

# DEATH OF A SALESMAN

This guide has various components intended to offer pre-show workshop ideas which do not necessarily need students to have read or seen the play. The workshops are designed to introduce them to the contexts, ideas and themes, design elements and staging of this production.

Activities are drama-based, practical and experiential, thought-provoking, and designed to lead the students to devising and discussion. We hope you find they stimulate your students' understanding of the play and their theatrical imagination. You can follow them in order, or dip in and out as you choose. We recommend you read this guide in conjunction with the *Death of a Salesman* program.

There are various other study guides available which complement this guide and offer insightful pre-show reading material on the following:

- contextualise the play in terms of its historical and literary significance
- time frame: post-war America and The American Dream
- about the playwright and why he wrote the play
- inspiration for the play
- production history
- summary of the plot/synopsis

## pre-show investigation | word splash

Challenge your students to find information, and fun and important facts, historical events quickly about playwright, Arthur Miller and build a digital Word splash or Wordcloud [<https://www.wordclouds.com> or <https://wordart.com>]. Discuss which of these may have an impact on his writing.

<https://www.teachhub.com/classroom-activities/2014/10/classroom-games-how-to-use-word-splash/>



*"The genius of Arthur Miller is that the themes of humanity and our basic instincts are in many ways the same. We all deal with love, loss, pride and the need to be understood. Those feelings are universal and current in today's society. Miller's work is timeless in that way."*

Anthony LaPaglia, Program for *Death of a Salesman* at Her Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, 2023

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## Themes

Through *Death of a Salesman*, we are reminded we need to talk about these realities, to have the hard conversations. Consider the following as the most important themes in the play:

- the American Dream
  - abandonment and betrayal
  - consumerism
  - responsibility to family and self
  - family and relationships, disaffection and estrangement
- personal struggle and financial and professional failure
  - self-awareness and self-deception
  - masculinity and heroism
  - infidelity
  - suicide

### workshop | where do you stand?

This workshop asks students to map their own values and judgments prior to reading the play. Present students with the following statements then ask them to line up along an imaginary scale from “highly agree” to “highly disagree” across the room in response to each statement. Ask several students for their rationale for their placement on the scale. Alternatively have students text their choice via an online poll using <http://polleverywhere.com>.

- Abandoning a loved one in their time of need is unforgivable act of betrayal.
- Prioritising material wealth above all else leads to a shallow and unfulfilling existence.
- Balancing your responsibilities to family and yourself is essential for personal well-being.
- Embracing self-awareness is the first step towards personal growth and authenticity.
- Estrangement from loved ones and family often results in profound emotional pain and regret.
- Success is not solely defined by financial or professional achievements.
- True masculinity is defined by qualities like empathy, vulnerability, and respect for others, rather than traditional stereotypes.
- Heroism lies in acts of selflessness and courage, not in seeking recognition or glory.
- Infidelity breaches the trust and commitment necessary for a healthy relationship.
- Seeking help for mental health issues is a sign of strength, not weakness.

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### workshop | who am I?

“Who am I?” is a powerful, recurring question which drives each character’s search for personal meaning in *Death of a Salesman*. This workshop asks students to reflect on and discuss their personal values, ideals, career and life goals and the question, “Who am I?”. What dreams do they have for the future? What expectations do their parents have for them?

In pairs, label students A and B. A’s ask their partner what their aspirations are for the future, what or whom do they want to be? A’s sculpt B’s into a statue which represents one of B’s life goals. Ask B’s to stay frozen while all the A’s walk around the “gallery of dreams”. Can you recognise common themes, ideas or feelings being portrayed? Then ask various A’s/B’s what is being presented. A’s return to their partner and now ask B’s what their parent(s) expect of them and sculpt a new image.

**discuss:** Are the images drastically different? How can the differences, if any, be reconciled? How did it feel to be shaped into a dream which is not your own?

