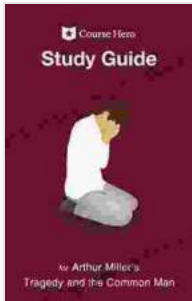


The Tragedy of the Common Man: A Study Guide for Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman



Study Guide for Arthur Miller's Tragedy and the Common Man by Course Hero

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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Arthur Miller's 1949 play, *Death of a Salesman*, is a powerful and moving tragedy that explores the American Dream and its impact on the common man. The play's protagonist, Willy Loman, is a salesman who has worked his entire life to achieve success, but has ultimately failed. His story is a cautionary tale about the dangers of chasing the American Dream at all costs.

This study guide will provide you with an in-depth analysis of *Death of a Salesman*, including a summary of the plot, an analysis of the characters, and a discussion of the play's themes and significance. It will also provide you with study questions and essay prompts to help you prepare for class discussions and exams.

Summary of the Plot

Death of a Salesman takes place in Brooklyn, New York, in the 1940s. The play follows the story of Willy Loman, a salesman who is struggling to make ends meet. Willy has always been a dreamer, but his dreams have never come true. He has worked hard all his life, but he has never been able to achieve the success he desired.

Willy's wife, Linda, is a loving and supportive woman, but she is also frustrated by Willy's inability to provide for his family. Willy's two sons, Biff and Happy, are also struggling to find their place in life. Biff is a former football star who has never been able to live up to his potential. Happy is a successful businessman, but he is also shallow and materialistic.

As the play progresses, Willy's mental health begins to deteriorate. He starts to hallucinate and talk to his dead brother, Ben. Ben encourages Willy to pursue his dreams, but Willy is too old and tired to do so. In the end, Willy commits suicide in order to provide for his family.

Analysis of the Characters

Willy Loman

Willy Loman is the protagonist of Death of a Salesman. He is a salesman who has worked his entire life to achieve success, but has ultimately failed. Willy is a tragic figure because he is a victim of the American Dream. He has been taught to believe that if he works hard enough, he can achieve anything he wants. However, the reality is that the American Dream is not available to everyone. Willy's story is a cautionary tale about the dangers of chasing the American Dream at all costs.

Linda Loman

Linda Loman is Willy's wife. She is a loving and supportive woman, but she is also frustrated by Willy's inability to provide for his family. Linda is a realist, and she knows that Willy's dreams are never going to come true. However, she still loves Willy and tries to help him in any way she can.

Biff Loman

Biff Loman is Willy's older son. He is a former football star who has never been able to live up to his potential. Biff is a dreamer, like his father, but he is also more realistic than Willy. He knows that the American Dream is not available to everyone, and he is not willing to sacrifice his happiness in order to pursue it.

Happy Loman

Happy Loman is Willy's younger son. He is a successful businessman, but he is also shallow and materialistic. Happy is the opposite of his brother Biff. He is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve success, even if it means sacrificing his morals.

Themes and Significance

Death of a Salesman explores a number of important themes, including:

- The American Dream
- The tragedy of the common man
- The importance of family
- The power of memory

The play's central theme is the American Dream. Willy Loman is a victim of the American Dream because he has been taught to believe that if he works hard enough, he can achieve anything he wants. However, the reality is that the American Dream is not available to everyone. Willy's story is a cautionary tale about the dangers of chasing the American Dream at all costs.

Another important theme in the play is the tragedy of the common man. Willy Loman is a common man, and his story is a tragedy because it is a story that could happen to anyone. Willy is a victim of circumstances, and his death is a reminder that no one is immune to tragedy.

The importance of family is also a major theme in the play. Willy Loman is a devoted family man, and his love for his wife and sons is one of the few things that gives him meaning in life. However, Willy's family is also a source of pain for him. His sons are a disappointment to him, and his wife is constantly nagging him about money. In the end, Willy's family is unable to save him from his tragic fate.

Finally, the power of memory is a significant theme in the play. Willy Loman is haunted by memories of his past, both good and bad. These memories shape his present, and they ultimately lead to his death. Willy's story is a reminder that the past is always with us, and that we cannot escape it.

Study Questions

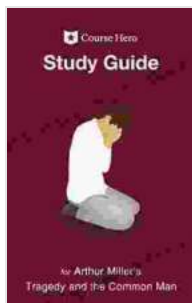
1. What is the American Dream, and how does it affect Willy Loman? 2. Why is Willy Loman a tragic figure? 3. How does Willy Loman's relationship with his sons contribute to his tragedy? 4. What is the significance of

memory in the play? 5. How does the play explore the theme of the tragedy of the common man?

Essay Prompts

1. Discuss the ways in which Death of a Salesman is a tragedy. 2. Analyze the character of Willy Loman. What are his strengths and weaknesses? 3. How does the play explore the relationship between fathers and sons? 4. What is the significance of the American Dream in the play? 5. How does Death of a Salesman remain relevant to modern society?

Death of a Salesman is a powerful and moving tragedy that explores the American Dream and its impact on the common man. The play is a classic of American literature, and it continues to be studied and performed today. This study guide has provided you with an in-depth analysis of the play, including a summary of the plot, an analysis of the characters, and a discussion of the play's themes and significance. I hope that this study guide will help you to appreciate the play's complexity and to understand its relevance to modern society.



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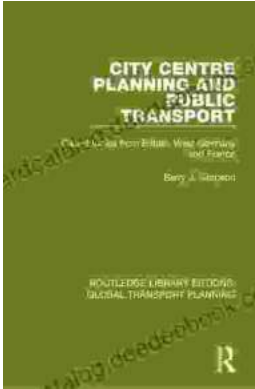
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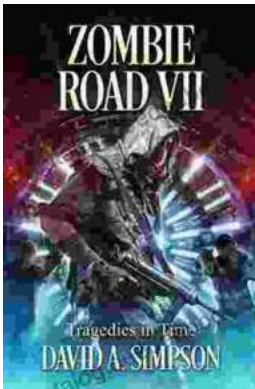
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