**DEATH OF A SALESMAN KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER**

**SUMMARY OF THE PLAY (A) KEY CONTEXT (B)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***9. Willy Loman*** | Tragic Hero and protagonist. Aged salesman who suffers with mental health issues. Commits suicide. ‘Willy’s repression of the past is a barrier to maturity and ego development’ (Welland) ‘fell from an imagined height’ (Huftel) |
| ***10. Linda Loman*** | Willy’s wife. ‘Linda’s facility for prodding Willy to his doom is what gives the play it’s direction’ (Bliquez) |
| ***11. Biff Loman*** | Athletic, popular but unsuccessful son of Willy and Linda. Deterioration of his relationship with his father is key for plot. |
| ***12. Happy Loman*** | *Youngest and often overlooked son of Willy and Linda: womaniser with an elevated sense of self.* |
| ***13. Charley*** | Lomans’ neighbour. Good friend who loans money to Willy; Willy is envious of him as Charley appears to have achieved AD. Symbol of both success, and hard work. |
| ***14. Uncle Ben*** | Willy’s older brother (appears in flashbacks). Symbol of success: made a fortune in Africa at 21. Willy pales in comparison to brother: looks up to him. |
| ***15. Bernard*** | Charley’s son and long-term friends and coach to Biff. Antithesis of Biff; Bernard has experienced great success in his career. |
| ***16. The Woman*** | Willy’s former lover in Boston. Transitions in and out of memory and present. Symbolic of Willy’s feelings of failure and inadequacy. |
| ***17. Howard Wagner*** | Willy’s boss who fires him. Represents callous nature of the American Dream. |

**KEY CHARACTERS (C)**

1. **Domestic tragedy**: ‘I believe that the common man is an apt a subject for tragedy as Kings are’ (Miller)
2. The realities of the **American Dream**, ‘communistic propaganda’ (Clark)
3. American post-war economic boom with an accompanying surge in cultural optimism and **consumerism.**
4. Position of women in society post-war: DOAS is ‘accurately depicting a post-war American culture that **subordinates women**’ (Balakian)
5. Lack of mental health awareness. Mental health influenced by the works of Freud and Jung – the **power of the subconscious**.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Act*** | ***Summary*** |
| **1.** | ***One*** | 1. Willy returns home ‘tired to the death’, worries about memory loss. Linda tries to reassure him but Willy rants about not being respected. They argue about Biff: ‘lazy bum’ vs ‘trying to find his way’. *PAST: Biff as a popular High School student* Willy declares he will no longer argue with Biff. 2. **Boys’ bedroom:** overhear Willy’s rant. Happy confides that Willy talks to himself most of the time. Boys reminisce about women. Biff confides he returned because he wasn’t satisfied with his job- he wants to work the land and own a ranch; contemplates asking Bill Oliver to fund it but worries about his stealing of balls in High School. Happy also discontented despite having material possessions. 3. Willy drinking milk in the kitchen. *PAST: Willy coaches Biff and Happy as they polish the 1928 Chevy. Brings punching bag. Happy has ‘lost weight’. Biff shows Willy a football he stole from school, Willy disapproves and then changes his mind. Excitement about upcoming game. Willy tells boys of his recent trips, tells them he will one day own a business.* 4. *PAST: ‘anaemic’ Bernard enters kitchen and asks why Biff has not come to study as he is likely to fail. Willy criticises him and states that Biff and Happy will be more successful because they’re ‘Adonis(es)’ while Bernard is ‘liked but not well-liked’* 5. *PAST: Linda enters carrying washing. Willy and Linda discuss his earnings; Willy exaggerates them. Linda recites itemised bills due. Willy is agitated and declares his Chevy to be ‘worthless’. Declares he will do well in Hartford because he is ‘well-liked; he then declares that he is not well respected because of the way he looks. Linda reassures him. Woman’s laughter can be heard in the background.* 6. *PAST: Willy continues to talk about how lonely and fearful he feels. The Woman now appears and responds to Willy: she reminds Willy he is funny and thanks her for her stockings.* 7. *PAST: Willy still caught between conversation with The Woman and Linda. Sees Linda darning stockings and his guilt turns to anger as he orders her to throw them out. Bernard enters anxious about Biff’s tests as he is not revising; Willy becomes angry and threatens to beat Biff. Linda reminds Willy that Biff has been stealing and mistreating women too. Willy is becoming more anxious and hears the woman laughing; he screams ‘shut up’ and orders Bernard away. Linda tries to defend Bernard but Willy counters her telling her that Biff is fine. Linda leaves and Willy then talks about how much of a failure Biff is.