

Short Answer Study Guide Questions - *Death of a Salesman* - Page Two

Act Two

1. Where did Biff go early that morning?
2. What did Willy resolve to talk about with Howard?
3. What is the result of Willy's conversation with Howard?
4. "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away -- a man isn't a piece of fruit!" Explain why Willy said that.
5. "This is no time for false pride, Willy. . . . You've got two great boys, haven't you?" What is sadly ironic about this statement?
6. Why didn't Willy go with Ben years ago when Ben offered him a job?
7. Ben says, "What are you building? Lay your hands on it. Where is it?" What is the point of this line?
8. Where does Willy go after his conversation with Howard?
9. What does Willy ask Bernard?
10. What was Bernard's reply?
11. Why can't Willy work for Charley?
12. Biff says, ". . . I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been." What does he mean?
13. What was the result of Biff's meeting with Bill Oliver?
14. What does Happy want Biff to tell Willy?
15. Willy says, ". . . the woods are burning, boys. Can't you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around." What does that mean?
16. What does Willy do while Biff is trying to explain the facts of his meeting with Bill Oliver?
17. What did Biff take from Bill Oliver?
18. Identify Miss Forsythe and Letta.
19. Where does Willy go?
20. What is Biff's opinion of his father now, when he tells it to Miss Forsythe?
21. Why can't Biff help Willy?
22. Happy denies that Willy is his father. Why?
23. What happened in Boston? What do we finally find out is the problem, the secret between Willy and Biff?
24. Why did Biff go to Boston in the first place?
25. Where does Willy go after he realizes that the boys have left him at the restaurant?
26. Why does Linda knock the flowers to the floor?
27. Willy says, "A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something." What does he mean?

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28. Why does Willy decide to kill himself?
29. What does Biff want to tell Willy before he is ready to go?
30. Biff says, "Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?" What is the significance of this line?
31. What is Willy's response to Biff's whole scene when Biff ends up crying?
32. Ben says, "The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy." Explain.
33. What does Willy do?
34. Why is the car an appropriate device?
35. Biff says, "He had all the wrong dreams. All, all wrong." Explain.
36. Based on the events of the play and our knowledge of the characters, what will probably become of Biff and Happy?
37. Linda says, "We're free and clear." What is the double meaning here?

Act Two

1. Where did Biff go early that morning?
Biff went to see Mr. Oliver.
2. What did Willy resolve to talk about with Howard?
He would talk to Howard about the New York job.
3. What is the result of Willy's conversation with Howard?
Willy is essentially fired.
4. "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away -- a man isn't a piece of fruit!" Explain why Willy said that.
Willy had spent the best years of his life working for the company, and now in his old age, they are letting him go since there is no more use for him.
5. "This is no time for false pride, Willy. . . . You've got two great boys, haven't you?" What is sadly ironic about this statement?
It is true; this is no time for false pride; however, Willy has had such false pride all through his life that he has made the boys out to be more than they are. Now when he really does need the boys, the reality of their worthlessness crushes Willy's idealized version, and Willy is in a catch-22, no win situation.
6. Why didn't Willy go with Ben years ago when Ben offered him a job?
He had inflated his own business worth to Linda, so that when the opportunity came to go with Ben, Linda didn't see the need since Willy was on such a great career path.
7. Ben says. "What are you building? Lay your hands on it. Where is it?" What is the point of this line?
In fact, Willy can't put his hands on anything worthwhile he has made in his life. He is always in debt, he is a failure at business, and his boys appear to be just like him.
8. Where does Willy go after his conversation with Howard?
He goes to see Charley for money to cover his life insurance premium payment.
9. What does Willy ask Bernard?
He wants to know if Bernard understands what went wrong with Biff, why Biff did not do anything with his life after the age of 17.
10. What was Bernard's reply?
Biff was ready to go to summer school to make up the math class, but when he returned from Boston, he gave up. Bernard figured out that something must have happened in Boston.