**challenge:** Alternatively, ask the students to get into groups of 4 to 6 and imagine they are a family. Creating a 360° statue which can be viewed from all “sides”, students represent two or three generations of their own family, their goals and aspirations and the tension in the family where these do not match.

**post-show discussion:** In what ways do you think about personal success? How important is it to you to be appreciated, recognised and rewarded for your accomplishments? How do you interpret Bernard’s line to Willy, “If at first you don’t succeed ...”? What does Willy mean when he says to Howard, “You can’t eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit!”? How does director, Neil Armfield choose to highlight Willy’s aspirations, for himself and his family and their perceived failure to attain them?

## The American Dream

### visual provocation | dreaming

The word “dream” is important. It is an abstract and possibly obscure concept to some people. What does it mean to you?

Jeffery Smart, *Outside the Ministry*, 1970  
<https://nga.gov.au/tours/jeffrey-smart/stop/51/>

Alex Frayne, *Theatre of Life*  
<https://bluethumb.com.au/alex-frayne/Artwork/australian-dream>

Edward Hopper, *Cape Cod Morning*, 1950  
<https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/cape-cod-morning-10760>

Edvard Munch, *Two Human Beings*, 1905  
<https://www.edvardmunch.org/two-human-beings.jsp>

Pin A3 copies of various artworks which express ideas on the American and Australian dream around the room in gallery style or create a digital gallery. In groups, ask students to respond to the three key questions in the *Harvard University's Project Zero Visible Thinking Routine, See-Think-Wonder* to analyse the artworks:

- What do you **see**?
- What does this make you **think**?
- What does this make you **wonder**?

Then, how does the artist portray the theme of the “American Dream”? How might the whole artwork symbolise the difference between inner and outer lives?

([https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/See%20Think%20Wonder\\_3.pdf](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/See%20Think%20Wonder_3.pdf))

### workshop | dramaturgy seek + find

There are a multitude of infographics which represent the American Dream and are helpful in gaining a snapshot of this concept, including how it has changed for each generation since the 1940's. Investigate and choose three to five infographics. Ask students to identify the commonalities and the differences.

Try this one: <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/422142165071906767/>

**post-show challenge:** Ask students to create their own infographic for the Loman Dream using a tool such as Canva (<https://www.canva.com>).

### viewing + reflecting | The Dream + popular culture

Given the popularity of the television series, *Mad Men*, many students will be familiar with the pursuit of the American Dream by the main characters in the drama.

**watch:** compilation from the TV Series *Mad Men*  
([https://youtu.be/PacxdPQ\\_tdl?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/PacxdPQ_tdl?feature=shared))

**read:** article from *The Guardian*, *Mad Men at 15: how the genius advertising drama foresaw the death of the American dream* by Phil Harrison  
Wed 20 Jul 2022 ([bit.ly/3ErYgJI](https://bit.ly/3ErYgJI))



**Mad Men at 15: how the genius advertising drama foresaw the death of the American dream**  
theguardian.com

Brainstorm the ideas of the American Dream which are alluded to in the YouTube compilation (and the series). How are these ideas, aspirations, hopes and dreams similar to your statues in the “Who am I?” workshop?

**challenge:** Ask students to source quotes from the characters in *Death of a Salesman* which are examples of these ideas in the play.

### pre + post show | viewing provocations

- ✦ What is the American Dream? Is it the same or different to the Great Australian Dream?
- ✦ How does this production represent Willy's different imaginings?
- ✦ Traditionally an audience will ask "What is going to happen?" but Miller structures his play so the audience becomes more interested in asking the question "what happened to this family to make them like they are?". How does director, Neil Armfield take charge of this production to engage his audiences in answering this question?
- ✦ What dream was Willy chasing? What did he accomplish? If Willy is not a "hero", what is the audience left with at the end of the play?
- ✦ It is the characters' dreams which inevitably lead to the play's tragedy. True or false?



