

PLAY GUIDE

PART 1 OF 2

[Part 2: suggested practical lessons and activities; available for downloading at vancouverplayhouse.com/education-outreach]

CREATED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PLAYHOUSE TEACHERS ADVISORY BOARD (PTAB)



SUGGESTED THEMES AND SUITABILITY

THE AMERICAN DREAM | DAYDREAMING | GROWING UP | MADNESS | NOSTALGIA/REGRET | OPPORTUNITY | THE NUCLEAR FAMILY | FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP | SUITABLE FOR GRADE 9 AND UP

HISTORY

Death of a Salesman was first produced in 1949 starring Lee J. Cobb. Last produced by the Playhouse in 1983, the play's most recent revivals on Broadway in 1999 and London's West End in 2005 demonstrate its lasting power. A new revival starring Philip Seymour Hoffman is planned to open on Broadway in the fall of 2011. The 1951 film adaptation earned Fredric March the Best Actor Golden Globe Award for his performance as Willy Loman. The play has been adapted numerous times for TV with Lee J. Cobb, Dustin Hoffman, Warren Mitchell and Brian Dennehy taking the lead role.

REVIVALS include

- 1975 - Circle in the Square Theatre, NY, NY starring George C. Scott
- 1979 - National Theatre, London, England starring Warren Mitchell Lee J. Cobb and Mildred Dunnock (1949)
- 1984 - Broadhurst Theatre, NY, NY starring Dustin Hoffman
- 1999 – Eugene O'Neill Theatre, NY, NY starring Brian Dennehy
- 2005 – Lyric Theatre, London, England starring Brian Dennehy
- 2011 - A revival starring Philip Seymour Hoffman is planned to open on Broadway in the fall

AWARDS

- 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- 1949 New York Drama Critics' Circle Best Play
- 1949 Tony Award for Best Play
- 1984 Drama Desk Award Outstanding Revival
- 1984 Tony Award for Best Reproduction
- 1999 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play
- 1999 Drama Desk Award Outstanding Revival of a Play
- 1949 New York Drama Critics' Circle Best Play

ON FILM

The 1951 adaptation by Stanley Roberts was directed by László Benedek who won the Golden Globe Award for Best Director. It starred Fredric March as Willy Loman who replaced Broadway actor Lee J. Cobb after concerns of Cobb's alleged left-wing political associations arose. March won the Golden Globe Award for Best Actor and the Venice Film Festival's Volpi Cup.

ON TELEVISION

1966: starring Lee J. Cobb; 1985: starring Dustin Hoffman; 1996: starring Warren Mitchell; 2000: starring Brian Dennehy.

References: wikipedia.com, imdb.com, ibdb.com

THE STORY

Death of a Salesman attempts to raise a counterexample to Aristotle's characterization of tragedy as the downfall of a great man: though Loman certainly has *hamartia*, a tragic flaw or error, his downfall is that of an ordinary man. In this sense, Miller's play represents a democratization of the ancient form of tragedy; the play's protagonist is himself obsessed with the question of greatness, and his downfall arises directly from his continued misconception of himself—at age 63—as someone capable of greatness, as well as the unshakable conviction that greatness stems directly from personal charisma or popularity.

References: wikipedia.com, imdb.com, ibdb.com

SUGGESTED PLAY ACTIVITY [A SAMPLER]

Type: post-viewing | **Suitability:** grade 9+ | **Suggested by:** Dan Adrian (Teacher, Moscrop Secondary; PTAB Member)

CHILDREN AND PARENTS: RELATIONSHIPS

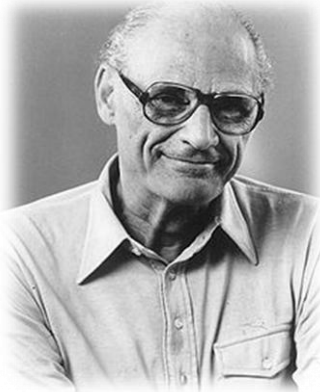
1. Biff blames his Dad for his own inadequacies. He says: "And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody!" **Can parents do more harm than good when they constantly stroke the egos of their children? Yes or No. Explain.**
2. In Act two, when Biff has the verbal confrontation with his Dad, he addresses him by his first name. **Why does he do this?**
3. A Nickname is a familiar or humorous name given to a person instead of or as well as his real name, often a short form of the real one. We learn in the play that Happy Loman's real name is Harold. He apparently acquired his nickname at West Point. **Do you think "Biff" is a nickname? If so, what is his real name and how did he acquire the one we know him as? Do you have a nickname? Share if you dare and tell how it came to pass.**

