

Death of a Salesman Prompts

A

In many distinguished plays, some of the most significant events are mental or psychological; examples include awakenings, discoveries, and changes in consciousness. In a well-organized essay, describe how Arthur Miller manages to give the internal events of *Death of a Salesman* the sense of excitement, suspense, and climax usually associated with external action. Do not merely summarize the plot.

B

“Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning.” - Northrop Frye

In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman is a tragic figure who functions as an instrument of the suffering of other characters in the play. Write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by Willy Loman contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole.

C

In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), protagonist Edna Pontellier is said to possess “that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.”

From *Death of a Salesman*, identify a character who conforms outwardly while questioning inwardly. Then write an essay in which you analyze how this tension between outward conformity and inward questioning contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid mere plot summary.

D

In many works of literature, past events can affect (positively or negatively) the present actions, attitudes, or values of a character. In *Death of a Salesman*, members of the Loman family must contend with aspects of the past, both personal and societal. Select one specific character from the play; then write an essay in which you show how that character’s relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

E

Works of literature often depict acts of betrayal. Friends and even family may betray a protagonist; main characters may likewise be guilty of treachery or may betray their own values. Consider a significant betrayal from the plot of *Death of a Salesman*. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the nature of the betrayal and show how it contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

F

Often in literature, a character’s success in achieving goals depends on keeping a secret and divulging it only at the right moment, if at all.

Consider a character from *Death of a Salesman* who must keep a secret. In a well-organized essay, briefly explain the necessity for secrecy and how the character’s choice to reveal or keep the secret affects the plot and contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

G

Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.”

Considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question raised by *Death of a Salesman* and the extent to which it offers any answers. Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid plot summary.