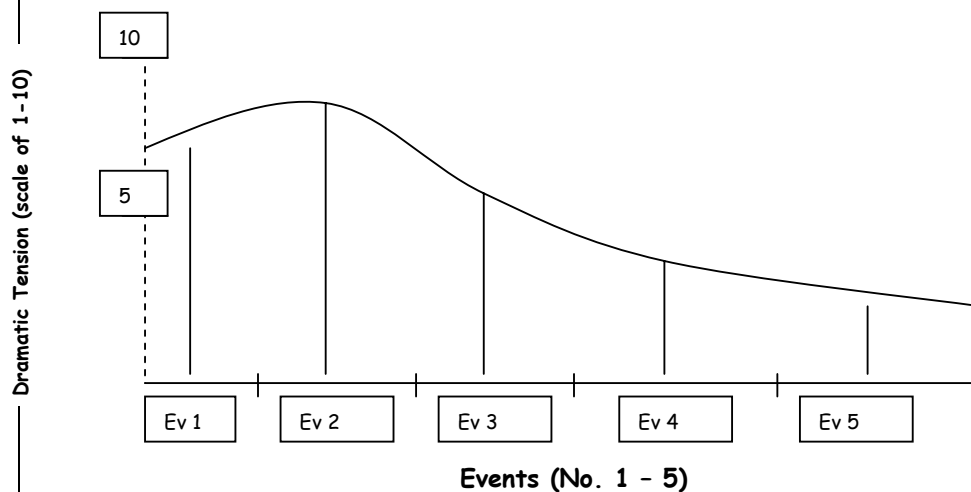
1. Willy comes home excited from some time on the road
2. Willy tells his sons how important he is
3. Willy tells Linda the truth about how much money he has made
4. Linda goes through their debts
5. Willy pities himself and feels sad

### Step Three - Give each event a mark out of ten for dramatic tension and excitement

1. Willy comes home excited from some time on the road (6)
2. Willy tells his sons how important he is (8)
3. Willy tells Linda the truth about how much money he has made (5)
4. Linda goes through their debts (3)
5. Willy pities himself and feels sad (2)

### Step Four - Draw a Dramatic Tension chart

### Step Five - Plot on the tension marks that you have given each event in the scene



**Step Six - Analyse your chart and put your findings into words**

e.g. On pages 21 to 23 the dramatic tension decreases as the scene unfolds. Willy enters the scene on a high, he and the other characters are excited to see him. However as reality hits Willy, the scene becomes quite sad as he begins to sink into self-pity

## Group work for Dramatic Tension Pattern Charts

Give each group a key scene from below. They are to draw tension graphs that chart the pattern of the drama in the scene.

**Group 1 - pg 4 & 5 Top to 'he's not lazy'**

**Group 2 - pg 16 & 17 to 'leave home anymore'**

**Group 3 - pg 25 & 26 from 'Where is he..' to 'anything but decent things'**

**Group 4 - pg 29 - 31 from 'I'm getting awfully tired..' to 'Ignoramus'**

**Group 5 - pg 38 & 39 Top to 'those ungrateful bastards'**

**Group 6 - pg 40 - 42 from 'He's dying Biff' to 'his life is in your hands'**

**Group 7 - pg45 - 46 from Top to 'he may remember me'**

**Homework Sheet -  
Revision of Key dramatic terms and references**

Find out the meanings to the words below. They are terms that you should be able to use confidently in the DOAS exam.

Tragedy =	
Tragic Hero =	
Tragic Flaw =	
Tension =	
Climax =	
Conflict =	
Movement =	
Gesture =	
Voice =	

## Linda Loman

Create a brainstorm around Linda based on what we know about her at the end of Act One. Clues we are given about how she feels about her husband. Look back at important scenes to help jog your memory.

'she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to Willy's behaviour'

'Why must he fight dear?'

'Biff, a man is no a bird, to come and go with the springtime'

'he's your father and you pay him that respect, or else you're not come here'

'Willy darling, you're the handsomest man in the world'



'Your mind is over-active, and the mind is what counts'

'well next week you'll do better'

'If you don't have any feeling for him, then you can't have any feeling for me'

'Biff his life is in your hands'

'He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog'

'Are they any worse than his sons?'

The Many Faces of Linda Loman

Linda is Willy's wife. Even though she is not a main character, she has many roles to fill in Willy, Biff and Happy's life. Underneath each face write a few notes on one of the roles that she has to play.