FOR MORE ACTIVITIES VISIT VANCOUVERPLAYHOUSE.COM/EDUCATION-OUTREACH

FAST FACTS

First Performance:
February 10, 1949 starring Lee J. Cobb.
Closed: November 18, 1950
(742 performances)
Morosco Theatre, New York, NY

CREATORS



ARTHUR MILLER, PLAYWRIGHT | Arthur Miller (1915-2005) (Playwright) began writing plays as a student at the University of Michigan. Among his works are *The Man who had all the Luck*, *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A View from the Bridge*, *The Misfits*, *After the Fall*, *Incident at Vichy*, *The Price*, *The American Clock*, *Broken Glass*, *Mr. Peters' Connections*, and his autobiography, *Timebends*. Miller's writing earned him a lifetime of honours including the Pulitzer Prize, seven Tony Awards, two Drama Critics' Circle Awards, an Obie, an Olivier, and the John F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award.



JOHN COOPER, DIRECTOR | John Cooper of the Vancouver Playhouse: *Moonlight and Magnolias*, *Death and the Maiden*, *Lips together, Teeth Apart**, *My Children, My Africa*, *Love and Anger**, *Doc*, and *Frankie and Johnny in the Claire de Lune*. Other productions of Arthur Miller: *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman* for Hamilton's Theatre Aquarius and *All My Sons** for the Arts Club Theatre. John had directed over 130 productions at theatres across Canada and currently teaches directing at UBC. (*Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards for Directing.)



Steve Thomas

Steve Thomas (Original Compositions) is an award winning graduate of the Humber College Music Program. He has been involved in Music Theatre for almost twenty-five years as a composer, arranger and Musical Director, working on musicals throughout North America.

Pam Johnson (Set Designer), **Alison Green** (Costume Designer), **Gerald King** (Lighting Designer), **Julie Martens** (Assistant Lighting Designer), **Richard Hagan** (Sound Designer), **Kevin K. James** - Fight Director, **Jan Hodgson** (Stage Manager) and **Peter Jotkus** (Assistant Stage Manager).

CHARACTERS

Willy Loman

A sixty year old salesman living in Brooklyn, Willy Loman is a gregarious, mercurial man with powerful aspirations to success. However, after thirty-five years working as a traveling salesman throughout New England, Willy Loman feels defeated by his lack of success and difficult family life. Although he has a dutiful wife, his relationship with his oldest son, Biff, is strained by Biff's continual failures. As a salesman, Willy Loman focuses on personal details over actual measures of success, believing that it is personality and not high returns that garner success in the business world.

Biff Loman

The thirty-four year old son of Willy Loman, Biff was once a star high school athlete with a scholarship to UVA. But he never attended college nor graduated from high school, after refusing to attend summer school to make up a flunked math class. He did this primarily out of spite after finding out that his father was having an affair with a woman in Boston. Since then, Biff has been a continual failure, stealing at every job and even spending time in jail. Despite his failures and anger toward his father, Biff still has great concern for what his father thinks of him, and the conflict between the two characters drives the narrative of the play.

Linda Loman

The dutiful, obedient wife to Willy and mother of Biff and Happy, Linda Loman is the one person who supports Willy Loman, despite his often reprehensible treatment of her. She is a woman who has aged greatly because of her difficult life with her husband, whose hallucinations and erratic behavior she contends with alone. She is the moral center of the play, occasionally stern and not afraid to confront her sons about their poor treatment of their father.

Happy Loman

The younger of the two Loman sons, Happy Loman is seemingly content and successful, with a steady career and none of the obvious marks of failure that his older brother displays. Happy, however, is not content with his more stable life, because he has never risked failure or striven for any real measure of success. Happy is a compulsive womanizer who treats women purely as sex objects and has little respect for the many women whom he seduces.

Charley

The Lomans' next door neighbor and father of Bernard, Charley is a good businessman, exemplifying the success that Willy is unable to achieve. Although Willy claims that Charley is a man who is "liked, but not well-liked," he owns his own business and is respected and admired. He and Willy have a contentious relationship, but Charley is nevertheless Willy's only friend.

Bernard

Bernard is Charley's only son. He is intelligent and industrious but lacks the gregarious personality of either of the Loman sons. It is this absence of spirit that makes Willy believe that Bernard will never be a true success in the business world, but Bernard proves himself to be far more successful than Willy imagined. As a grown-up, he is a lawyer preparing to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court.

Ben

Willy's older brother, Ben left home at seventeen to find their father in Alaska, but ended up in Africa, where he found diamond mines and came out of the jungle at twenty-one an incredibly rich man. Although Ben died several

weeks before the time at which the play is set, he often appears in Willy's hallucinations, carrying a valise and umbrella. Ben represents the fantastic success for which Willy has always hoped but can never seem to achieve.