* 8. Happy comes downstairs and tries to walk Willy to bed. Willy says he nearly hit someone with is car in Yonkers then talks about Uncle Ben and how he wishes he had gone to work with him. Charley comes over to play cards with Willy. Charley offers Willy a job, Willy angrily turns it down and then talks about his anxieties about his boys. Uncle Ben enters (only visible to Willy). Willy becomes confused when having a conversation with both Charley and Ben, he becomes angry and causes Charley to leave. 9. *PAST: Ben and Willy talk about Ben’s success. Willy begs Ben to tell the boys about their father- his only memories are of flutes, campfires and beards. Willy talks about the great outdoor opportunities in Brooklyn and then tells the boys to steal sand from a nearby construction site so that they can remodel the porch. Charley warns that Biff is being watched by the site-men and Willy criticises Charley and Bernard. As Ben leaves, Willy begs him to stay as he feels ‘kind of temporary’ and doesn’t know what to teach his boys.* 10. Linda looks for Willy and finds him talking to himself outside. Willy asks about diamond watch fob given to him by Ben and Linda reminds him that he pawned it for Biff’s classes. Willy goes off mumbling to himself. Biff and Happy come out and a fraught argument ensues about the lack of communication between Linda and Biff; she defends Willy as ‘exhausted’ not ‘crazy’. Linda confesses that Willy has been trying to commit suicide and she has found a ‘rubber hose’. 11. Willy anxious that people are calling him ‘crazy’. Argues with Biff and tells him to return to Texas but becomes excited when Happy tells him of Biff’s plan to speak to Bill Oliver. Linda tries to be encouraging but Willy yells at her for interrupting. |
|
| **2.** | ***Two*** | 1. Biff has gone to see Bill Oliver. Willy, convinced that life is getting better, dreams of growing vegetables and building houses. Linda reminds Willy to ask Howard for an advance to which he becomes angry, Linda reminds him that the mortgage will be paid in a month. Biff calls Linda, Linda tells Biff that Willy removed the pipe but Biff confesses it was him. Linda describes Willy as ‘a little boat looking for a harbour’. 2. Willy goes to the office to ask Howard for a New York position. Howard tells Willy there is no job available in New York; Willy begs, asking for less and less money. Howard sacks Willy. 3. *PAST: preparation for football game. Happy and Bernard fight over who will carry Biff’s helmet. Charley enters, pretending to have forgotten about the game- this infuriates Willy.* 4. Willy goes to Charley’s office where he meets Bernard who is now a successful lawyer. Willy asks why Biff didn’t do as well stating ‘maybe I did something to him’ ; Bernard states that something happened when he travelled to Boston to visit Willy after his exams. Willy then becomes angry. 5. Charley comes into the office and tells Willy that Bernard is representing a case for the Supreme Court. He gives Willy $50 but Willy asks for more because of his insurance. Again, Charley offers him a job but Willy refuses. Willy wonders why a person is ‘worth more dead than alive’. 6. Chophouse. Happy chats to Stanley and then flirts with Miss Forsythe (referred to as a ‘strudel’). Biff is unhappy as he waited six hours to see Bill who didn’t even remember him. Biff stole Bill’s fountain pen. Happy suggests that Biff should not tell Willy about what has happened. 7. Biff declares he wants to have an honest conversation when Willy arrives. Willy tells the boys he was fired. Biff tries to explain but Willy continues to interrupt him 8. Set in restaurant but house is lit on stage. Biff tries to talk about Bill but Willy hears Young Bernard telling Linda the Biff failed Maths and will not graduate and that he has now gone to visit Willy. Back in reality, Biff tells Willy that he stole Bill’s pen. Willy tells Biff his ‘no good for anything’ so Biff lies and tells him that he is going to meet again will Bill about a ‘Florida idea’. Willy slips back into the past and hears the voice of the woman; he stumbles out of the restaurant. Happy denies that Willy is his father and any responsibility for him. 9. Set in a hotel room where Willy and The Woman are getting dressed. Biff knocks on the door and enters, telling Willy that he will not graduate. Biff discovers The Woman and calls Willy a ‘phony little fake’. 10. Set at the Lomans’ home where Linda is angry at the boys for abandoning their father. Argument ensues whilst Willy is outside planting seeds. Ben enters garden and discusses the plan to commit suicide and the subsequent insurance policy. Willy imagines a grand funeral. 11. Biff declares that he is leaving home and Willy tells him to ‘rot in hell’. Argument ensues, and Biff states he will not pity Willy if he commits suicide and that the Lomans’ have never been honest with each other. He declares that they are just ordinary people. At the pinnacle of their argument, Biff breaks down and collapses onto Willy. Willy is overwhelmed by his son’s love. 12. Willy is still reeling from the love he felt from Biff. Ben reappears and reminds Willy of the $20,000 insurance policy. Willy drives away. |