## The Salesman as a tragic figure

The Hollywood star's troubled relationship with his dad drove him to quit Australia for the US in the mid-1980s. Now he's returning home to perform in a celebrated stage play that features a complicated father-son dynamic of its own.

By Michael Idato  
*GoodWeekend* in *The Age*  
August 19, 2023



### workshop | what do you see?

Provide a selection of posters from previous productions of *Death of a Salesman*. Use the *See-Think-Wonder* Routine (see above) to consider the question "Why would I want to see this production?". Ask students to predict the plot, examine the varying artistic concepts and directorial visions and even where the sympathies of the director might lie. Alternatively, choose a variety of performance stills from previous productions and ask similar questions.

**try this another way:** Do this as an alternative exercise to examining the artwork(s) or divide the class into two, three or four groups - one looks at artworks, another at posters and others at images of scenes or set and costume designs from previous productions.

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## The Salesman

What is your definition of salesman? What is unique or different about the occupation of salesman compared to others? What attitudes do you think a salesman would need to be successful? What attitudes would be counterproductive?

### Warm-up | 1-minute Theatresports Commercial

In groups of 1 to 4 players, the objective of the scene is to improvise a commercial to sell a product. This game combines skills of storytelling, mime, song and simple scene development. The teacher provides a quirky product (rubber bricks, cardboard car, disappearing chocolate bar etc.) and groups are given no or minimal time to prepare.

**challenge:** Choose products relevant to *Death of a Salesman* such as a “never-tear pantihose”, “whipped cheese”, “bottomless suitcase” etc.

Pierse, L. (2006) *Improvisation: The Guide: Theatre and Performance Games, Warm-ups and Scene Work for Coaches and Players*

### thinking + discussion:

According to Willy, what is the single greatest quality of “the man who gets ahead”? Do you agree or disagree with him? What does it mean “to get ahead”, to be successful? How will you know when you have made it? What obstacles you might need to overcome to reach this success? How do you think you might handle these issues?

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## Dramatic Form | Tragedy

“Common to all works of tragedy is a *protagonist* at the centre of the drama, known as the hero ... The hero is usually flawed with one or more weaknesses. Throughout the course of the drama, the hero struggles to achieve his objectives, which involves overcoming obstacles placed in his path. The hero is normally defeated and as a result of this, the play ends in unfortunate circumstances.

Early Greek tragedies usually followed a well-known formula set down by the philosopher Aristotle in his work *The Poetics* (330 BC). Aristotle demanded the tragedy must be formal, complete with resolution at the end of the play and be of great moral significance for the people of Greece. He insisted all the action of the tragedy occurs within a single day in the plot. Conflict was also to be an essential ingredient. Aristotle saw tragedy in drama as an important benefit to society, as was catharsis, the release of human emotions that occurs when witnessing such action on stage.” (<https://thedramateacher.com/tragedy/>)

**post-show discussion:** How do you define tragedy? Is *Death of a Salesman* a tragedy according to these definitions? Could we call it a domestic or modern tragedy?



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## Family + the Lomans

*“One of the exciting things about Willy is you see him as a younger man, and you also see him at the end of his life. You have the whole scope of his family’s history packed into one evening. And the Lomans are a family that, for the audience, may sometimes seem very much like their own. If there’s an immediate identification with Willy and with the family in the theatre, it will lead to a powerful understanding of the play.”*

James Bundy, Director, Yale Rep Theatre, 2020

[https://yale-rep-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2020/06/Salesman\\_Study\\_Guide.pdf](https://yale-rep-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2020/06/Salesman_Study_Guide.pdf)

### workshop | tableaux + archetypal characters

This is a fast-moving practical workshop to build energy and curiosity through increasingly detailed exploration in front of the students’ eyes. The aim is to explore key relationships, characters and conflicts in the play.

