

English Department Key Stage 5 Knowledge Organiser – *Death of a Salesman* Paper 1

Death of a Salesman			
AO3: Context	Key characters:	Tragedy Terminology	Key concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arthur Miller: Born in New York City in 1915, his career as a playwright began when he was a student at the University of Michigan. His early works won prizes and in 1949 he wrote <i>DOAS</i> which won the Pulitzer Prize and transformed Miller into a national sensation. It was described as 'the great American tragedy' as it addresses painful conflicts within one family but tackles the larger issues regarding American national values. The dramatic conflict from the play comes from Miller's own conflicted relationship with his uncle, Manny Newman (also a salesman). Newman imagined a constant competition between Miller and his own son • Post-war America: After WW2, the USA faced domestic tensions and contradictions. The USA became embroiled in a tense cold war with the Soviet Union. There was constant anxiety about Communism, bitter racial conflict and ignored economic and social stratification. A new generation of artists and writers rallied against capitalist success as the basis of social approval. • The Great Depression: With the crash of the stock market in 1929, America plummeted into the worst economic downturn it had ever faced. Many banks, companies, and individual families lost everything, leaving a bruised national psyche that lacked confidence about the future. For Arthur Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i> illustrates the personal effects of the Great Depression. The shattered dreams of Miller's family, and of the American people, are reflected in the shattered dreams of Willy Loman. As the protagonist of <i>Death of a Salesman</i>, Willy is unable to attain financial or emotional stability despite a lifelong career as a salesman and a long marriage to a faithful and devoted wife. • Psychoanalysis: The work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung regarding the role of the human subconscious in defining and accepting human existence became more prevalent in this time period. It allowed people to understand their own existence. • Domestic tragedy: 19th century development in which the tragic protagonists are ordinary, middle or working class individuals. • The American Dream: The phrase 'the American Dream' was first used by historian James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book <i>The Epic of America</i>. He described the dream as a place where "life should be better and rich and fuller". Some have translated the dream into materialism. Many argue that aspects of culture such as: poverty, classism, racism and sexism keep the dream elusive for millions of Americans. 	<p>Willy Loman – An insecure, self-deluded traveling salesman. Willy believes wholeheartedly in the American Dream of easy success and wealth, but he never achieves it. Nor do his sons fulfill his hope that they will succeed where he has failed. When Willy's illusions begin to fail under the pressing realities of his life, his mental health begins to unravel. The overwhelming tensions caused by this disparity, as well as those caused by the societal imperatives that drive Willy, form the essential conflict of <i>Death of a Salesman</i>.</p> <p>Biff Loman – Willy's thirty-four-year-old elder son. Biff led a charmed life in high school as a football star with scholarship prospects, good male friends, and fawning female admirers. He failed math, however, and did not have enough credits to graduate. Since then, his kleptomania has gotten him fired from every job that he has held. Biff represents Willy's vulnerable, poetic, tragic side. He cannot ignore his instincts, which tell him to abandon Willy's paralyzing dreams and move out West to work with his hands. He ultimately fails to reconcile his life with Willy's expectations of him.</p> <p>Linda Loman – Willy's loyal, loving wife. Linda suffers through Willy's grandiose dreams and self-delusions. Occasionally, she seems to be taken in by Willy's self-deluded hopes for future glory and success, but at other times, she seems far more realistic and less fragile than her husband. She has nurtured the family through all of Willy's misguided attempts at success, and her emotional strength and perseverance support Willy until his collapse.</p> <p>Happy Loman – Willy's thirty-two-year-old younger son. Happy has lived in Biff's shadow all of his life, but he compensates by nurturing his relentless sex drive and professional ambition. Happy represents Willy's sense of self-importance, ambition, and blind servitude to societal expectations. Although he works as an assistant to an assistant buyer in a department store, Happy presents himself as supremely important. Additionally, he practices bad business ethics and sleeps with the girlfriends of his superiors.</p> <p>Charley - Willy's next-door neighbor. Charley owns a successful business and his son, Bernard, is a wealthy, important lawyer. Willy is jealous of Charley's success. Charley gives Willy money to pay his bills, and Willy reveals at one point, choking back tears, that Charley is his only friend.