Howard Wagner

The thirty-six year old son of Frank Wagner, Willy Loman's former boss, Howard now occupies the same position as his late father. Although Willy was the one who named Howard, Howard is forced to fire Willy for his erratic behavior. Howard is preoccupied with technology; when Willy meets with his new boss, he spends most of the meeting demonstrating his new wire recorder.

Stanley

Stanley is the waiter at the restaurant where Willy meets his sons. He helps Willy home after Biff and Happy leave their father there.

The Woman

An assistant in a company in Boston with which Willy does business, this nameless character has a continuing affair with Willy. The Woman claims that Willy ruined her and did not live up to his promises to her. When Biff finds the Woman in Willy's hotel room, he begins his course of self-destructive behavior.

Miss Forsythe

An attractive young woman at the restaurant, who serves the play by allowing Happy to demonstrate his womanizing and seduction habits.

Source: <http://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list/>

FAST FACTS

NEW!! "Dramatic Discoveries" with UBC resident, Dr. Warren McKinnon:

EXPLORE *issues and ideas through a pre-play presentation for "Death of a Salesman"*
In attendance: Jameson Parker who stars as Stanley!

Wednesdays, Feb. 9, 2011, 7pm-8:30pm

At Tapestry Learning Centre, 3338 Wesbrook Mall

To register call 604 709 0920 or email dramaticdiscoveries@shaw.ca

GLOSSARY

coolie (as in "to work like a coolie") | historical term for a manual labourer from Asia, particularly China

Filene's | department store founded in 1881; its flagship store was in Boston

Gene Tunney | world heavyweight boxing champion from 1926 – 1928

"The Hub" | nickname for Boston

Jack Benny | comedian, star of vaudeville, radio, movies and television; his wife was raised in Vancouver and he met her here when he came to perform at the Orpheum

J.P. Morgan | famously wealthy banker

New York Giants | football team since 1925

on the barrelhead | immediate payment, possibly from the days when barrels served as tables in bars and patrons had to pay cash as soon as their drinks were poured

open sesame | magic cave-opening words from the Ali Baba story

Red Grange | American football player

requiem | a composition, hymn or service for the dead

simonize | to polish with wax, from the commercial product "Simoniz"

Slattery's | Boston restaurant

Studebaker | American automobile since 1912

West Point | prestigious military academy in New York state

THANK YOU TO

our PTAB Members: **DAN** Adrian / Moscrop Secondary; **CHERYL** Causley / Crofton House School; **GARY** Davis, City School; **MURIEL** Densford / Sir Winston Churchill; **ERIN** McGinley/ Moscrop Secondary; **WARREN** McKinnon / UBC, Continuing Studies; **YVONNE** Price / Cloverdale Learning Centre; **HEATHER** Robbie / David Thompson Secondary; **SAL** Robinson, City School; **JOSH** Weiss / Tamanawis Secondary; **STASA** Andric, **MEREDITH** Elliott and **JOHN** McHenry / Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company who play an integral role in the creation of our 2010/2011 Play Guides. Interested in joining our PTAB? Call **604 637 3094**

ABOUT THE COMPANY

The **Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company** is British Columbia's premier regional theatre company, producing engaging plays of the highest calibre since **1962**. Our mandate, as it has evolved with the region's cultural needs, is to be a vital cultural leader in the theatre ecology, describing and shaping our community's perspectives by engaging a wider audience in significant theatre experiences. We fulfill our mission by: 1) Producing first-class theatrical productions of contemporary and modern classical work that engage the greater Vancouver community; providing significant social-cultural experiences for audiences and new and graduate opportunities for artistic expression; 2) Developing new Canadian work that reflects the changing face and perspectives of our community; supporting emerging artists and organizations in the realization of associated and independent productions; 3) Deepening the connection between the audience and the art form through education and outreach

We ask that you note the following guidelines to help keep the theatre experience an enjoyable one for all.

THEATRE ETIQUETTE FOR ALL AGES

Thou shalt not arrive late.

This is an insult to performers and annoying to those who arrive on time.

Thou shall sit in your assigned seat.

When in doubt, speak with an usher or refer to your admission ticket.

Thou shalt not talk during the performance.

You're not at home watching television.

Thou shalt not rattle candy wrappers.

Sound effects for this production have been chosen by the designers.

Thou shalt not "sing along" with the performers.

Save that for after the show.

Thou shalt not consume food or drinks inside the auditorium.

Performers can hear you just as much as you can hear them.

Thou shalt not place feet on the seat in front, or tap out a rhythm.

The back of the seat in front does not belong to you.

