

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

BY: ARTHUR MILLER

ARTHUR MILLER

- Born in Harlem, New York, in 1915
- Moderately affluent household until his family lost almost everything in the Wall Street Crash of 1929
- Worked odd jobs to save money to attend the University of Michigan
- Wrote for the student paper and completed his first play, *No Villain*



ARTHUR MILLER

- Took courses with playwright/professor Kenneth Rowe, who taught him how to construct a play in order to achieve an intended effect. Rowe influenced Miller to move back east and begin his career
- His first play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1940), was closed after just four performances
- Six years later, *All My Sons* (1946) achieved success on Broadway and earned him his first Tony Award for “best author”



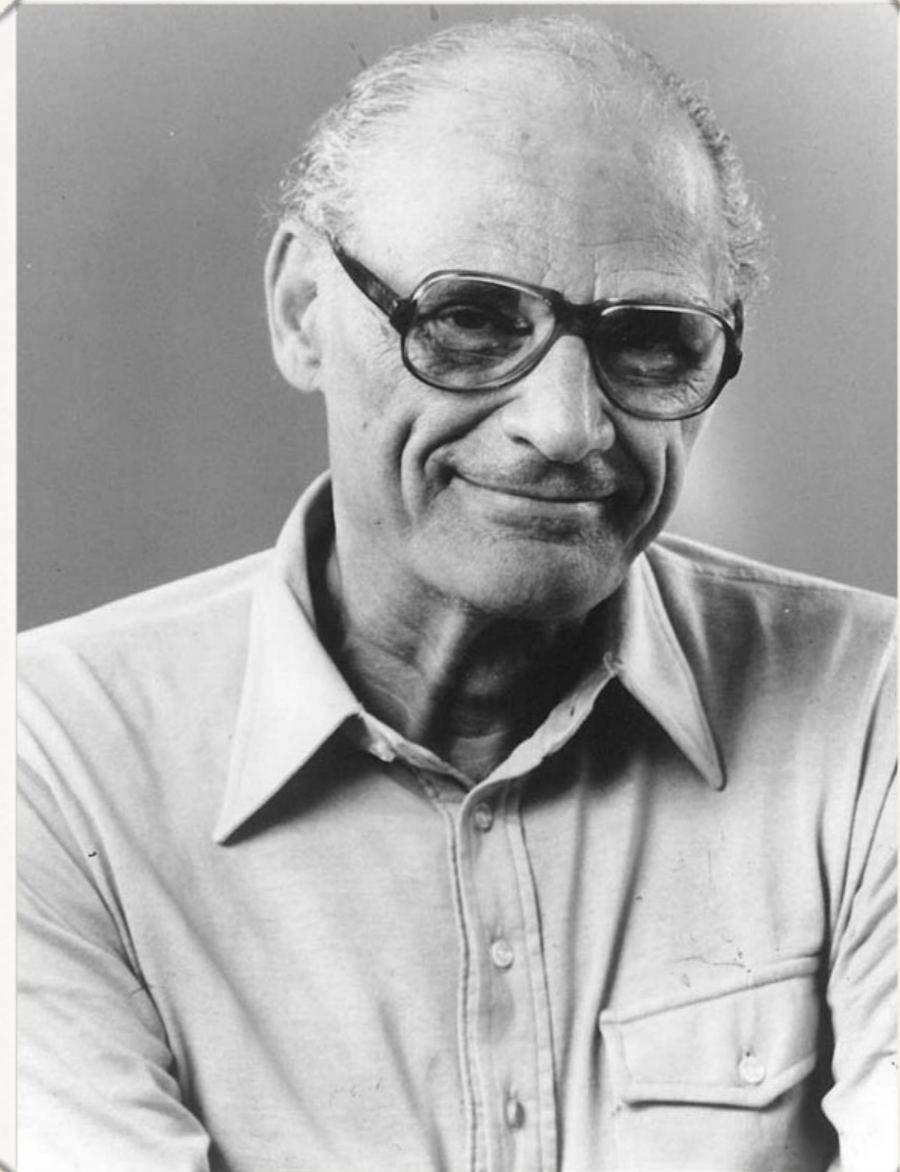
ARTHUR MILLER

- Wrote the first act of *Death of a Salesman* in a day and it opened on February 10, 1949, at the Morosco Theatre on Broadway
- Won him the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award and a Tony
- Left his wife in 1956 and married famed actress Marilyn Monroe
- She starred in *The Misfits* in 1961, a film for which Miller had written the screenplay



ARTHUR MILLER

- Divorced Monroe, married for the third time and had a son and a daughter
- Miller died of heart failure on February 10, 2005 (on the 56th anniversary of *Death of a Salesman's* Broadway debut) at the age of eighty-nine



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- The conditions that we see in *Death of a Salesman* are extremely representative of the post-World War II period:
 - United States experiencing economic prosperity
 - Increase in spending and in housing construction
 - Economic situation unimproved for the poorest of Americans (migrant farm workers and unskilled labourers, like Happy and Biff)
 - Credit purchases
 - Capitalism vs. Communism (Cold War attitude)
 - Growth of corporations and mass communications media
 - Being “well liked”
 - The American Dream: A set of ideals that includes **freedom**, the opportunity for **prosperity** and **success**, and the **possibility for upward social mobility** achieved through **hard work** and **determination**

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

- *Death of a Salesman* is Miller's most famous work
- Speaks to the unpleasant conflicts within one family (the Lomans) but also addresses larger issues dealing with American values



WILLY LOMAN

- Aging, suburban traveling salesman who strongly believes in the American Dream, but never achieves it
- Unrealistic self-confidence
- Declining mental health
- Considered to be the play's tragic hero
- Equates happiness and freedom with material wealth



LINDA LOMAN

- Willy's doting wife - she is on the mission to protect Willy's emotions and his dreams
- She is very much "out of the loop"
- Sees beyond the need to be "well liked"



BIFF LOMAN

- Willy and Linda's oldest son and the apple of Willy's eye
- High school "hot shot" and star football player
- Moved West to work on ranches, but couldn't keep a job because he stole from his bosses
- 34 years old and is finally realizing the negative influence his father has had on his life



HAPPY LOMAN

- Takes after his father and is relatively successful in his job
- Has the same unrealistic self-confidence and dreams big
- Suffers from his father's expectations for him, but to a lesser extent than Biff
- Competitive and ambitious, but these traits are often taken into different avenues than succeeding at his job
- Happy isn't happy (irony)