| **3.** | ***Requiem*** | 1. Set at Willy’s grave. Linda can’t understand why no one came to the funeral; Happy is angry and Biff claims that Willy ‘didn’t know who he was’. Happy is determined to fulfil Willy’s dreams; Biff plans to leave; and Linda says she can’t understand why Willy killed himself for money as they are now debt-free. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***18.*** | ***Act One*** | *‘I have such thoughts. I have such strange thoughts’* **Willy**  *‘I’m the New England Man. I’m vital in New England’* **Willy**  *‘I don’t want change, I want Swiss cheese!’* **Willy**  *‘He’s liked, but not well-liked’* **Biff, referring to Bernard**  *‘Walked into a jungle and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he’s rich!’* **Willy, referring to Uncle Ben**  *‘I don’t say he’s a great man […] But he’s a human being and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid.’* **Linda, referring to Willy**  *‘A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man’* **Linda, referring to Willy** |
| ***19.*** | ***Act Two*** | *‘You can’t eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit’* **Willy**  *‘Be loving to him. Because he’s only a little boat looking for a harbour’* **Linda, referring to Willy**  *‘I’m just what I am, that’s all’* **Biff**  *‘After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive’* **Willy**  *‘I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman!’* **Willy**  *‘I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you’* **Biff** |
| ***20.*** | ***Requiem*** | *‘He had all the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong’* **Biff**  *‘Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy’* ***Charley***  *‘It’s the only dream you can have – to come out number one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I’m gonna win it for him’* **Happy** |

**KEY QUOTATIONS (D)**

**SYMBOLS/MOTIFS (E)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Symbol*** | ***Meaning*** |
| ***21. Rubber hose*** | A symbol of Willy’s impending suicide. Like Willy’s other attempt at suicide (driving off the road) the hose pipe points at how conveniences like the car which Willy works hard to afford might, under the surface, be killing him. |
| ***22. Stockings*** | During the affair Willy gives The Woman the intimate gift of stockings, then seeing Linda mending her own is a symbol of his betrayal, both as a husband and provider as they can’t afford to replace such luxuries. |
| ***23. Seeds*** | By planting the vegetable seeds Willy is attempting to begin anew as the sons he has cultivated in his own image have disappointed him and none of his financial hopes have borne fruit. His attempt to plant the seeds at **night** emphasises the futile nature. |
| ***24. Flute*** | The flute that drifts through the play is symbolic and represents the single faint link Willy has with his father and the natural world – the sound of the road Willy didn’t take. |
| ***25. Cheese*** | Symbolic of Willy’s inability to accept change or admit failure: cannot understand why Linda would make the change from Swiss to American cheese to save money. |

**THEMES (F)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Theme*** | ***Analysis*** | ***Examples of where it appears in the text*** |
| ***26. The American Dream*** | Various secondary characters achieve the dream in different ways: Ben goes off to the wilderness in Africa and Alaska and makes his fortune, Howard Wagner inherits his Dream through his father’s company, while Bernard who is presented as a studious bore as a child becomes a successful lawyer through hard work. Willy’s version of the dream is that if a man is attractive, well-liked and charismatic he deserves success and naturally will achieve it. Over the course of his lifetime, Willy and his sons fall short of the impossible standards of the dream. The real tragedy of the play is not that Willy fails to succeed in achieving his dream of financial success, but that he buys into the dream so thoroughly that he ignores those things in his life which are tangible, like the love of his family. | *(use summary for reference)*  1a), b), d), e), f), g), h), i), k)  2a), b), c), d), e), f), h), k), i)  Requiem |
| ***27. Betrayal*** | The link between love and betrayal is evident throughout the play in many ways: Willy betrays his wife by cheating on her with ‘The Woman’ who is able to feed Willy’s ego by ‘liking’ him, Willy’s betrayal of Linda is the catalyst for the breakdown of the relationship between Biff and Willy, and Biff then reveals at the end of the play that Willy has betrayed him by encouraging him to settle for nothing less than greatness, thus making the real world more difficult for Biff. Happy and Linda also arguably betray Willy out of a desire not to shake him out of his illusions, which thereby forces Willy’s fragile mind to deal alone with the discrepancies between his real and dream life. | 1a), e), f), g), j)  2a), h), i), j), k) |
