

# THE Classic Theatre

SAN ANTONIO

Presents

## Death of a Salesman



By: Arthur Miller

Our student performances are funded by a generous grant from:



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**The Classic Theatre mission** is to build a professional theatre that inspires passionate involvement in a shared theatrical experience and to create a source of pride for our community.

## Cast of Characters

**Willy Loman** - An insecure, self-deluded traveling salesman. Willy believes wholeheartedly in the American Dream of easy success and wealth, but he never achieves it.

**Biff Loman** – Willy and Linda’s thirty-four-year-old eldest son. Biff led a charmed life in high school as a football star with scholarship prospects, good male friends, and fawning female admirers. He failed math, however, and did not have enough credits to graduate. Since then, his kleptomania has gotten him fired from every job that he has held.

**Linda Loman** - Willy’s loyal, loving wife. Linda suffers through Willy’s grandiose dreams and self-delusions. Occasionally, she seems to be taken in by Willy’s self-deluded hopes for future glory and success, but at other times, she seems far more realistic and less fragile than her husband. She has nurtured the family through all of Willy’s misguided attempts at success.

**Happy Loman** – Willy and Linda’s thirty-two-year-old youngest son. Happy has lived in Biff’s shadow all of his life. Although he works as an assistant to an assistant buyer in a department store, Happy presents himself as supremely important. He is unethical in business dealings and is fixated on pursuing the girlfriends of his superiors.

**Charley** - Willy’s next-door neighbor. Charley owns a successful business. Willy is jealous of Charley’s success. Charley gives Willy money to pay his bills, and Willy reveals at one point that Charley is his only friend.

**Bernard** - Charley’s son and an important, successful lawyer. Biff was Bernard’s childhood hero.

**(Uncle)Ben** - Willy’s wealthy older brother. Ben has recently died and appears only in Willy’s “daydreams.” Ben is a symbol of the success that Willy so desperately craves for himself and his sons.

**The Woman** - Willy’s mistress when Happy and Biff were in high school.

**Howard Wagner** - Willy’s boss. Howard inherited the company from his father, whom Willy regarded as “a masterful man” and “a prince.”

**Stanley** - A waiter at Frank’s Chop House and a friend of Happy’s.

**Miss Forsythe and Letta** - Two young women whom Happy and Biff meet at Frank’s Chop House.

**Jenny** - Charley’s secretary

# Synopsis

“*Salesman* is absurdly simple. It’s about a salesman and it’s his last day on earth”

—Arthur Miller

**SYNOPSIS -- (excerpts from Royal Lyceum Theatre Company, Edinburgh)**

## **Act 1**

Willy Loman is a traveling salesman at the end of his career. The beginning of the play sees him returning home to his wife Linda after nearly crashing his car. Biff and Happy, their adult sons, are on a rare trip home. The relationship between Biff and his father is strained. Willy thinks Biff is a “lazy bum”: he has not found himself a career at the age of 34. Upstairs in their bedroom, Biff talks to his brother Happy about his inability to settle and his anger at his father’s criticism of him. Alone in the kitchen, Willy retreats into his memory, remembering the boys as teenagers, Biff being a popular football star and his successful brother, Ben. Within these memories are also hints of where things started to go wrong for Willy as he exaggerates his success, dismisses Biff’s stealing and lies to his wife. Another woman is seen in Willy’s past.

The past and present mingle in Willy’s mind throughout a visit by his friend Charley who offers him a job which Willy proudly rejects. The brothers and Linda discuss Willy – Linda defends him and attacks her sons for their treatment of him. She tells them that Willy is trying to kill himself.

Biff tries to placate Willy’s anger when he overhears them discussing him by telling Willy that he will go and see an old employer, Oliver, and ask for a job. This escalates into a plan for the brothers to set up in business together. Willy is delighted and the whole family is sucked into this daydream. At the end of the Act, however, Biff discovers the length of tubing that Willy has hidden so he can use it to commit suicide.

## **Act 2**

The Act opens happily with Willy making plans to ask his boss for a desk job and then meet his sons for dinner. However, when Willy sees his boss, he will not give him a different job and finally tells Willy he is fired. This triggers memories of his brother Ben offering him a job, which he turned down. Willy then goes to Charley’s office to borrow money and meets Charley’s son Bernard, whom Willy had ridiculed as a boy but who is now a successful lawyer. Charley again offers him a job and Willy is again furious at the ‘insult’.