</p> <p>Bernard – Bernard is Charley's son and an important, successful lawyer. Although Willy used to mock Bernard for studying hard, Bernard always loved Willy's sons dearly and regarded Biff as a hero. Bernard's success is difficult for Willy to accept because his own sons' lives do not measure up.</p> <p>Ben – Willy's wealthy older brother. Ben has recently died and appears only in Willy's "daydreams." Willy regards Ben as a symbol of the success that he so desperately craves for himself and his sons.</p> <p>The Woman – Willy's mistress when Happy and Biff were in high school. The Woman's attention and admiration boost Willy's fragile ego. When Biff catches Willy in his hotel room with The Woman, he loses faith in his father, and his dream of passing math and going to college dies.</p> <p>Howard Wagner – Willy's boss. Howard inherited the company from his father, whom Willy regarded as "a masterful man" and "a prince." Though much younger than Willy, Howard treats Willy with condescension and eventually fires him, despite Willy's wounded assertions that he named Howard at his birth.</p>	<p>Heroine Status Flawed / Resolution Hegelian tragedy Schopenhauer and tragedy Hamartia Pride Antagonist Tragic arc Modern tragedy Expressionism Realism Inevitable Peripeteia Catharsis Anagnorisis Use of music</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fate and inevitability • The American Dream • Death/suicide • Father/son relationships • Familial love • The dangers of modernity • Gender relations • Symbolism • Injustice of existence • Opportunity • Materialism • Masculinity • Personal cult • Mental health • Natural vs. artificial world • Betrayal and abandonment • Reality and illusion • Cruelty of capitalism • Domestic tragedy • Societal pressures • Chaos

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AO1 Plot Summary		
<p>ACT ONE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willy is returning from a sales trip. His wife is concerned he has had another wreck but Willy claims he is exhausted because he is aging. He travels long distances to sell his wares and has recently suffered the indignation of being paid on a straight commission basis – usually used with salesmen starting out in their career. He pins all of his hopes on sons Biff and Happy but has previously had an argument with Biff for working on farms and horse ranches. Willy's rambling wakes his sons – they think he had another accident too. Happy and Biff reminisce about the good old days when they were young. Biff plans to ask Bill Oliver, an old employer, for a loan to buy a ranch – he remembers that Oliver thought highly of him and offered help any time. Willy becomes lost in memories of his son's childhood as they wash their father's car. Willy whispers he will soon open a bigger business that his successful neighbour Charley because Charley is not "well liked". Bernard, Charley's son, enters and Willy tells the boys that he may make good grades but Happy and Biff will be successful in business because they are "well-liked". Still in the daydream, Willy brags to Linda that he made \$1200 in sales that week. Linda figures out the commission and Willy admits he only grossed \$200 - \$70 commission is not enough to cover the family's expenses. His jealousy of his neighbour becomes apparent. Linda seeks to reassure Willy about his success; meanwhile, the audience are introduced to The Woman, Willy's mistress. He gives the Woman new stockings and gets angry when he sees Linda darning her own Biff is accused of being "too rough" with some people's daughters and Willy is enraged by the truth of his son's behaviour. The memory fades and Willy laments to himself and Happy that he didn't go to Alaska with his brother Ben, who acquired a fortune aged 21 by discovering a diamond mine. Charley offers Willy a job but he is insulted by the offer. Ben appears in a semi-daydream on stage – Willy alternates between talking to Ben and Charley. It is revealed their father abandoned them. Willy's shouts wake Linda and Biff who find Willy outside in his slippers. Linda explains this mental unbalance comes from losing his salary. Biff offers to stay home and get a job to help with the expenses but Linda says he cannot fight with Willy – she tells them she found a rubber hose, a sign that Willy tried to suffocate himself. Happy mentions Biff's plans to ask Bill Oliver for a business loan – Willy offers dubious and unhelpful advice for Biff's interview. Linda begs Willy to ask his boss for a non-travelling job. Biff removes the rubber hose from behind the fuse box. 	