Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* Questions

1. What is the turning point in Willy’s life? Is Willy the main character in this play or is Biff? Why? What does Biff discover about himself? How does this discovery affect his relationship with Willy? How is Biff’s self-realization dramatic? What is the climax of the play?

2. Does Linda help or hinder Willy in overlooking his small sales and his dishonest attempts to make them seem bigger? How else does she influence Willy? Discuss Linda’s remark, “Attention—attention must finally be paid to such a man!” What is the effect of the switch in Linda’s speech to this very formal statement? Why does Miller use it?

3. What is Willy’s dream? What is he searching for throughout the play? Why doesn’t he find it? Did he have a chance of fulfilling it? Did he have the wrong dream?

4. How does Ben affect Willy? How does he influence the events in the play?

5. Willy is proud of putting up the living-room ceiling and making a cement porch. How is the image of working with his hands carried through the play? Why is it significant?

6. Why does Miller let us know in the title that Willy’s death is coming? Why doesn’t he make it a surprise? Is Willy’s death in a car more or less appropriate than a suicide using the rubber hose on the water heater would be? Why? What harm does Willy’s death do? What good?

7. How are the angular shapes and the lighting described in the opening scene important to the meaning of the play? Why does Miller have the buildings closed in by other buildings? How does he use the stage setting as a statement about time?

8. What is the effect of having scenes from the past staged in addition to the current action of the play?

9. What would you say are the false values which the play reveals? What are the true values which the play upholds?

10. Daniel E. Schneider, in “Play of Dreams,”\* states that the play is really about a man and his sons. Do you agree that the primary theme of Death of a Salesman is the conflict between father and son and between first-born and second-born sons? Support your opinion.

11. Some reviewers believe that the play is a criticism of capitalism and the American way of life. Discuss your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with them. What are the social implications of the play?