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Reflections: A Student Response Journal



*Death of a Salesman*  
Arthur Miller

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**Arthur Miller**



**Prestwick House**

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ISBN 978-1-60389-532-3

Item No. 201568

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## *Response Journal*

### **To The Student**

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

## *Death of a Salesman*

### **ACT I**

1. What are your impressions of Willy's travel? Draw a sketch of how you visualize the house and the apartment buildings.
2. Who or what sort of people do Willy and Linda remind you of?
3. Imagine what it would be like to be married to Willy or to Linda. Describe how you would react to being married to each.
4. Willy seems to have contradictory ideas about his son Biff. Speculate about what Biff's situation really is.
5. This play was written during the late 1940's, which was the time of the urbanization of America. Consider Willy's reactions to the apartment buildings. Do you consider them justified or understandable?
6. At the start of the play, it is apparent that Willy has worked as a travelling salesman for the Wagner Company for most of his life. Willy's original boss, "old man Wagner," has died; and according to Willy, "that boy of his, that Howard, he don't appreciate" Willy's years of service and contributions to the company. Write a statement explaining what you believe an employer's obligations to a long-term employee are. Include any restrictions or limits that should be included on these obligations.



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*Death of a Salesman*

15. List the comments that Happy makes about women. Are you offended by his attitude toward women, or do you think that his attitude reflects the typical male attitude in American society?

16. In this scene, Willy's mind returns to the past; he remembers conversations and events when Biff was a senior in high school.

List the advice Willy gives Biff and beside each point Willy makes, indicate your agreement or disagreement and if you would attempt to follow the advice or ignore it.

17. Consider the information you have about what Biff was like in high school. Describe what you imagine Biff would be like in high school today.

18. In this scene, Willy is told that Biff may fail a major subject, has "borrowed" school equipment, is driving without a license, and is "too wild with the girls." How would your parents react if they heard any of this about you? How do you think parents should react to this type of behavior in their children?

19. As Willy is confronted with this information about Biff in his memories, he yells, "There's nothing the matter with him" and "I never in my life told him anything but decent things." It may be that Willy is in denial, which is a defense mechanism people use to protect themselves from a reality that is too painful for them to face.

What is your viewpoint on people being in denial and not facing reality?

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*Death of a Salesman*

58. In this scene, Charley seems to be trying to help Willy accept reality. What would you have said to Willy if you had been Charley?
59. Willy seems to be thinking about dying. He is concerned about paying his life insurance and states, "After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive." Charley seems to recognize that Willy is focused on death, perhaps suicide. Charley says, "Willy, nobody's worth nothin' dead. Did you hear what I said?"

Evaluate Charley's choice to allow Willy to leave. Remember Charley's earlier statement, "When a deposit bottle is broken you don't get your nickel back." Do you think Willy is a broken bottle? What would you have done if you were Charley? Do you think there are people who cannot be helped, and situations that cannot be changed? Is the most realistic thing to just let them alone and not to take too great an interest in them, or is it better to get involved?

60. Consider Happy's conversation with Stanley and the girl. What do you think of Happy? Tell about a person Happy reminds you of.
61. Happy and Biff and Willy seem to not be responding to each other. Tell about a time that you tried to communicate something serious to someone and you felt the person or someone else prevented you.
62. This scene is Willy's memory of Biff going to Boston after Biff failed math and found Willy with "the woman." Did you suspect an affair was what happened in Boston?

## **REQUIEM**

74. Describe what you think Biff's and Happy's lives will be like in five years.
75. Linda has the final words of the play, and she says that she cannot understand Willy's suicide. Write a letter to her explaining the reason for his suicide.
76. How do you intend to make your marriage different or the same as Willy's? If you do not intend to marry, what advice about marriage would you give a friend?