In the restaurant that evening, Biff tells Happy that Oliver did not remember him – he realized he had been lying to himself about his importance in the company. As he was leaving the office he stole a fountain pen. Willy joins them and Biff tries to tell him what has happened but Willy won’t listen. Biff and Happy leave Willy alone in the restroom. Willy remembers an incident in Boston where Biff discovers him with a woman.

On the boys’ return to the house, Linda is furious. Willy is talking to his brother Ben (in his mind) about his plan to commit suicide so his family can have the insurance money. Biff and Willy argue again and Biff tells his family that he has lost every job he ever had through stealing and that he has been in jail. However, Willy sees Biff’s admission as a sign that Biff loves him

and decides that if he leaves him the money he will be 'magnificent'. As the others go to bed, Willy leaves the house and crashes his car.

### **Requiem**

The graveside. The family react in different ways – Happy is angry; Charley believes that the job has destroyed Willy. Biff knows that he has had the 'wrong dreams'. The scene ends with Linda who cannot understand why he has done it when they have just made the final payment on the house and are 'free and clear.'

*Death of a Salesman* is considered an artistic masterpiece and became a turning point in Arthur Miller's career as a writer. Willy Loman, the protagonist of the play, has become a symbol of the common man throughout the world. Even today, almost 65 years after the play's first production, audiences see themselves or someone they know in the character of Willy, as he tries but fails to achieve the American Dream of material success and prosperity. The play has been structured "expressionistically", in that, Miller broke down conventional constraints of time and place traditionally observed in theatre, and moved the audience in and out of Willy's past and then into the present and then back in the past again, as Willy shuttles between the dreams and promises of his past and the harsh reality of the present. The play carries the audience into Willy's mind, to expose his loneliness, his needs, and his struggle to establish his significance in the world.



***Willy (Allan S. Ross), Linda (Terri Pena-Ross) and Biff (Tony Ciaravino) in a scene from Classic Theatre's production.***

## Productions of Death of a Salesman

The original Broadway production was produced by Kermit Bloomgarden and opened at the Morosco Theatre on February 10, 1949. It won the Tony Award for Best Play, Best Supporting or Featured Actor (Arthur Kennedy), Best Scenic Design (Jo Mielziner), Producer (Dramatic), Author (Arthur Miller), and Director (Elia Kazan), as well as the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play. The play has been revived on Broadway three times since.



***Photos (by Eileen Darby) from the original New York production starring Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman, Mildred Dunnock as Linda, Arthur Kennedy as Biff, Cameron Mitchell as Happy, and Thomas Chalmers as Uncle Ben.***



***Photo from the 1985 movie, starring Dustin Hoffman as Willy and John Malkovich as Biff***

## About the Playwright, Arthur Miller



Arthur Miller was born in Manhattan, New York City, near the lower edge of Harlem in 1915. His father was a comfortably middle-class manufacturer of women's coats, and his mother was a schoolteacher. The Miller family moved to Brooklyn in the early 1930s because the Great Depression had plunged them into great financial difficulty. These years of poverty and struggle influenced many of his plays.

After he graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, Arthur Miller spent the next two and a half years working as a stock clerk in an automobile parts warehouse until he had saved enough money to attend college at the University of Michigan. He finished college with financial aid from the National Youth Administration and from the money he earned as night editor of the Michigan Daily newspaper. While there, Miller began to write plays, several of which were rewarded with prizes. Upon graduating from college in 1938, Miller returned home to New York where he married Mary Grace Slatter and had two children, Jane and Robert.

While back home, Miller also joined the Federal Theatre Project, an arts program sponsored by the U.S. government. However, before his first play could be produced, the project ended. A college football injury kept him from active service in World War II. He worked as a fitter at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and wrote radio scripts. He also wrote two novels during this time - *Situation Normal* (1944), a volume of material about army life, and *Focus* (1945) a novel about anti-Semitism. Miller had not, however, given up on playwriting. In 1944, his play *The Man Who Had All the Luck* won a prize offered by New York City's Theatre Guild and received a Broadway production. The show, though, was not very successful - it closed after only four performances. It was not until three years later that Miller was able to find success on the stage. His play *All My Sons* debuted to positive critical reviews in 1947, and it was a big hit with audiences as well. This play established him as a significant voice in American theatre. The play won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the Donaldson Award, voted upon by subscribers to Billboard Magazine.