Ask students to walk openly and freely in space, while keeping equidistant from each other. Tell students when you call freeze, you will call a different number and a selection of roles or archetypes each time. Students must use their whole bodies, levels, gestures and facial expressions to create the given relationships in various tableaux.

**tableaux:** two brothers, father and son, father and two sons, mother and two sons, husband and wife, boss and employee, a family at war, a family with secrets.

**discuss:** What did you base your shapes, posture, gestures, spatial relationships and status on? Why might these decisions be called stereotypes or archetypes?

Repeat the exercise with tableaux which require more complex and subtle responses derived from key moments in the play. For example: two teenage brothers practicing pitching baseball, two brothers (30s), father and son debating examination results, boss reluctantly firing an employee, a mother trying to reason with her sons to cooperate, wife discovering her husband’s betrayal.

Photograph these tableaux and post them on the walls of the classroom or on a shared digital board or gamify the task by using storyboards at <http://www.storyboardthat.com>. Have students complete a gallery walk and predict the events and relationships in the play. Label key characters and/or themes or situations with post-it notes or arrows.

**Discuss:** What important relationships and themes do you see expressed in the storyboards, and hear in the dialogue? Who has power? Who has a secret? Who loves who? What is causing tension?

#### **challenge:** **spotlighting + thought tracking**

Repeat the exercise with new tableaux, this time identifying the characters and key moments in the play and using “spotlighting” to challenge the students.

Students are asked to speculate about what a character might be saying (literal), thinking or feeling (subtext). The teacher holds up a hand to represent a spotlight and moves around the room, shining their hand on a group and calling out “spotlight”. The rest of the class freeze and watch the group in the spotlight. The students in the spotlight animate the tableaux and improvise dialogue.

To thought track, the teacher hovers their hand over one particular student in one tableau. The student representing the character speaks their words, thoughts or feelings aloud using first person narrative. This approach helps students to deepen empathy with the character, explore subtext and add to their understanding of the characters.

**predictions:** What predictions can you make about the play, the narrative, key events and impacts on the characters, and the denouement or conclusion? What clues can we take from the title of the play?

**challenge:** Explore the play through the Requiem activity first (see below), then ask students to work out who is who and create several tableaux to work backwards and predict the catalysts which lead to Willy's death.

**extension activity:** Invite the students to compare their photos to previous productions stills and photos from Armfield's production.

**extension activity:**

Develop the students' understanding further by introducing them to the characters from *Death of a Salesman*. Search and read some detailed character descriptions and for a visual representation, examine the relationships via character maps.

Try starting with the Character Map at *Digital Theatre Plus* ([bit.ly/44DxmZJ](https://bit.ly/44DxmZJ)).

### post-show workshop | conscience alley

Invite a student to play the character of Willy and place them at one end of the "alley" formed by students making two lines facing each other down the length of the classroom. Choose a key turning point or decision for Willy in the play, which relied on choices and decision making. Willy walks slowly between the lines as one person from each line speaks their advice or warnings or counter-thoughts (his "good" and "bad" conscience). It should be organised so those on one side give opposing advice to those on the other and represent Willy's struggle of conscience. When Willy reaches the end of the alley, he makes his decision. Do the workshop once as an improvisation and then give students time to rethink and shape questions, and to repeat with other characters from *Death of a Salesman*. Students giving advice might also take on the roles of other characters in the play or implied characters. Take a look at <https://dramaresource.com/conscience-alley/>

## Dramatic structure | flashbacks + daydreams

### past + present

Arthur Miller wrote about the play that he wanted to show that 'nothing in life comes 'next' but that everything exists together and at the same time within us; that there is no past to be 'brought forward' in a human being, but that he is his past at every moment and that the present is merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to. I wished to create a form which, in itself as a form, would literally be the process of Willy Loman's way of mind.'