Thou shalt not go "to and fro" from thy seat during the performance.

This disrupts the show for everyone.

Thou shall turn off all that goes beep, ring or buzz.

Accompaniment is provided by the orchestra only.

Thou shall turn off all texting devices.

We love to twitter, facebook or blog, too, but save it for before or after the performance.

[VISIT VANCOUVERPLAYHOUSE.COM/BLOG](http://VISITVANCOUVERPLAYHOUSE.COM/BLOG)

[BEFORE OR AFTER THE PERFORMANCE]

PLAYHOUSE EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

NEW! AUDIO DESCRIBED PERFORMANCES are part of EarSighted, a season of audio described theatre provided by [Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture](#), made possible with assistance from Canadian Heritage and the City of Vancouver. Audio description begins 15 min. prior to curtain. **[Death of a Salesman](#): Feb. 25, 2011.**

PRODUCTION CENTRE TOURS As a group, you can book a complimentary guided tour of the 25,000 square foot Production Centre and explore scenery and prop shops, the wardrobe department and rehearsal halls. We recently moved into a new facility on East 2nd Ave., which will be our home until 2011. **Call 604 637 3094.**

E-STAGE: PLAYHOUSE YOUNG PLAYWRIGHTS 2010 High school students from across British Columbia collaborate with professional directors and playwrights to develop an eight-minute scene, which is then performed by professional actors on the Playhouse stage. Email submissions are preferred. **For more information contact Meredith Elliott at 604 629 2097 or melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com.**

TALKBACKS An excellent way to enhance your experience as actors return to stage to offer insights on the show and their work. Select Monday and Tuesday evening performances. **[Death of a Salesman](#): Feb. 21 & Mar. 1, 2011.**

SALON SATURDAY Informative and fun, Salon Saturday is presented in the Playhouse Salon at 1pm (show at 2pm). This series brings the audience together with a notable speaker to explore some of the underlying themes of the play that follows. **Feb. 26, 2011 with John Cooper, Director of this production of [Death of a Salesman](#).**

PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN MATINEE This matinee is instrumental in bringing live, professional theatre to everyone in our community regardless of income level. **[Death of a Salesman](#): Feb. 19, 2011.**

RUSH TICKETS Available 15 minutes before show time and subject to availability, rush tickets are only \$20 for regular performances and \$30 for the season's musical.

PREVIEWS Be the first! We stage four preview performances (not yet media-reviewed), which offer dramatic savings on regular tickets (preview tickets: \$32-\$41). **[Death of a Salesman](#): Feb. 12, 14, 15, 16, 2011.**

TEA MATINEES These lively matinees are extremely popular, especially with seniors and students. Tea, coffee and biscuits (complimentary) are served at 1pm; show at 2pm. **[Death of a Salesman](#): Feb. 23, 24 & Mar. 2, 2011.**

RENTALS In addition to our own production work, we share our rehearsal halls and props and costume inventory with our community. **604 872 6622. Rehearsal: ext. # 224. Prop: ext. # 236. Costume: ext. # 320.**

VANCOUVERPLAYHOUSE.COM

Send us feedback and questions regarding our Play Guides | Request a copy of a script (for educational purposes)

Contact: Stasa Andric at **604 637 3094** / sandric@vancouverplayhouse.com

or Meredith Elliott at **604 629 2097** / melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com

SEE YOU AT THE PLAYHOUSE!

ALL PERFORMANCES AT HAMILTON & DUNSMUIR

2010/2011 SEASON PRODUCTIONS

THE FANTASTICKS

OCT. 2-23, 2010

Book and Lyrics by Tom Jones

Music by Harvey Schmidt

Directed and Choreographed by Max Reimer

Co-Sponsored by:

[Leith Wheeler Investment Counsel Ltd.](#)



NOËL COWARD'S BRIEF ENCOUNTER

NOV. 27-DEC. 26, 2010

Adapted for the stage by Emma Rice

Directed by Max Reimer

A co-production with Manitoba Theatre Centre

Sponsored by:

[The Great-West Life Assurance Company](#)



THIS

JAN. 8-29, 2011

Written by Melissa James Gibson

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

FEB. 12-MAR. 5, 2011

Written by Arthur Miller

Directed by John Cooper

THE TRESPASSERS

MAR. 26-APR. 16, 2011

Written by Morris Panych

Directed by Ron Jenkins

A co-production with The Belfry Theatre, Victoria

Sponsored by:

[Hyphen Communications Inc.](#)



SPECIAL PRESENTATION

MACHOMER

MAY 11-16, 2011

Created and Performed by Rick Miller

Directed by Sean Lynch

A WYRD Production

Sponsored by:

[TELUS](#)