Two years later, *Death of a Salesman* opened on Broadway and ran for 742 performances at the Morosco Theatre. The play earned Miller the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1949. Critics began to regard him as one of the greatest twentieth-century American playwrights.

The next several years were very good for Miller, during which time he had several hit plays, culminating with *The Crucible*, which debuted on Broadway in 1953, during the height of Senator Joe McCarthy's congressional investigations into "un-American" activities of US citizens (which mostly meant involvement with the Communist Party). The early 1950s were a very tense time in American history; the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union made many Americans extremely worried about the safety and future of their nation, and Miller reflected the paranoia and hysteria of the time in *The Crucible*. As a result, Miller was denied a passport to Belgium to attend the opening of *The Crucible* there. Later, he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and was asked to tell the committee members the names of US citizens who were involved in Communist activities. Miller refused, and was thus cited with contempt of Congress, a serious crime. This conviction, however, was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1958.

The mid-50s were also very turbulent times in Miller's personal life. In 1956 he divorced his wife and married movie star Marilyn Monroe, whom he had first met in Hollywood in the early 1950s. This event brought him great notoriety and caused a media sensation, but in 1961 it also ended in divorce. Miller married photographer Inge Morath in 1962. They had two children, Rebecca and Daniel. Miller still wrote up until his death in 2005, although from the mid-eighties his work was more highly valued in London, where critical and popular success was much warmer than in the United States. He is revered as one of America's greatest playwrights, the recipient of 7 Tony Awards and the John F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award among many others.



***Miller with his second wife, Marilyn Monroe.***



***A scene from the film version of *The Crucible*, starring Miller's son-in-law, Daniel Day-Lewis.***

## INSPIRATION for *Death of a Salesman*

Arthur Miller once said that everything he had written was based on somebody he had seen or known...

In his autobiography *Timebends*, Miller related that he found inspiration for the play in his own life. Miller based Willy Loman largely on his own uncle, Manny Newman. Miller described Newman as a man who was a competitor at all times, in all things, and at every moment. Miller said that his uncle “saw my brother and I running neck and neck with his two sons [Buddy and Abby] in some horse race [for success] that never stopped in his mind.”

Manny’s son Buddy, like Biff in Miller’s play, was a sports hero, and like Happy Loman, popular with the girls. And like Biff, Buddy never made it to college because he failed to study in high school. In addition, Miller’s relationship with his cousins was similar to Bernard’s relationship with Biff and Happy in *Salesman*. As Miller stated: “As fanatic as I was about sports, my ability was not to be compared to [Manny’s] sons. Since I was gangly and unhandsome, I lacked their promise. When I stopped by I always had to expect some kind of insinuation of my entire life’s probable failure, even before I was sixteen.” In *Timebends*, Miller described Manny’s wife as the one who bore the cross for them all. One can easily see this woman honored in the character of Linda Loman.

In fact, Miller stated that the writing of the play began in the winter of 1947 after a chance meeting he had with his uncle outside the Colonial Theatre in Boston, where his *All My Sons* was having its pre-Broadway preview. Miller described that meeting in this way: “I could see his grim hotel room behind him, the long trip up from New York in his little car, the hopeless hope of the day’s business. Without so much as acknowledging my greeting he said, “Buddy is doing very well.”!

Because he was so deeply involved in the production of *All My Sons*, Miller did not give the meeting with his uncle more than a passing thought, but its memory hung in his mind. In fact, Miller described the event as the spark that brought him back to an idea for a play about a salesman that he had ten years previously - an idea that he had written as a short story. In April 1948, he drove up to his Connecticut farm and began to write the play that would become *Death of a Salesman*. From those humble beginnings, one of American theatre’s most famous plays took shape.

**PRODUCTION TEAM, The Classic Theatre of San Antonio**

**CAST**

<b>Willy</b>	Allan Ross
<b>Linda</b>	Terri Pena Ross
<b>Biff</b>	Tony Ciaravino
<b>Happy</b>	John Stillwaggon
<b>Bernard</b>	Kenneth Lopez
<b>Woman/Jenny</b>	Meredith Alvarez
<b>Charley</b>	Byrd Bonner
<b>Uncle Ben</b>	David Rinear
<b>Howard Wagner</b>	Guy Schaafs
<b>Stanley</b>	Victor Trevino
<b>Miss Forsythe</b>	Morgan Clyde
<b>Letta</b>	Karie Ann Randol
<b>Waiter</b>	Louis Valdez*

