

Milwaukee Repertory Theater Presents

April 12 - May 8, 2011

Quadracci Powerhouse

By Arthur Miller

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

This study guide is researched and designed by the Education Department at Milwaukee Repertory Theater and is intended to prepare you for your visit.

It contains information that will deepen your understanding and appreciation of the production. We've also included questions and activities for you to explore before and after our performance of

DEATH OF A SALESMAN.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Synopsis	2
Who's Who	5
Vocabulary	5
About the Author	6
First Rehearsal Notes	8
The American Dream	10
Miller's Inspiration for <i>Salesman</i>	12
An Interview With Lee E. Ernst, Actor	14
Visiting The Rep	16

Weekday Matinees

April 19, 10:30 am **April 27, 1:30 pm**
(Student Matinee only) **May 4, 12:00 pm**
April 20, 1:30 pm (Rep Immersion Day)

If you would like to schedule a classroom workshop, or if we can help in any other way, please contact

Jenny Kostreva at 414-290-5370 or
jkostreva@milwaukeeerep.com

Rebecca Witt at 414-290-5393 or
rwitt@milwaukeeerep.com

Study Guide Created By

Rebecca Witt, Education Coordinator

With Contributions From

Cindy Moran, Public Relations Director
and Goodman Theatre

Edited By

Jenny Kostreva, Education Director
Tamara Hauck, Director of Corporate
and Foundation Relations



NOTE: *Death of a Salesman* contains brief adult language.

SYNOPSIS

**Spoiler Alert: This synopsis contains crucial plot points.*

All Costume Renderings were drawn by Rachel Healy, Costume Designer.

Death of a Salesman is a memory play: it takes place in the present and in the past. The action begins in Brooklyn at the home of Willy Loman, an aging salesman who has just returned from a road trip. Willy is having difficulty remembering events and distinguishing the difference between the present and the past. Seeing Willy's exhaustion, Linda, his wife, suggests that he request a job in New York rather than travel each week to Boston.

Biff and Happy, their sons, are awoken by Linda and Willy conversing. The scene shifts to them and they discuss their lives and whether or not they have been successful. Happy brags that he has had many women. Biff wonders why Willy is so hard on him. Happy tells Biff that many times when Willy talks to himself he is usually talking to Biff. Biff admits that he isn't sure what he wants from life, but believes that something is out there for him. He brings up the idea of going to see his old boss, Bill Oliver, and asking him for a loan in order to buy a ranch out West. Happy and Biff overhear Willy talking to himself. The boys decide to go to bed and the lights shift to Willy in the kitchen.

As Willy makes a sandwich, he speaks with Biff in the past and we go back to a time when Biff is getting ready for a football game. Willy tells Biff and Happy about his trips as Bernard, their neighbor's son, comes in. Bernard is a meek and mild young boy with his mind constantly on school. Bernard tells Willy that Biff is failing math and will not graduate unless his scores improve. Unfortunately, Willy dismisses this important news

because Biff is well-liked and Bernard is not. After Bernard leaves, Willy and Linda discuss how much Willy made from sales. They realize that it's not quite enough to pay the bills, but know that they will get by somehow. Linda continues to talk, but Willy's memories begin to blend together and The Woman enters. We see a brief encounter between The Woman and Willy. We hear snippets of Linda, Bernard and

The Woman laughing until Willy is brought back to the present when Happy comes down the stairs.

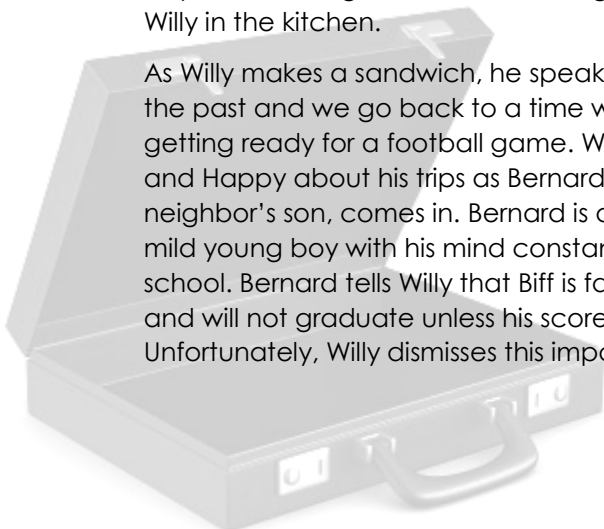
As Happy checks in on Willy, Charley, their neighbor comes over to check on Willy. Charley sends Happy back to bed and Charley suggests that he and Willy play a game of cards. While playing cards, Uncle Ben appears to Willy and he relives an old conversation with Ben while simultaneously talking with Charley. Willy becomes confused by the two different discussions and accuses Charley of cheating. Charley leaves and Willy continues to speak with Ben. We go into a flashback when Willy introduces Ben to Linda, Biff and Happy and they talk about Ben's enterprise in Africa. Willy, jealous of his brother, tries to show off by sending Biff and Happy to a construction site to

steal materials to rebuild the deck right in front of Ben. Willy asks him to stay for a few days, but Ben leaves to catch a train.

We come back to the present as Linda interrupts Willy's dream. Willy asks Linda about his diamond watch-fob and she tells him that he pawned it many years before to put Biff through a radio correspondence course. Willy decides to go take a walk and leaves the kitchen. Biff and Happy come down the stairs and ask Linda what is going on. Linda tells them not to worry too much, but also say that it would be good for Willy if they both settled down. Linda tells them



**Costume
Rendering for
Willy Loman.**



that Willy is on straight commission and has been borrowing money from Charley in order to pay the bills. She also tells them that Willy is suicidal and has been keeping a rubber hose attached to the water heater. Biff is appalled by this, but also realizes that he may not have been the best son.