As preparation students might find it helpful to watch this education clip from the BBC, it explains the structure of the play and Arthur Miller discusses the accuracy of Willy's memories and why the way he remembers them affects him. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00x1sgd>

### workshop | whoosh!

This is a quick, physical, student-participation way of telling a story which uses text and action to establish an understanding of plot, dramatic action and character. There is a skill to writing an effective Whoosh! text which comes with practice, but a short plot summary will suffice (Try <https://www.thoughtco.com/death-of-a-salesman-summary-4588251>). Consider if you want to do the 24-hour linear narrative, the flashbacks, or the whole play.

**discussion:** What is learned? What is added by including the flashbacks to the audience experience? How is drama and theatre created and enhanced by the interweaving of past and present?

Check out how to do a Whoosh! here: <https://dramaresource.com/whoosh-bringing-stories-alive-through-drama/> or otherwise here: <https://cdn.shakespearesglobe.com/uploads/2020/05/Winters-Tale-Whoosh-synopsis.pdf>

## preshow workshop | Requiem

An epilogue (Requiem) concludes the play with the funeral of the salesman. What is a Requiem? Read the Requiem from *Death of a Salesman*. What do we learn? What is its dramatic purpose? What do you think Miller's intention was through the Requiem? How might we use the Requiem to predict the outcomes, key events and relationships in the lives of the characters?

In small groups, students work "backwards" to create a timeline of tableaux which imagines and predicts what might have happened in the past to bring the characters to this point. You might choose to do this workshop as the very first activity to introduce the play.

## post-show | monologue challenge

Write a requiem as another character from the play, such as Happy, Biff or Charley. In your monologue address the following dot points:

- a request for forgiveness
- your bequest
- regrets
- hopes and dreams

## Theatrical Styles | Realism + Expressionism

### Realism

- an artistic movement which began in France in the 19th Century
- it sought to accurately portray everyday characters, situations and problems
- the dialogue was as close as possible to natural conversation
- costumes were contemporary and sets were three-dimensional and lifelike
- plots were usually about social problems

<https://theatrelinks.com/realism/>  
<https://thedramateacher.com/expressive-skills-and-realism/>

### Expressionism

- a cultural movement, initially in poetry and painting, originating in Germany at the start of the 20th century
- aimed to present the world through a subjective perspective, distorting it for emotional effect, to evoke moods or ideas
- Expressionist artists sought to depict emotional experiences rather than physical reality
- works sought to portray the inner psychological life of a character, concentrating on a subjective rather than objective view of the world
- poetic dialogue had greater importance than plot, structure and characterisation
- lighting was used to create atmosphere

<https://thedramateacher.com/expressionism-in-the-theatre/>

## pre and post-show | things to think about

In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller relies on the theatre styles and conventions of Realism and Expressionism. He uses the conventions to create an intricate montage of scenes interlacing "real" characters and events in the present (just 24 hours) with memories, imagined moments and flashbacks\* from the past twenty years of Willy's life.

Beyond the opening scene, where *"an air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality,"* the gap between reality and illusion begins to blur "expressionistically". Miller makes unconventional and challenging use of time and space to capture the internal turmoil and psychological breakdown Willy is experiencing. For example, the character of Ben appears as a memory, and as an expression of Willy's desire for escape and success.

\* Miller described Willy as 'literally at that terrible moment when the voice of the past is no longer distant but quite as loud as the voice of the present'. He did not think of Willy's episodes as flashbacks. "There are no flashbacks in this play but only a mobile concurrency of past and present... because in his desperation to justify his life Willy Loman has destroyed the boundaries between now and then." Arthur Miller in his introduction to *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*, 1957, Viking Press)

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## pre-show workshop | rope exercise

This task reveals to students Miller's exquisite skill in crafting the complex dramatic structure of *Death of a Salesman*. Divide students into small groups and give each group an approximately five metre length of nylon rope. Ask students to use the rope to map out on the floor various plot structures. Start with a traditional linear (Freytag's Pyramid traditional structure) then episodic, perhaps a Shakespeare play they are familiar with such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a plot and subplot, and a Theatre of the Absurd non-linear/circular plot as a challenge.

