

SHORT ANSWER STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS - *Death of a Salesman*

Act One

1. Who is Willy Loman?
2. Identify Linda.
3. What happened to Willy after he got a little above Yonkers?
4. What is Linda's reaction to Willy's complaints about himself?
5. What reason does Willy give that he can't work in New York?
6. Identify Biff and Happy.
7. In the first scene with Linda, Willy contradicted himself twice. About what did he contradict himself?
8. What seems to be the problem between Biff and Willy?
9. Why doesn't Happy go west with Biff?
10. What does Biff want from Bill Oliver?
11. Why did Biff stop working for Bill Oliver?
12. Happy says, "I don't know what to do about him [Willy], it's getting embarrassing." To what is he referring, and what does the fact that Happy thinks this way tell you about his character?
13. Why does Willy talk so much about the car?
14. Where did Biff get the football? What does Willy say about that?
15. What does Willy admit to Linda about his business? What is her reaction?
16. Who is The Woman?
17. What does Willy mean, "I'll make it up to you, Linda, I'll --"? What does Linda think he means?
18. What does Willy want young Bernard to do for Biff?
19. What does Willy tell Happy about Ben when Happy asks how Ben "did it"?
20. Who is Ben?
21. Who is Charley?
22. Charley says, "To hell with it. When a deposit bottle is broken, you don't get your nickel back." What does he mean?
23. Charley and Willy are playing cards. Why does Charley leave?
24. What did Willy's father do for a living? How is that different from what Willy does?
25. Why does Charley tell Willy "the jails are full of fearless characters"?
26. Linda says, "Attention, attention must be paid to such a person." Explain.
27. Linda tells the boys that Willy won't be all right. When the boys ask why he won't, what is her reply?
28. What advice does Willy give Biff on the evening before he goes to see Bill Oliver? How does Willy contradict himself again?
29. How much time passes in the first act? How much time are we given information about?

ANSWER KEY SHORT ANSWER STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS - *Death of a Salesman*

Act One

1. Who is Willy Loman?

Willy is a salesman who, after thirty-four years with the company, has been taken off salary and is experiencing some personal and financial difficulties.

2. Identify Linda.

Linda is Willy's wife.

3. What happened to Willy after he got a little above Yonkers?

He forgot he was driving and ran off of the road. His daydreams took the place of his reality for a short time, and he nearly had an accident.

4. What is Linda's reaction to Willy's complaints about himself?

Linda makes excuses for him.

5. What reason does Willy give that he can't work in New York?

He is the New England man. He is vital to New England.

6. Identify Biff and Happy.

Biff and Happy are the Lomans' boys. Biff is the older of the two and is very unsettled. Happy has largely been ignored as the two were growing up, and, as his name suggests, is happy-go-lucky without being very responsible.

7. In the first scene with Linda, Willy contradicted himself twice. About what did he contradict himself?

First, Willy calls Biff lazy, but later he describes him as hard-working. Willy also contradicts himself about the windshield of the car.

8. What seems to be the problem between Biff and Willy?

They apparently never got along when Biff lived at home. Also, Biff is unsettled and hasn't made anything of himself yet, and this distresses Willy.

9. Why doesn't Happy go west with Biff?

He wants to "show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade."

10. What does Biff want from Bill Oliver?

Biff wants money to buy a ranch.

11. Why did Biff stop working for Bill Oliver?

He suspected Oliver knew he had stolen some basketballs.

12. Happy says, "I don't know what to do about him [Willy], it's getting embarrassing." To what is he referring, and what does the fact that Happy thinks this way tell you about his character?
He is referring to Willy's mental lapses into a dream world, his forgetfulness. Happy doesn't express particular concern for Willy; rather, he is concerned about being embarrassed in public with Willy.
13. Why does Willy talk so much about the car?
Willy has had a bad experience in his car today, and the old car is a happy experience from the past. Being a traveling salesman, Willy's car would be very important to him. It is almost symbolic of his way of life -- now his deteriorating way of life.
14. Where did Biff get the football? What does Willy say about that?
Biff had stolen it from school. Willy said that the coach would probably congratulate him for his industriousness.
15. What does Willy admit to Linda about his business? What is her reaction?
He tells her that business isn't so good, that people don't seem to like him. Linda makes excuses for him.
16. Who is The Woman?
The Woman is someone Willy apparently had a not-very-meaningful affair with while he was away on business at some time.
17. What does Willy mean, "I'll make it up to you, Linda, I'll --"? What does Linda think he means?
Willy means that he'll make up for his infidelity. Linda thinks he is still talking about his business and will try to make more money for them.
18. What does Willy want young Bernard to do for Biff?
Willy wants Bernard to give Biff answers for a test.
19. What does Willy tell Happy about Ben when Happy asks how Ben "did it"?
He said, ". . . The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he's rich. The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress!"
20. Who is Ben?
Ben is Willy's brother who apparently became very successful at a young age.
21. Who is Charley?
Charley is a long-time friend of Willy (although Willy doesn't really think of Charley as a friend until near the end of the play).

22. Charley says, "To hell with it. When a deposit bottle is broken, you don't get your nickel back." What does he mean?
One may invest a lot of time and money into a child, but if the child doesn't turn out well, you won't get any satisfaction or rewards for your time spent. But, there's no use worrying about it; you just pick up and go on with your own life, and let it go.
23. Charley and Willy are playing cards. Why does Charley leave?
Willy is, besides being rude to him, not making any sense since he is talking to imaginary Ben at the same time he is talking to real Charley.
24. What did Willy's father do for a living? How is that different from what Willy does?
Willy's father made flutes and traveled from town to town selling them. Willy doesn't have the pride of craftsmanship that Mr. Loman had; Willy sells someone else's product and just plays a personality game to try to get sales.
25. Why does Charley tell Willy "the jails are full of fearless characters"?
Willy had just sent his boys across the road to a new construction site to steal more building supplies. Willy is proud of their fearlessness, but Charley sees a more practical side to it, that what the boys are doing is wrong.
26. Linda says, "Attention, attention must be paid to such a person." Explain.
However misguided Willy is, he is still a person trying to muddle through life as well as he can, and he deserves our attention, our interest and caring, to try to help him make it through as much as we can.
27. Linda tells the boys that Willy won't be all right. When the boys ask why he won't, what is her reply?
She tells them that Willy is trying to kill himself.
28. What advice does Willy give Biff on the evening before he goes to see Bill Oliver? How does Willy contradict himself again?
Wear a business suit, talk as little as possible, don't make jokes, walk in seriously, ask for fifteen thousand dollars, don't say, "Gee," walk in with a big laugh and tell a couple of stories to lighten things up, and that personality wins the day. The contradictions are that Biff is not supposed to talk much, but he is supposed to start out with a couple of stories. He is to be serious and not joke, yet he is supposed to "lighten things up."
29. How much time passes in the first act? How much time are we given information about?
Only a day passes in Act I, but we are given information about the family from the time the children were small.