What is the difference between Willy 'living his dream' and 'living in his dreams'?

Living his dream

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Living in his dream



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## Keeping Secrets

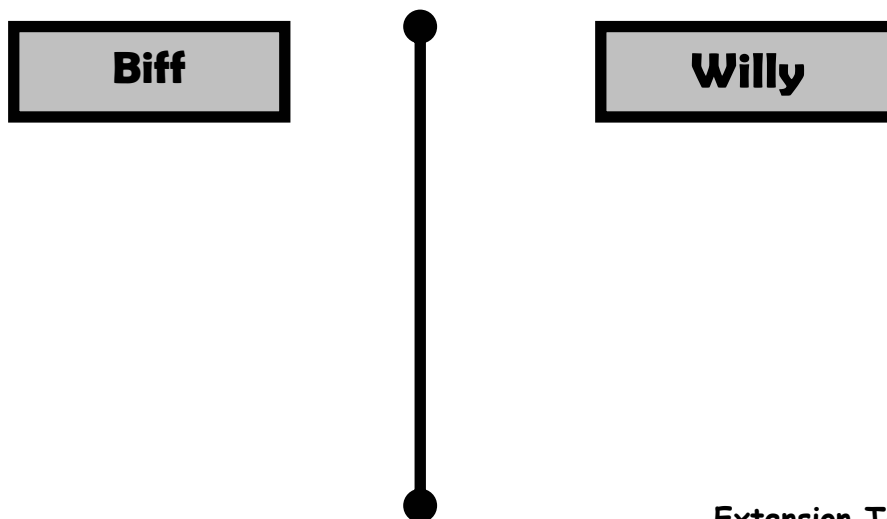
There appears to be some kind of secret between Willy and Biff

Think about some of the emotions associated with keeping secrets



Plot your ideas on either side of the Biff and chart.

Who is feeling which emotion.



### Extension Task

Can you find any quotations from the play that highlight these emotions clearly?

*Tragedy and the Common Man*  
An Essay by Arthur Miller  
1949

In this age few tragedies are written. It has often been held that the lack is due to a paucity of heroes among us, or else that modern man has had the blood drawn out of his organs of belief by the skepticism of science, and the heroic attack on life cannot feed on an attitude of reserve and circumspection. For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy--or tragedy above us. The inevitable conclusion is, of course, that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly, and where this admission is not made in so many words it is most often implied.

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classific formulations, such as the Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instance, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations.

More simply, when the question of tragedy in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well-placed and the exalted the very same mental processes as the lowly. And finally, if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the highbred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it.

As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society.

Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his "tragic flaw," a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing--and need be nothing--but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." Most of us are in that category.

But there are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them, and in the process of action, everything we have accepted out of fear or

insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined, and from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us--from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment--comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy.

More important, from this total questioning of what has been previously unquestioned, we learn. And such a process is not beyond the common man. In revolutions around the world, these past thirty years, he has demonstrated again and again this inner dynamic of all tragedy.

Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of his character, is really but a clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king.

The quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. Among us today this fear is as strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best.

Now, if it is true that tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment. And this is precisely the morality of tragedy and its lesson. The discovery of the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of, is not the discovery of some abstract or metaphysical quantity.

The tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself. The wrong is the condition which suppresses man, perverts the flowing out of his love and, creative instinct. Tragedy enlightens--and it must, in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy, of man's freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarred from such thoughts or such actions.

Seen in this light, our lack of tragedy may be partially accounted for by the turn which modern literature has taken toward the purely psychiatric view of life, or the purely sociological. If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action, is obviously impossible.

And if society alone is responsible for the cramping of our lives, then the protagonist must needs be so pure and faultless as to force us to deny his validity as a character. From neither of these views can tragedy derive, simply because neither represents a balanced concept of life. Above all else, tragedy requires the finest appreciation by the writer of cause and effect.

No tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit, or custom as being either everlasting, immutable, or inevitable. In the tragic view the need of man to wholly realize himself is the only fixed star, and whatever it is that hedges his nature and lowers it is ripe for attack and examination. Which is not to say that tragedy must preach revolution.

The Greeks could probe the very heavenly origin of their ways and return to confirm the rightness of laws. And Job could face God in anger, demanding his right, and end in submission. But for a moment everything is in suspension, nothing is accepted, and in ' this stretching and tearing apart of the cosmos, in the very action of so doing, the character gains "size." the tragic stature which is spuriously attached to the royal or the highborn in our minds. The commonest of men may take on that stature to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest, the battle to secure his rightful place in his world.