Then, using a plot synopsis of *Death of a Salesman* or their own knowledge, students shape the rope to map the journey of Willy's 24 hours of the play, omitting the memories. Students discuss their shapes, their understanding of the events and their interpretation. Then give the students cards with Willy's memories and ask them to add them to the dramatic action, changing the shape of the rope to "circle back on itself" or be manipulated in some way to map out and represent the now complex dramatic structure.

Alternatively, they might recreate tableaux from the earlier workshop and stage them along the key bends and curves of rope. Make the task more challenging by asking them to guess where to add the cards with lines of dialogue. What is revealed about the patterns of dreaming and memory? What effect is achieved by this dramatic device?

**discuss:** The play is distinctly divided into Act 1 and Act 2, but there are no scenes. Why do you think Miller made this choice?

## post-show workshop | I am the ...

This is a fun, fast paced, energetic recall exercise designed to encourage students to share their take-aways and visceral responses to the live performance of *Death of a Salesman*. Students enter the performing space one at a time, and take up a frozen shape which encapsulates one character, or inanimate object, or element of the production they can recall. "I am Josie and I am the kitchen table." ... "I am Hugo and I am Willy, slouched at the kitchen table" ... "I am Rose and I am the blue back light shining on Ben's shoulders" etc. As students gain more confidence and speed, they can be more detailed and visceral or animated; "I am Jack and I'm the seam on Linda's stockings" or "I am Phoebe and I am the laughter of the Woman" [Phoebe laughs]. Students can enter and leave the space as many times as they like. Encourage the class to continue for at least several minutes.

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## Directors + Designers

### workshop | production team

Divide students into groups to create their own production company and fulfill the following roles: director and various designers: set, costume, lighting, music and sound.

Students use the opening stage directions to prepare a production concept and presentation brief of the "world of the play" for their interpretation for a production of *Death of a Salesman*. Encourage them to present in role as director or designers accompanying their presentation with visuals, text, music, and sound. The students should justify their artistic choices with reference to discoveries they have made in their work so far.

In preparation, encourage students to find at least 3 to 5 references to visual, design or symbolic elements of the staging Miller intends and discuss how to stylise, exaggerate, distort and utilise these in their interpretation and design. Students should be encouraged to complete some initial dramaturgical research into words, contextual references, and locations they are unfamiliar with.

**tip:** The above workshop can be conducted, independently, in conjunction with the exercises below or replaced by them depending on the confidence and experience of the students. Students could bring complexity to their designs by referring beyond the opening to other scenes.

The action of *Death of a Salesman* takes place mostly at the Loman's home in Brooklyn, 1949. Miller's opening stage directions and Willy's complaints describe the small, single storey home as "boxed in" by bricks and windows" and "towering, angular shapes."

Further, "*the street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighbourhood. The grass don't grow any more, and you can't raise a carrot in the backyard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them? ... They should've arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighbourhood.*"

In contrast, in Willy's distorted memories Brooklyn was still green, expansive, and distinguished by trees, and it is these

**challenge:** Directors could be encouraged to devise a rehearsal warm up for the class as their imagined cast, which highlights one or several elements of the production company’s concept for staging.

**post-show discussion:** Students return to their directorial and design concepts and images after seeing the production. How would they summarise Neil Armfield’s directorial concept? What was most dominant in his interpretation? What themes do you think this production wanted to highlight in the play? How do you know? What elements of the production had the most impact for them? What was surprising? In what ways was their interpretation similar, different?

### workshop | set + lighting

One of the challenges of staging *Death of a Salesman* is capturing the movement from one temporal space to another. Miller envisages various lighting design “solutions” in his stage directions, such as “*The entire setting is wholly or, in some places, partially transparent*”. Literally this allows a multitude of Expressionistic lighting states and set transitions.

