

## **Death of A Salesman**

### **Themes**

#### **Major**

The falsity of the American Dream is the dominant theme of Arthur Miller's play. Willy Loman represents the primary target of this dream. Like most middle-class working men, he struggles to provide financial security for his family and dreams about making himself a huge financial success. After years of working as a traveling salesman, Willy Loman has only an old car, an empty house, and a defeated spirit. Miller chose the job of salesman carefully for his American Dreamer. A salesman does not make his/her own product, has not mastered a particular skill or a body of knowledge, and works on the empty substance of dreams and promises. Additionally, a salesman must sell his/her personality as much as his/her product. Willy Loman falsely believes he needs nothing more than to be well liked to make it big.

#### **Minor**

The tragedy of the dysfunctional family, which helps to keep the American Dream alive, is a second important theme of Miller's play. Linda and Happy especially work very hard to keep the fantasy of the dream of success alive. In the dysfunctional Loman family, the wife is restricted to the role of housekeeping and bolstering her husband's sense of self-importance and purpose. A contradictory role given to her is that of the family's financial manager. In effect, Linda juggles the difficult realities of a working class family while making her husband believe that his income is better than adequate. Willy attempts to provide financial security and to guide his sons' future, neither of which he does very well. Unlike the myth of economic mobility in America, the vast majority of people in the working class stay in the working class generation after generation. However, the myth is what Willy Loman lives on. Unfortunately, his illusions do not fit his reality. Finally, the only solution to providing for his family is to kill himself so that they can collect on his life insurance.

#### **Mood**

The mood is uncomfortably false and depressing throughout the play. The audience is always aware of the family's trying to keep the truth from one another. The failure of the American Dream is ever present and makes the audience question its own commitment to false dreams.