There is a misconception of tragedy with which I have been struck in review after review, and in many conversations with writers and readers alike. It is the idea that tragedy is of necessity allied to pessimism. Even the dictionary says nothing more about the word than that it means a story with a sad or unhappy ending. This impression is so firmly fixed that I almost hesitate to claim that in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker's brightest opinion of the human animal.

For, if it is true to say that in essence the tragic hero is intent upon claiming his whole due as a personality, and if this struggle must be total and without reservation, then it automatically demonstrates the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity.

The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not possibly have won. The pathetic is achieved when the protagonist is, by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity, or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force.

Pathos truly is the mode for the pessimist. But tragedy requires a nicer balance between what is possible and what is impossible. And it is curious, although edifying, that the plays we revere, century after century, are the tragedies. In them, and in them alone, lies the belief--optimistic, if you will--in the perfectibility of man.

It is time, I think, that we who are without kings took up this bright thread of our history and followed it to the only place it can possibly lead in our time--the heart and spirit of the average man.



## Tragedy in Literature

'DOAS' is a modern tragedy play.

Mix and match the correct definitions to the correct terms regarding tragedy.

Write the correct terms and definitions onto A4 paper.

<b><u>Catharsis</u></b>	Ordinary people in tragic situations, most central characters die or are destroyed in some way in the end.
A release of emotional tension, as after an overwhelming experience, that restores or refreshes the spirit	<b><u>Classical Tragedy</u></b>
<b><u>Tragic Flaw</u></b>	<b><u>Modern Tragedy</u></b>
A series of actions the hero of the play takes that eventually lead to his downfall	Exalted people in tragic situations, most central characters die or are destroyed in some way in the end.

## Willy the Tragic Hero

Recap on the conventions a tragic hero must fulfil. Write a few sentences on whether the following features are seen in Willy's character, thus making him a modern tragic hero.

- Do Willy's actions and circumstances affect those around him? How?

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- Does Willy have a good reputation? Does anyone think highly of him as a person?

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- Can the fact that Willy pursues his unrealistic dreams be seen as a tragic flaw? Do you think it will lead to his downfall?

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- Has Willy's ability to achieve his dreams increased or declined with time? How does the audience know?

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- Does Willy have any redeeming features, or does he do something to make up for his flaws that make the audience and those characters around him end up feeling sympathy for him?

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## Willy's state of mind

Once Willy leaves his dreams in Act One, he appears to have a new found energy for life, and seems more determined than ever to fulfil his dreams through Biff. Willy believes that everything will be all right now, but the author leaves some clues for the audience that show them that all may not be well.

In your groups, take a look at the quotation you have been given.

On the sheets provided, create a brief spoken presentation based on the discussing the following questions:

- Who is Willy talking about?
- What does he want to happen?
- Is he relying on the dreams in his mind, or the reality around him?
- Are there any clues in what he says that tell the audience that disaster may soon follow?

'That is a one-million-dollar idea' -  
pg45

'I see great things for you kids, I think your troubles are over. But remember, start big and you'll end big.' - pg 46

'It's not what you say, it's how you  
say it - because personality always  
wins the day' - pg 46

'Because you got a greatness in you,  
Biff, remember that. You got all kinds  
a greatness' - pg48

'God Almighty, he'll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away' - pg 49

'And if anything falls off the desk while you're talking to him - like a package or something - don't pick it up. They have office boys for that'. -

pg 48



'The average young man today - is got  
a calibre of zero.' - pg 48

'Tell him you were in the business in the West. Not farm work' - pg 48

## Willy's State of Mind - Homework Sheet

Just because Willy is no longer dreaming, does not mean that he can accept the truth of the life he has around him. Think about what takes place at the end of Act One and write some notes on the plans Willy has for:

Himself: \_\_\_\_\_

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Biff: \_\_\_\_\_

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The future of his family:

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## Writing as a Director - Homework Sheet

The question you will tackle will ask you to think about the voice, movement and gestures that certain characters from the play should be using for a particular scene.

Use this sheet to help you plot your ideas

Character	Type of words they say	How should they say them?	Type of emotions they feel	Which gestures will show this best?
Willy				
Biff				
Linda				
Charley				
Ben				