Consider the following stage directions from the play:

- *Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage.*
- *The surrounding area [around the house] shows an angry glow of orange.*
- *The kitchen at centre seems actual enough, for there is a kitchen table with three chairs.*
- *The apartment houses are fading out, and the entire house and surroundings become covered with leaves ... and later ... The light of green leaves stains the house, which holds, the air of night and a dream.*
- *[Biff] comes downstage into a golden pool of light.*
- *On Howard’s exit, the light on his chair grows very bright and strange ... Willy breaks off, staring at the light, which occupies the chair, animating it.*

Read through each of the two scenes from *Death of a Salesman* below.

#### Scene from Act 1:

HAPPY [getting into bed]: I wish you’d have a good talk with him.

[The light on their room begins to fade.] BIFF [to himself in bed]: That selfish, stupid . . .

... to ...

WILLY: Terrific. Terrific job, boys. Good work, Biff.

#### Scene from Act 1:

LINDA: Willy, darling, you’re the handsomest man in the world—

... to ...

WILLY [coming out of THE WOMAN’s dimming area and going over to LINDA]: I’ll make it all up to you, Linda, I’ll—

Using the conventions of Expressionism, imagine how a production could use staging and lighting to create and then transition between the past and present, and between locations to represent Willy’s thoughts and meandering speech and memories. Create some sketches of stage and lighting designs for these scenes and/or others.

### workshop | directing movement + a rehearsal warm up

Students design a rehearsal warm up for a cast of actors beginning work on an imagined production of *Death of a Salesman*. The workshop must encourage actors to explore and experiment with ways of moving to create and show these transitions without relying on set, lighting, or costume changes, but instead developing acting and movement skills.

**challenge:** Students could experiment with warm ups which rely on the conventions and approaches of different practitioners such as Laban, Stanislavski, Brecht or Butoh, and Physical Theatre. How might the whole cast or ensemble be used on stage at one time as a chorus for example?

#### direction + movement

Miller uses movement as another way to represent the time shifts to his audience. In the opening stage directions Miller suggests: “*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.*”

### workshop | costume

In the script, Miller provides detailed descriptions of his characters. In groups, students investigate costume designs from previous productions and discuss concepts, similarities and differences. Encourage them to investigate design details such as colour, texture, shape, embellishment and attention to era, which are intended to enhance audience

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understanding of the character and world of the play. Which designs were predictable, surprising, creative, recontextualised etc? Any recontextualisations or unusual designs? Each group chooses one of the characters and experiments with their own designs using various mediums appropriate to their skills, such as collage compilations, renderings or digital technology.

Alternatively, pre or post show, look at the gallery of Neil Armfield's staging of this production of *Death of a Salesman* and designers Dale Ferguson and Sophie Woodward's suite of costume designs. How do these costume designs enhance your growing knowledge of the characters? What details are interesting or surprising? What do you notice about the use of primary and secondary colours, texture and shape, for example? As a suite of costumes, what statements are being made about the world of the play, such as context?

### workshop | music + soundscape

In addition to lighting and set, Miller describes sound and music or a *leitmotif*\* to underscore some of his characters. Willy has his own theme music, a solo flute, which accompanies him in the present. Ben has his own theme music, and the arrival of The Woman is marked by harsh laughter. Can you think of examples in contemporary film or television which use musical motifs for characters (such as the shark in *Jaws*, 007 in *James Bond*)? If students are particularly interested in this concept read and listen to more here: <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-a-leitmotif-definition/>

*\*leitmotif: A repeating melodic musical phrase used to represent a character, setting, emotion, or theme.*

Read the text to identify where and when different music has been described by Miller, such as "a single trumpet note jars the ear" or "the music has developed into a dead march". What do you think are Miller's different intended effects for each of these moments when music is used?

**post-show discussion:** How does composer Alan John and sound designer, David Greasley use music and leitmotifs as Miller intended and/or in an original way to convey the mood and of these scenes and transition?