| ***28. Abandonment*** | Inspired by the love for his family, willy ironically abandons them, much like his father and brother did to him when he was a child and young man. The tragedy of Willy’s death comes about because of his inability to distinguish between his value as an economic resource and his identity as a human being, and these feelings derive from being abandoned by his father at the age of three and then by his brother who went off to find his own success. The irony lies in the fact that by allowing his dream of financial security to consume his life, he sabotages both his role as a provider, husband and father. | 1a), b), h), i),  2i), j), k), l)  Requiem |
| ***29. Fathers and sons*** | The central conflict in the play is between Willy and Biff, who showed great promise as a young athlete and ladies-man but has now become a drifter. Through use of the flashbacks, the play is able to track how the values Willy instilled in his sons – luck over hard work, likeability over expertise- led them to disappoint both him and themselves as adults. Biff realises at the end of the play that only by escaping the dream that his father has instilled in him will he be able to lead a fulfilling life. Happy never realises this, and vows at the end of the play to continue in his father’s footsteps, pursuing an American Dream that will leave him empty and alone. | 1c), d), j), k)  2c), g), h), i), j), k), |
| ***30. Masculinity*** | Willy and his sons are all struggling against a societal system which forces them into boxes of archetypal masculinity. All three strive to be what society asks them to be: strong, hard-working and popular, yet for the Lomans these do not come naturally. Through Willy in particular Miller explores the detrimental mental effects of the societal pressures and demands placed upon men to be financially successful providers for their family. Biff is the only character to realise the true pitfalls of society; a once thriving golden boy, the exact system which elevated him to such heights is the one which has brought him so low. He sees through the rampant materialism and obsession with success in society, yet is incapable of acting due to the constraints placed upon him by these very conventions. | 1b), c), e), f), g), h), j)  2i), k) |
| ***31. Nature vs. the city*** | The towering apartment buildings that surround Willy’s home block out the stars and the sunlight that would allow him to grow seeds in his back garden represent the artificial world of the city – with all its consumerism and superficiality- encroaching on his little spot of self-determination. The urban world has replaced the rural world that Ben and his father immersed themselves in, and Willy’s throws his lot into making sales. Biff and Happy symbolise the two facets of Willy’s personality: the individualist dreamer and the eager-to-please salesman. While Willy collects material possessions that the American Dream instructs him to, like cars and household appliances, they do not leave him satisfied and in the end he ventures into death, his own dark jungle. | 1a), i)  2a), j) |
| ***32. Reality vs. fantasy*** | One of the main sources of conflict in the text is Willy’s inability to distinguish between reality and illusion. Willy’s most prominent illusion is that success is dependent on popularity and personal attractiveness as it is based on this idea that Willy continues to strive for his dream. Willy’s fantasies begin to encroach on his life in the form of his flashbacks, through which he continues to straddle the past and the present. It appears to the audience that whenever Willy faces conflict or difficulties in the present, his mind takes him to the past where he can experience Biff’s, and his own imagined success. These glimpses into the past also help the audience to better understand Willy as we see both his interactions with Uncle Ben and The Woman; a figure who fuels Willy’s feelings of inadequacy, and one who he uses in an attempt to quell these. Biff attempts at the end of the play to remind his father of their reality, and through his funeral in Requiem the family and the audience are reminded of the reality of his life as there is no one in attendance. | 1a), e), f), g), i), j), k)  2a), c, g, h, i), j), k)  Requiem |
| ***33. Mental health*** | Willy Loman exhibits bipolar tendencies and experiences delusional thoughts, paranoia, hallucination and suicidal thoughts. Willy’s illness is used as a defence mechanism to distort his view of reality: lost his job, feelings of anger, disappointment, suicide. Given the context of the period, little is known and understood about mental illness and this therefore results in Willy’s troubles taking a toll on his family. Linda in particular feeds into the lie, is over-compassionate with her husband and also appears to micromanage him, especially with finances. | 1a), g), h), j), k)  2a), h), k), l) |