<b><u>CREW</u></b>		<b><u>STAFF- The Classic Theatre of San Antonio</u></b>	
<b>Director</b>	Jim Mammarella	Rick Malone, Executive Director, Founding Member Diane Malone, Co-Artistic Director, Founding Member Allan Ross, Co-Artistic Director, Founding Member Christie Beckham, Director of Education Linda Ford, House Manager/Bookkeeper Florence Bunten, Box Office Manager Joseph Urick, Public Relations Coordinator	
<b>Stage Manager</b>	Melissa Salazar		
<b>Asst. Director</b>	Linda Ford		
<b>Tech Director</b>	Rick Clyde		
<b>Set Design</b>	Ronnie Watson		
<b>Costume Design</b>	Diane Malone		
<b>Light Designer</b>	Felice Garcia		
<b>Sound Designer</b>	Rick Malone		
<b>Prop Master</b>	Rex Harder		
<b>Set Construction</b>	Rick Clyde		
<b>Intern</b>	Louis Valdez*	*AIM High Intern. The AIM High program is an immersive internship program for high school and college students interested in pursuing a career in the theater. Applications are available at our website <a href="http://www.classictheatre.org">www.classictheatre.org</a>	
<b>Intern</b>	Lauren Botello*		
<b>Intern</b>	Dana McHutchion*		

# EXPRESSIONISM

*Death of a Salesman* can be a challenging play to follow as the flow of time and use of space is quite unconventional. The playwright blends realistic images of modern American life—cars, aspirin, refrigerators- with symbolism and expressionism. For example, the character of Ben is not real; rather he is an expression of Willy's desire for escape and success. The play does not follow a linear time-flow pattern but moves back and forth between the past and the present. Willy's life history comes to the forefront as splashes of the present and past are thrown onto the canvas of the theatrical stage.

Expressionism was a cultural movement, initially in poetry and painting, originating in Germany at the start of the 20th century. Its' typical trait is to present the world in an utterly subjective perspective, radically distorting it for emotional effect, to evoke moods or ideas. Expressionist artists sought to express the meaning of "being alive" and emotional experience rather than physical reality.

As a playwright, Miller suggests the use of several stage devices to distinguish time and place. One such device is lighting. As the first memory scene in Act One begins, for example, Miller notes in the stage directions: *"Willy's form is dimly seen below in the darkened kitchen. He opens the refrigerator, searches in there, and takes out a bottle of milk. The apartment houses are fading out, and the entire house and surroundings become covered in leaves."* The light then rises on the kitchen and Willy, who has been mumbling to an invisible Biff, shuts the refrigerator. By lowering and raising the light levels, Miller signals to the audience that the time frame is changing.

Another way that Miller suggests to the audience with time shifts is movement. In the opening stage directions Miller advises: *"Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through the door at the left. But in the scenes of the past, these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by stepping 'through' a wall onto the forestage."*

In addition to lighting and movement, Miller creates sound motifs to underscore some of the characters. Willy has his own "theme" music, which is played on a solo flute, the instrument his long lost father once made and played. The flute theme accompanies Willy in the present and is heard at the end of the play as Linda speaks

over Willy's grave. Ben also has his own recognizable theme music, while raucous laughter always signals the arrival of The Woman.

The above devices were suggestions offered by Arthur Miller as the playwright. However according to common theatrical convention, the director of the play is not bound by the playwright's suggestions and directions and can choose to stage the play in any manner that they think best. Thus, director Jim Mammarella and the design team chose some of their own stage devices to depict the shifts in time and place.



***Biff (Tony Ciaravino) and Willy (Allan S. Ross) in a scene that takes place in Willy's memory.***

## GLOSSARY OF NAMES/REFERENCES

**Thomas Edison-** (1847 – 1931) was an American inventor and businessman. He developed many devices that greatly influenced life around the world, including the phonograph, the motion picture camera, and a long-lasting, practical electric light bulb.

**B.F. Goodrich-** is an American brand of tires. It is now separated from the Goodrich company and owned by Michelin.

**J.P. Morgan-** (1837–1913) was the leading financier of the Progressive Era, and his dedication to efficiency and modernization helped transform American business. In 1892, Morgan arranged the merger of Edison General Electric and Thomson-Houston Electric Company to form General Electric.