### Pre-show activity | make your own soundscape

What sounds, man-made or in nature do you hear during your day, first thing in the morning, as you are falling asleep, in your home, travelling, in your neighbourhood and suburb? What styles of music are featured? Is there a specific cultural diversity to the sounds? To the voices? Imagine you are designing a soundscape for a monologue about yourself:

- take one day to be aware of the sounds around you and keep a written "play list" as you hear them
- select the sounds which are the most evocative of you, your world and the story about yourself you wish to tell
- capture these sounds on a recording device (choose a voice recording app) or use pre-recorded sound bites and effects to compile an aural recording of your day
- distort, stylise or enhance your recordings by adding other sounds to them. Add poetry, song or text for a more layered result and create a score for a day in your life and/or symbolises through sounds whom you are

### extension | composing task:

Challenge students to create or find their own music for a key scene, character or important transition or theme music. Then students can compile a collection of tracks/playlist and write explanations of their choices as an intention statement or imagined blurb for the release on a streaming service. Students might like to compare their choices to track lists from past productions of *Death of a Salesman* on YouTube or Spotify.

### design | set

Read Arthur Miller's set description at the beginning of the play. Make a sketch of the stage set as you envisage it or be resourceful and creative and gather physical elements from what you have to recreate it in the classroom space. Consider how you could evoke many of the ideas explored so far, the possibilities for scene and time shifts, and the styles of Realism and Expressionism.

### post-show discussion | considering design

Consider Neil Armfield's direction and Dale Ferguson's use of design. How would you describe this interpretation? The design makes use of the conventions of both Realism and Expressionism. Can you identify how? What references, dramaturgical research and beliefs about the play and its characters would have been inherent to this design? How do their choices confront you? Help you to engage and react to the play?

## symbols + motifs

### workshop | would I lie to you?

Using the premise similar to the round called “Possessions” in the British television game show, *Would I Lie to You?* present students with a collection of some of the props symbolic to *Death of a Salesman*.

Either conceal the items so they are unsure what they are choosing or display them clearly. Students choose an item and improvise or prepare a 1-minute story about how they have come to own the object, its significance, and its meaning to them. The aim is to convince their audience the object genuinely belongs to them.

Ask students to predict how the objects might become symbolic in *Death of a Salesman*. Can they recall them being used in the posters? In the production photos? Which characters might they belong to?

### symbols + motifs

- suitcase
- stockings
- diamonds
- football
- tape recorder
- seeds
- rubber hose (at teacher’s discretion)

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/death-of-a-salesman/symbols> provides one of many explorations of some of the symbols in *Death of a Salesman*.

### while watching | the motif of falling

Arthur Miller communicates much about his characters in particularly Willy, through “falling” imagery in stage directions and dialogue. Willy is described as “beaten down” and he at times seeks relief by collapsing into a chair or “lies back, exhausted”. With the Woman, Willy “falls” into bed and she later shouts at him to “get up.” After their confrontation, Biff exits as Willy is “left on the floor on his knees”. How do the director, Neil Armfield, set designer, Dale Ferguson and actor, Anthony LaPaglia collaborate to interpret this motif in Miller’s text?

### post-show thinking | seeds and the garden

Willy tells us the Loman’s garden used to grow well before the apartment blocks were built, but now “*the grass don’t grow anymore, you can’t raise a carrot in the backyard.*” Armfield brings Willy’s determination to plant downstage centre at the end of the play, as Willy drags and empties a bag of earth, and measures the spacing for seeds. How does Armfield ensure the power of foreshadowing the Requiem is undeniably palpable? Why does Willy persist in wanting to plant seeds where they have never grown before? Juxtaposed to the dying garden, in Armfield’s production, a key burst of life against the sombre set design, is the Happy’s bouquet of roses for Linda. Discuss the impact of the imagery of these flowers?