| ***34. Gender*** | In DOAS Miller presents a society that has defined natural roles for both men and women: women undertake household duties whilst men are the breadwinners for the family and hard-working, else he be labelled a failure. Linda as the woman of the house can only contribute to household related issues, and even then isn’t given a say in certain decisions, like how their sons are raised. Despite this however, Linda is expected to be the foundation and the cornerstone of the family even though she has been given a powerless role, both metaphorically and literally silenced by her husband in speaking to him about his mental issues, or the boys. Linda could leave and claim her independence, but instead she chooses to compromise and selflessly denies herself happiness to support her family. There are clear examples of engrained misogyny in the text exemplified in Happy’s treatment and attitudes toward women, Willy’s ego-fuelled affair, his silencing of Linda when men are discussing business etc. | 1a), b), e), f), g), k)  2f), h), i), |

**LINKS TO TRAGIC GENRE (G)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Tragic convention*** | ***How/where it appears in Death of a Salesman*** |
| **35. Hamartia** | ***Willy delusion is his fatal flaw:*** his deluded view of his own success, and that of his sons. Willy refuses to acknowledge or admit that he is a failure and this delusion leads him to take his own life. Arguably, Miller portrays Willy’s belief and search for the unattainable American Dream as delusion; Willy truly believes that he and his sons will achieve success and make their fortune. |
| **36. Peripeteia** | Willy’s ***reversal of fortune happens*** across various points. We could argue that his downfall has begun to happen before the commencement of the play as he is failing to adequately carry out the role of a salesman and his familial relationships have broken down. Willy’s downfall is further emphasised when Charley, having been loaning him money to pay his bills, offers him a job. Willy’s downfall is cemented however when Howard fires him; Willy’s identity is inextricably linked with being a ‘Salesman’ and therefore in losing this job he not only loses financial stability for he and his family, he loses himself. |
| **37. Anagnorisis** | Willy dies at the end of the play having not experienced the ***moment of realisation*** expected of a tragic hero. Despite Biff’s attempts to make his father understand their role in society and their shortcomings, Willy dies under the illusion that Biff will use the insurance money to start a business and achieve the American Dream. Arguably, having been fired, Willy must have some understanding of his failure as a salesman, but does not understand fully the depths of his own delusion. |
| **38. Catharsis** | The ending of the play is ***cathartic*** as we experience pity for both Willy and Biff. Biff has his own moment of realisation in which he discovers that his life up until this point has been a lie. We end the play with feelings of optimism that Biff will now be free to lead a life that will make him happy. The audience experiences feelings of pity and fear as Willy chooses to take his own life; we understand his desperation and that this is his only way of attempting to achieve the American Dream. The audiences experiences catharsis because the fear of not achieving personal goals and the emotional turmoil of this is something that presides in each of us. |
| **39. Hubris** | While we might not initially describe Willy Loman as a ***prideful*** man, he does suffer from his pride throughout the text. ***Pride*** is what leads Willy to reject numerous job offers from Charley, causes him to continue to relive a more successful imagined past because he cannot come to terms with the present, and what leads him to delude himself as to the success of himself and the potential success of his sons. |
| **40. Pathos** | Linda is an example of a character who evokes ***pity*** in the audience as she continues to put the needs of her husband before her own, to the detriment of herself and her relationship with her children. |
| **41. Tragic Victim** | We could argue that Willy’s entire family, both Linda and the boys, become collateral damage as he continues to strive for the American Dream and attempt to delude himself and those around him. Perhaps the real tragedy of Death of a Salesman is not Willy’s death, it is that in focusing all his energy and efforts on making himself and his sons successful, Willy ignores and takes for granted how blessed he is to have a family around him who love him. |