<p>ACT TWO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willy wakes the next morning to find Biff and Happy have left – Biff to see Bill Oliver and Happy to mull over the 'Florida idea' and go to work. Willy is in high spirits and mentions he would like to get some seeds and plant a small garden in the yard. Willy talks about getting a house in the country. Linda reminds Willy to ask his boss for a non-travelling job. They have one last payment on both the refrigerator and the house and they have just finished paying for the car. Linda informs Willy Biff and Happy want to take him to dinner at Frank's Chop House. Willy enters Howard's office – Howard is playing with a tape recorder and doesn't really listen to Willy. Willy asks him for a non-travelling job at \$65 a week but Howard replies that there is no opening available. Willy lowers his salary request, explaining his financial situation but Howard remains resistant. Howard keeps calling him "kid" and is condescending towards Willy. Willy recalls the anecdote about Dave Singleman, an 84 year old salesman who died the noble "death of a salesman" that eludes Willy – hundreds of salesmen and buyers attend his funeral. An uninterested Howard leaves the room and returns to Willy shouting frantically – he becomes so distraught that Howard tells him he doesn't want Willy to represent the firm anymore. Willy immerses himself in memories of a visit from Ben – Ben asks Willy to go to Alaska and manage a tract of timberland he has purchases. Linda, afraid of Ben, says Willy already has a nice job. In the present, the grown up Bernard is sitting in his father's reception room when his secretary, Jenny, enters to beg him to deal with Willy – immersed in his memory, he is arguing with Charley from the past about Biff's football game. Bernard speaks to Willy and mentions he has a case in Washington DC – Willy replies that Biff is working on a big deal in town. He breaks down and asks Bernard why Biff's life ended after his big football game. Bernard mentions that Biff failed math. Charley counts out \$50 – with difficulty, Willy asks for over \$100 to pay his insurance fees. Charley offers him a job but he refuses and eventually breaks down that he has been fired. At the meal, Happy advises Biff to tell Willy that Oliver is thinking over the business proposition despite Oliver not remembering who Biff was. Biff attempts to tell Willy the truth but Willy shouts that Biff cannot blame everything on him because Biff failed math at school. Willy enters a day-dream like state reliving Biff's discovery of him and The Woman. Willy daydreams about this scene and Stanley pulls him out of it- he is on his knees in the restaurant ordering teenage Biff to come back. Willy goes on about a seed shop, highlighting his insecurity about his legacy – poor and unemployed, Willy has no means to pass anything on to his sons. By declaring that "nothing's planted" Willy acknowledges that Biff has broken free from the roots of the Loman delusion. Biff and Happy return home with roses for Linda – she throws them to the ground and tells them never to come back accusing them of abandoning their father. Biff tells Willy that he is leaving for good and he will not keep in touch and confronts Willy about the rubber hose. He reproaches Willy for filling him with hot air about how important he was. Willy has an epiphany that Biff must have loved him because he cried. Everyone retires to bed except for Willy who converses with Ben, predicting that Biff will go far with \$20,000 in his pocket. Linda calls for him to come up but he doesn't. They hear the car start and speed away. 	<p>REQUIEM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willy's family, Charley and Bernard are the only mourners at Willy's funeral. Linda wonders where his business friends are. She is angry that he killed himself when they were so close to paying off their bills. Biff recalls that Willy was happier working on the house than as a salesman – he had the wrong dreams. This frustrates Happy who plans to stay in the city to fulfil his father's dream. Charley replies that a salesman has to dream or he is lost. Linda requests some privacy and reports to Willy she made the last payment on the house – she apologises for her inability to cry as it seems like Willy is on "another trip". She begins to sob, repeating "we're free". <p>AO2 Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressionism: the artist depicting a version of reality – symbolism, staging, the music and lighting. Realism: Represents middle class life/believable characters. Clearly defined plots, climaxes, resolutions. Naturalism: Writers apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings. Theatre of the Absurd: Biff, Happy and Willy are all portrayed as lost and confused in a hostile world. Time Frame: The play is in 2 Acts, creating a unity of time and a sense of continuous action. Language: Characters speak in colloquial, informal prose. Mobile concurrency: Where the past and present are shown on stage (usually done by different coloured lighting). Stage setting: The reality of the house walls can be breached by the actors. Stage directions/lighting: Miller creates fluency in a lot of the transitions between scenes by blending reality with the past. Flashbacks: Memories are presented as something that haunts Willy and there is a sense he can control them. Music: It dominates the play and dissolves time and space – important in the last few scenes. Symbolism: Various symbols throughout the play indicate different meanings e.g. stockings, The Car, the rubber hose.