

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?

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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?

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.

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).