

Death of a Salesman Act 1 Reading Guide

1. Why is Willy home? Why is Linda alarmed that he is home?
2. Why is Willy annoyed at Biff? How does he describe Biff? What does that tell you about Willy?
3. How has the neighborhood changed? Why does it matter to the story that his surroundings are no longer the way they used to be?
4. How does Linda treat Willy? How do the boys feel about him?
5. Why does Biff come home in the spring? What is the symbolism of the new colts and Texas in the spring? How does this juxtapose with the city in the summer?
6. Why won't Happy go out West with Biff, and why won't Biff stay? Explain what it means to "get ahead of the next fella".
7. Why doesn't either son get married and settle down?
8. How does Willy act toward the boys when they are young? How do they act toward him?

9. What does Willy's reaction to Biff's theft of the football tell us about Willy? About Biff? About their relationship?

10. How does Willy feel about Charley and Bernard?

11. Willy says the boys look like Adonises; what other clues show that Willy believes in appearances? What does he think of his own, specifically how when he tells Linda about how much he's sold?

12. "Five hundred gross in Providence" becomes "roughly two hundred gross the whole trip." How does Linda take Willy's stories? What does this reveal about her?

13. Why does Willy make a fuss about Linda's mending stockings? How is this important to the play?

14. Why does Charley visit? How does he feel about Willy? How and why do they insult each other?

15. Who is Ben? Why does Ben appear? In the flashback, what does Ben teach Biff? How does Charley react to what he teaches Willy/Biff?

16. Describe his father. What did he do for a living and how does this juxtapose with Willy? What is the symbolism of his father's flutes?

17. What happened to him? What is the symbolic meaning of diamonds and timber? (Diamonds will change—sort of—throughout the story.) How does this juxtapose with Willy's sales?
18. What does Linda think is the trouble with Willy's life? Why is she angry at her sons?
19. Why does she put the rubber hose back after she had taken it? What does this tell about her?
20. Why is Willy interested when Biff mentions Bill Oliver? Why do they argue?
21. How does Biff react to Willy yelling at Linda? Why does he come to his mother's defense "all the time"?
22. Why is Willy unable to let Biff go to bed without saying more to him about Bill Oliver? What does Biff's reaction tell us about their relationship?

Death of a Salesman Act 2 Reading Guide

23. Why is Willy's mood upbeat at the start of Act II? What does he expect to happen?
24. What is the significance of the Dave Singleman story?

25. What is the significance of naming Howard? What does Willy mean when he says “a man is not a piece of fruit”?
26. Why is the Ebbets Field game so important to Willy? To Biff?
27. What is Willy’s impression of Bernard when he sees him in his father’s office?
28. Why does Willy exaggerate Biff’s importance?
29. Why does Bernard ask what happened after Boston? Explain the significance of the shoes with “University of Virginia” printed on them.
30. Why can’t Willy work for Charley? Why does Charley say Willy hasn’t grown up?
31. What does Willy sell? How is Charley’s view of what a salesman is different from Willy’s?
32. In the restaurant, how is Happy like his father?

33. Why does Biff take Bill Oliver's fountain pen? Why can't Biff "hold on to the facts" with Willy even though he wants to?
34. Why do Biff and Happy leave Willy at the restaurant?
35. Why did Biff go to Boston? What does he discover when he sees the Woman?
36. Why is it that Biff never went to summer school? Why doesn't he believe his father will be able to convince Mr. Birnham to change Biff's grade?
37. Why does Linda tell the boys, "Get out of here, both of you, and don't come back!"?
38. Why does Willy keep planting seeds where they've never grown before? What is the symbolism of the garden? How does this tie into the neighborhood at the beginning of the play?
39. What is the "proposition" Willy is discussing with Ben while he is planning the garden?
40. Why does Willy think Biff will be impressed with his funeral? Why does he need him to be? Why does Ben say that Biff will call Willy a fool?

41. Why doesn't Willy want to see Linda?

42. Why does he think Biff is "spiting" him? Why does Biff show him the rubber hose?

43. What understanding does Biff come to when he takes Bill Oliver's pen? What is the symbolism of the pen?

44. What does Biff come to understand about himself that he tries to make Willy acknowledge? What does this mean about Biff?

45. What does Biff do that's makes Willy happy? What does Willy finally understand about his son?

46. What does Happy tell Linda and Willy he's going to do?

47. What is the symbolism of Ben's watch? (It has been throughout the play.)

48. What does Willy do at the end of the act?

Death of a Salesman Requiem Reading Guide

49. What is the significance of no one attending Willy's funeral and how does it juxtapose with Dave Singleman's?
50. What does Biff mean when he says Willy "had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong"?
51. What is Charley's response?
52. What is Biff going to do after Willy's funeral? What is Happy going to do? Why?
53. Why can't Linda cry at Willy's grave?