11. Why can't Willy work for Charley?
Charley stands for the things Willy does not believe in; if Willy would work for Charley, he would admit that his whole life had been wrong.
12. Biff says, ". . . I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been." What does he mean?
Biff finally realized that he was raised on a false philosophy and that most of the things that happened were glossed over and made far better than they were. The glossy versions of things were repeated so often that even the participants had believed they were true. Taking away all of the gloss, Biff realized that he was a clerk and a thief.
13. What was the result of Biff's meeting with Bill Oliver?
Basically, he got brushed aside. He would not ever get the money, and he would have no more meetings with Bill Oliver.
14. What does Happy want Biff to tell Willy?
He wants Biff to tell Willy that there will be another meeting with Bill Oliver. Happy wants Biff to paint a glossy picture for Willy instead of telling him the truth.
15. Willy says, ". . . the woods are burning, boys. Can't you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around." What does that mean?
Willy's world is falling apart. He has lost his job and has no resources. He is getting trapped by the years of lies he has lived.
16. What does Willy do while Biff is trying to explain the facts of his meeting with Bill Oliver?
Willy daydreams about the time Biff flunked math.
17. What did Biff take from Bill Oliver?
Biff took Bill Oliver's fountain pen.
18. Identify Miss Forsythe and Letta.
They are women who come into the restaurant. Happy is more interested in getting a date with them than in the welfare of his own father.
19. Where does Willy go?
Willy goes to the restroom to compose himself.
20. What is Biff's opinion of his father now, when he tells it to Miss Forsythe?
He calls his father a "fine, troubled prince."
21. Why can't Biff help Willy?
He can't help Willy because they don't communicate well. They both just get frustrated and yell at each other.

22. Happy denies that Willy is his father. Why?
Happy is embarrassed by Willy, and he does not want the responsibility of caring for Willy. After all, Happy never has had much attention from Willy, either. Everything Willy does is for Biff.
23. What happened in Boston? What do we finally find out is the problem, the secret between Willy and Biff?
When he was 17, Biff went to Boston to talk to his father. When he got there, he walked in on his father and the woman with whom he had an affair.
24. Why did Biff go to Boston in the first place?
He went to get his father to talk to the teachers at school to try to get his grade changed. He thought his father's personality could help him not have to go to summer school.
25. Where does Willy go after he realizes that the boys have left him at the restaurant?
He goes and buys some carrot seeds and goes home to plant them in his garden.
26. Why does Linda knock the flowers to the floor?
She is furious because the boys left Willy at the restaurant.
27. Willy says, "A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something." What does he mean?
Willy can't see any worth in his life. He feels like he ought to have contributed something to the world, to have something to leave his mark on the world.
28. Why does Willy decide to kill himself?
By killing himself so that it looks like an accident, Willy can leave Biff a lot of insurance money. By leaving the money, he has left something in the world. Also, Willy probably thinks that Biff will make something of himself if he has the money, thereby Willy has left a successful person behind as well.
29. What does Biff want to tell Willy before he is ready to go?
He wants to tell Willy that he (Biff) is nothing, that he accepts that now, and that he has no hard feelings towards Willy.
30. Biff says, "Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?" What is the significance of this line?
Biff realizes that Willy's philosophy is false and that no good will come of it. This line foreshadows Willy's death, and it brings together the dream/illusion motif with the "woods are burning" motif.
31. What is Willy's response to Biff's whole scene when Biff ends up crying?
He says, "Isn't that -- isn't that remarkable? Biff -- he likes me!"

32. Ben says, "The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy." Explain.
The jungle is death. The diamonds represent the insurance money.
33. What does Willy do?
He speeds away in his car and has a fatal car accident.
34. Why is the car an appropriate device?
The car could symbolize his life as a traveling salesman, and his philosophy for success in life in general. It is appropriate that the car, as such a symbol, would be the means to his end.
35. Biff says, "He had all the wrong dreams. All, all wrong." Explain.
Biff realized that Willy's philosophy was wrong, and he realized that most of Willy's life was made up of illusions.
36. Based on the events of the play and our knowledge of the characters, what will probably become of Biff and Happy?
Biff will probably become a productive citizen in a realistic world. Happy will probably follow more in Willy's footsteps.
37. Linda says, "We're free and clear." What is the double meaning here?
It is ironic that just at the time when Willy dies, the mortgage is paid on their home. Willy would have owned something tangible even if he hadn't used the insurance policy. Willy and Linda would have been more financially free. Also, now that Willy is dead, he is free of the conflicts presented by his philosophy; although he is literally boxed in, he is free of worldly concerns. Biff is free of Willy's influence (and ironically, probably would have been even if Willy hadn't died).