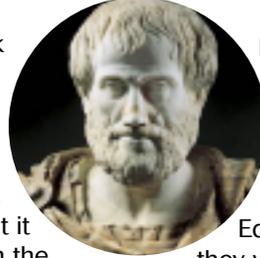


THE COMMON MAN AS TRAGIC HERO

"In this age few tragedies are written...For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy—or tragedy above us...I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were... I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity."
—**Arthur Miller**

Aristotle, a famous Greek philosopher and scientist, defined the parts of ancient Greek tragedy in his book *Poetics*. The most important aspect of tragedy, according to Aristotle, is that it should incite pity and fear in the audience.



heroes of two working-class characters: Eddie Carbone and Willy Loman.

Miller creates his tragic heroes using modern American values. Eddie and Willy are noble because they work hard to support their families. They pursue the American Dream – that a person can start with nothing and become successful through hard work and determination.

Greek tragedy also has a tragic hero. This person (typically a man) must be noble, so we will pity him when he experiences his downfall. For Aristotle, noble meant a king or a leader of men. Arthur Miller, however, found many tragic heroes among the common people of his own time. While other modern playwrights moved away from classical tragedy, Miller applied Aristotle's theory to stories of everyday American life. He made tragic

Like Greek tragic heroes, Eddie and Willy are good men, but not perfect. They have tragic flaws and make tragic mistakes that bring about their downfalls. When watching the plays, note what each man's flaws and mistakes are. Do they understand their mistakes? Do they deserve their tragic endings?

TITLE WORDS



Rick Fouchoux stars as Willy Loman

LIFE OF A SALESMAN

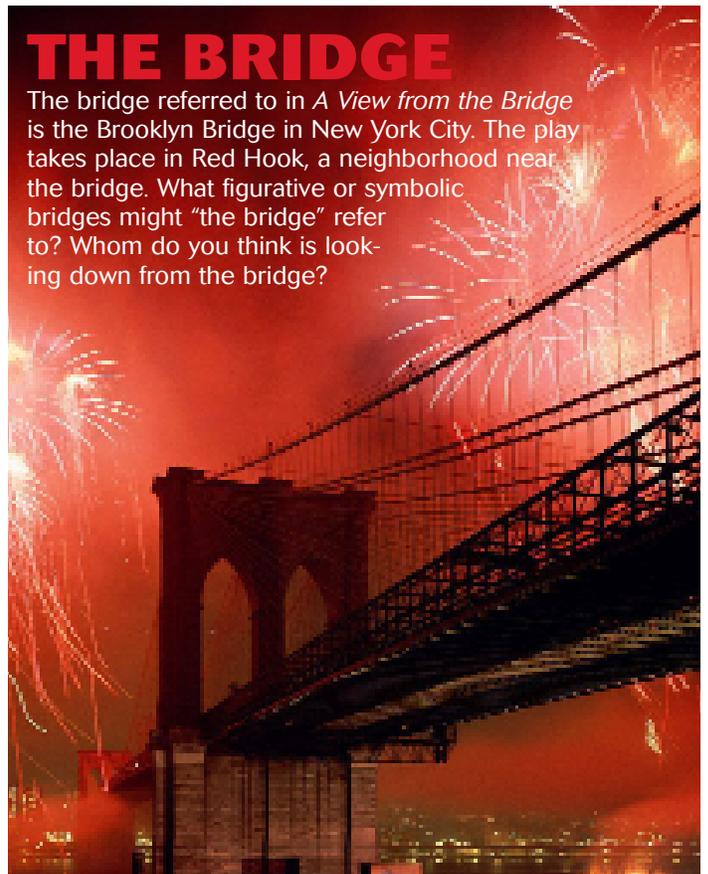
Willy Loman believes being a salesman is "the greatest career a man could want." In the 1940s, most people, like Willy, would work for the same company for their entire career. Workers were loyal to their company and believed in its products. With no television or Internet for sales or advertising, door-to-door salesmen were crucial to a company's success. Salesmen sold everything from vacuum cleaners to life insurance, demonstrating

products in people's homes. They had to represent their product and company in the best light. Personal relationships and personality were critical, because they meant repeat sales, and a salesman's pay was often based on the amount he sold.

a! *Activity! Willy's strength and downfall is his unwavering belief. As a salesman, he believes in his company's products wholeheartedly. How does belief affect your ability as a salesperson? Pitch (try to sell) a product that you believe in. Then, pitch a product you do not like. Which is easier? What makes a pitch successful?*

THE BRIDGE

The bridge referred to in *A View from the Bridge* is the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City. The play takes place in Red Hook, a neighborhood near the bridge. What figurative or symbolic bridges might "the bridge" refer to? Whom do you think is looking down from the bridge?



ARTHUR MILLER'S WRITING REFLECTS THE ISSUES OF HIS DAY AND OURS

A View from the Bridge: Immigration

Each year hundreds of thousands of people like Marco and Rodolpho enter the U.S. illegally in search of a better life.

Some people feel that illegal immigrants take jobs and public services away from American citizens. Some feel illegal immigrants are a threat to national security. They believe we should not let illegal immigrants obtain a driver's license, attend public school or work in the U.S. They also believe there should be greater security measures on U.S. borders to prevent people from entering the country illegally.

Other people, however, believe the U.S. government already limits immigration too much. They think that more people should be allowed to immigrate legally. They also believe that some illegal immigrants should be allowed to stay in the U.S. since they face poverty, starvation, persecution or even death in their home countries.

Ultimately, the question of immigration is one without an easy answer. Would fewer people enter the country illegally if it were easier to do so legally? Or would it be better simply to make it more difficult to enter the U.S.? These are all questions policymakers are still trying to answer.



Activity: Scan local and national headlines for current stories regarding immigration and unemployment. Examine the platforms of the presidential candidates; where do they stand on immigration and the economy? As a class, discuss whether these issues are still important today and how they affect you as a person in the United States.

Death of a Salesman: A Changing World & Workplace

Willy Loman rails, "I am not a dime a dozen!" Unfortunately, in a world that is constantly changing people can become unimportant and even irrelevant.

Although Willy devoted his life and best efforts to being a salesman, in the end he is unemployed, cast off by all his former business contacts and forced to borrow money from his neighbor, Charley. Willy has become old, old fashioned and, therefore, not useful or important in the workplace.

Today, people who cannot keep pace with technological changes can have difficulty keeping or finding jobs. People become unemployed as machines or computer programs are created to do their work or replace them. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's boss, Howard, plays with a recording machine while Willy begs for a job. In this scene, Howard is paying more attention to the machine than the man in front of him.

What, in your lifetime, have you seen become old fashioned and outdated? What jobs do you think will no longer exist in the near future? What does it mean when people become unimportant?

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

Arrive at least 30 minutes early.

Visit the restroom before the show starts.

Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers, and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.

Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.

Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!

Do not talk, whisper, sing, or hum.

Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.

Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.

Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

Enjoy the show!



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Edited by Rebecca Campana
Illustrations by Sterling Hundley

Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

Additional Resources

Books

The Crucible by Arthur Miller
On Politics and the Art of Acting by Arthur Miller

Film

On the Waterfront
Death of a Salesman
Charlie Rose with Arthur Miller
In Search of History – Spies Among Us

Web

American Masters: Arthur Miller
www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters

Arthur Miller Society
www.ibiblio.org/miller

Immigration: The Living Mosaic
library.thinkquest.org/20619