

Death of a Salesman Study Guide

ACT ONE

1. Why is Willy home? Why is Linda alarmed that he's home?
2. Why is Willy annoyed at Biff? How does he describe Biff? What does this tell us about Willy?
3. How has the neighborhood changed? Why does it matter to the story that his surroundings are no longer the way they used to be?
4. How does Linda treat Willy? How do the boys feel about him? Is Biff trying to spite Willy? Why does Biff come home in the spring?
5. 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?
6. How does Willy act toward the boys when they are young? How do they act toward him? How does Willy feel about Charley and Bernard?
7. What does Willy's reaction to Biff's theft of the football tell us about Willy? He says the boys look like Adonises. What other clues show that Willy believes in appearances?
8. 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?
9. "Five hundred gross in Providence" becomes "roughly two hundred gross on the whole trip." How does Linda take Willy's stories? What does this reveal about her? Why does Willy make a fuss about Linda's mending stockings? How is this important to the play?
10. Why does Charley visit? How does he feel about Willy? How and why do they insult each other?
11. 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?
12. What does Linda think is the trouble with Willy's life? Why is she angry at her sons? Why does she put the rubber hose back after she had taken it? What does this tell about her?
13. Why is Willy interested when Biff mentions Bill Oliver? Why do they argue? How does Happy try to capture attention?

ACT TWO

1. Why is Willy's mood upbeat at the start of Act Two? What does he expect to happen?
2. Why does Willy tell Howard about Dave Singleman? Describe the dramatic effect when Howard listens to the voices of his family while Willy tries to talk business. Why does Howard tell Willy to drop off his samples and forbid him to go to Boston? Why is this such a blow to Willy?
3. What is Willy's philosophy? How does Biff as a football hero embody his father's dreams? Why does Charley say Willy hasn't grown up?
4. What is Willy's impression of Bernard when he sees him in his father's office? Why does Willy exaggerate Biff's importance? Why does Bernard ask what happened after the game at Ebbets Field?
5. Why won't Willy work for Charley? Why is Willy able to ask Charley for money? How is Charley's view of what a salesman needs different from Willy's view?

6. In the restaurant, how does Happy reflect Willy's values? Why does Miller have the girls come in?
7. How does Biff's realization that his life is a lie underline the theme of the play? Why does Biff take Bill Oliver's fountain pen? Why can't he tell his father what happened with Bill Oliver? Why do Biff and Happy leave Willy at the restaurant?
8. Why did Biff go to Boston? What does he discover when he sees the Woman? Why is it that Biff never went to summer school? Why can't he believe in his father?
9. Why does Linda tell the boys, "Get out of here, both of you, and don't come back!"?
10. Why does Willy keep planting seeds where they've never grown before? Why does Willy think Biff will be impressed with his funeral? Why does Ben say that Biff will call Willy a fool?
11. Why doesn't Willy want to see Linda? Why does he think Biff is spiting him? Why does Biff show him the rubber hose? Why does Biff confront Willy and Happy?
12. What does Biff do that elates Willy? How does Happy try to attract Willy's attention? How does Ben influence Willy at this point?

REQUIEM

1. What is a requiem? What is the purpose of this final act? To what extent is it successful?
2. Charley says: "No man only needs a little salary." To what is he referring? What else does a man need?
3. Explain the irony of Linda's last speech.

from Penguin Teaching Guide for *Death of a Salesman*