**Jack Benny-** (1894–1974) was an American comedian, vaudevillian, radio, television, and film actor, and notable violinist. Recognized as a leading American entertainer of the 20th century.

**Al Smith-** (1873–1944) was an American statesman who was elected Governor of New York four times and was the Democratic U.S. presidential candidate in 1928. As a committed anti-Prohibition candidate, he attracted millions of voters of all backgrounds, particularly those concerned about the corruption and lawlessness brought about by the Eighteenth Amendment.

**Red Grange-** was a college and professional American football halfback for the University of Illinois, the Chicago Bears, and for the short-lived New York Yankees. In 2011, he was named the Greatest Big Ten Icon by the Big Ten Network.

**Gene Tunney-**(1897 –1978) was an American professional boxer and the world heavyweight champion from 1926–28.

**Wire Recorder-** an analog audio storage device used during World War II.

**Simonize-** to polish with or as if with wax. (i.e. a car)

**Adonis-** An extremely attractive, youthful male. The name comes from the Greek god of beauty and desire.

**Ebbets Field-**was a Major League Baseball park located in Brooklyn, New York. It was the home of the Brooklyn Dodgers of the National League. It was also a venue for professional football. The field was demolished in 1960 and replaced with apartment buildings.

**Yonkers-** a city in New York that borders the borough of The Bronx.

**Hackensack-** a city in New Jersey, a suburb of New York City.

**Waterbury Clock-** a successful American clock company now owned by Timex.



Your “*Death of a Salesman*” shortcut!

## **ON THE BUS:**

- Share a bit of the synopsis with your students.
- A brief discussion of **audience etiquette**, particularly emphasizing no cell phone use or pictures, to politely sit quietly during the performance, but laughter and applause where appropriate are encouraged. Point out that sometimes silence during a performance can be a wonderful thing; it’s not just about what the characters say on stage, but how they move, how the lights change, etc. **Encourage them to view the entire production with “theater eyes”** (as opposed to “movie eyes” or “TV eyes”) and think about questions they may have for cast and crew during our Q&A following the show.

## **Reflection Questions after Performance:**

What was Willy’s dream? What is he searching for throughout the play? Why doesn’t he find it?

Describe the design elements (set, lights, props, costumes, sound, etc.) that you noticed in *Death of a Salesman*. How did you feel the design elements helped to tell the story?

Do you define success in terms of material possessions (such as cars, homes, and jewelry), in terms of more intangible possessions (such as love, friendship, and respect), or a combination or both?

## **STUDENT SURVEY:**

Please encourage your students to take our brief online survey after the performance. It helps us to gather data we can use to fund more school performances in the future!



or visit [www.classictheatre.org](http://www.classictheatre.org) EDUCATION

# **DELVING DEEPER**

## **Thinking critically about the play...**

**“Willy is foolish and even ridiculous sometimes. He tells the most transparent lies, exaggerates mercilessly, and so on. But I really want you to see that his impulses are not foolish at all. He cannot bear reality, and since he can’t do much to change it, he keeps changing his ideas of it.”**

*Arthur Miller, Salesman in Beijing, 1984*

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?

Is Willy a born loser, or does he stand in his own way to success? Explain.

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?

Why is Biff so angry about the incident in Boston? Why does Biff steal? Does Biff use Willy’s behavior as an excuse for his own waywardness?

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? Near the end of your life, how will you judge whether you were a success or not? What are the risks and benefits of pursuing only material possessions?

What were some of the stage devices that the director used to mark shifts in time and place? Now imagine you were directing *Death of a Salesman*. What other stage devices would you use to mark these shifts?

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## 1. TEN YEARS LATER:

Have your students write or improvise a scene between Linda, Biff, and Happy that takes place ten years after Willy's death. To help them get started, you might want to ask them to consider the following questions:

- What event might bring the three of them together?
- How do they feel about seeing each other?
- What has happened to each of them in the past ten years?

Instruct them to use everything they learned about the characters over the course of the play as a guide, but to feel free to make up their own story, as long as it is consistent with the play. Then have the student groups perform their scenes to the class.

## 2. ESSAY:

*Death of a Salesman* was first produced in 1949. Write an essay evaluating the play in terms of how it is relevant to families today. Support your judgment with experiences taken from the lives of yourself and your friends as well as with specific examples from the play.

*Allan S. Ross as Willy Loman*

All photos courtesy of Dwayne Green