Willy overhears his wife and sons talking and comes back to the kitchen. Biff states that people have been laughing at Willy for years and Willy tells Biff to go back West. Happy tries to calm the situation and tells Willy that Biff has a plan to open his own business and to visit his old boss. Willy is overjoyed by this initiative and tells Biff how to act during the meeting. They all begin believing that things are starting to look up until Biff yells at Willy for treating Linda poorly. Willy and Linda head to bed to discuss their hopes for Biff's future. Meanwhile, we see Biff remove the rubber hose that Willy has hidden.

We begin Act II the next morning with Willy preparing to visit his boss, Howard. Willy realizes that he is getting old and he wants to get a job selling in New York. Linda tells Willy that Happy and Biff would like him to meet them for dinner at Frank's Chophouse at six o'clock. We see Willy leave and then enter Howard's office. Howard shows Willy a wire recorder, a new technology that records sound, and plays various things for him, including his daughter whistling and his son reciting the capitals of states. Willy confronts Howard about traveling and says that he is not able to do to it anymore. Howard says that he has no job in New York for Willy. Willy persists and reminds Howard that he named him and that he was a very successful salesman when he worked for Howard's father. Howard says that things must move forward and fires Willy.

As Willy tries to comprehend what has



**Costume
Rendering for
Linda Loman.**

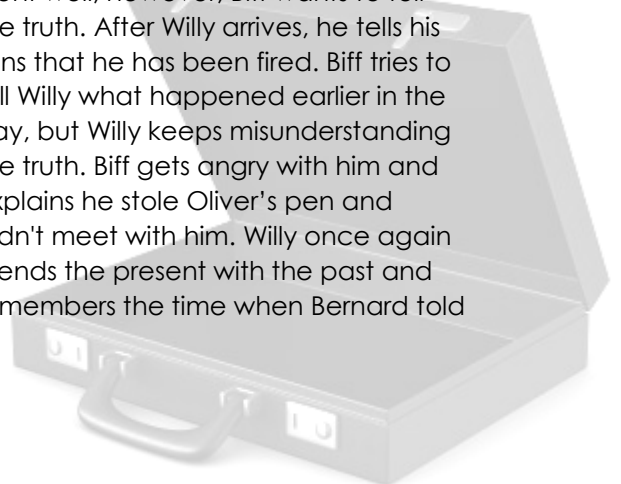
happened, Ben comes to him in another memory. Ben offers Willy a job in Alaska. Willy wants to do this; however, Linda enters and feels that it isn't the right thing to do. Willy, believing that Biff will be successful enough on his own to support the Lomans, turns down Ben. We transition to another memory of the Lomans getting ready for Biff's last football game. While packing up, Charley comes over to see what all the hustle and bustle is about, even though he knows they're getting ready for the big game.

The memory fades into reality as Willy arrives at Charley's office. Bernard is there visiting Charley before he leaves for Washington, D.C. While waiting, Willy and Bernard discuss why Biff has problems committing to a job. Bernard tells Willy that Biff changed right after high school when he visited Willy in Boston. Bernard questions Willy about what happened in Boston and Willy becomes defensive. After Bernard leaves, Willy speaks with Charley; he has come back to ask for more money to pay the bills. Willy tells Charley that Howard fired him and Charley offers Willy a job. Willy again refuses and leaves.



**Costume
Rendering for
Biff Loman.**

We then travel to Frank's Chophouse where Happy is waiting for Willy and Biff. While there, he speaks with Stanley, a waiter, and flirts with a young woman. Biff joins Happy and tells him that Oliver did not remember him and that he stole a pen from the office. Before Willy arrives, Happy tries to persuade Biff to tell Willy that things went well; however, Biff wants to tell the truth. After Willy arrives, he tells his sons that he has been fired. Biff tries to tell Willy what happened earlier in the day, but Willy keeps misunderstanding the truth. Biff gets angry with him and explains he stole Oliver's pen and didn't meet with him. Willy once again blends the present with the past and remembers the time when Bernard told



Linda that Biff had failed math and would not graduate. Willy remembers when Biff came to Boston and as Willy comes to the present again, he leaves the table and goes to the bathroom. Biff and Happy argue about whose fault it is that Willy is having these problems and Biff storms out. Happy casually walks out with two young women.

In the bathroom, Willy relives Biff's surprise visit. After failing math, Biff went to Boston to tell Willy that he would not graduate from high school unless they could convince his teacher to pass him. During this Willy attempts to hide The Woman in the bathroom, but she comes out while Biff is in the room. Biff leaves immediately and calls Willy a fake. Willy comes back to the present and Stanley tells him that his sons have left and will meet him at home. Willy asks Stanley where he can buy seeds to plant a garden and leaves.

Biff and Happy get home later that night and Linda questions them about where they were. Happy tries to explain that they met two girls, but she yells at them for leaving Willy at the restaurant. Biff comes to his breaking point and decides to confront Willy. Linda tells him that Willy is planting a garden and Biff fully realizes that Willy has lost his mind. While working on the garden, Willy imagines Ben again.



**Costume
Rendering for
Happy Loman.**



**Costume
Rendering for Ben.**

During this memory, Willy does not remember a conversation with Ben, but makes up a new conversation instead. They discuss his plan to commit suicide, and Ben warns Willy that the insurance company might refuse to pay a settlement if he does this, and Biff might never forgive him. Biff comes outside and tells Willy that he is leaving home for good. Biff and Willy argue and Biff confronts Willy with the rubber hose, saying he will not pity him if he commits suicide. Biff believes that the Lomans have never been truthful with one another or themselves and that they are just ordinary people who can be replaced. Finally, Biff breaks down crying and tells Willy that he will leave in the morning. At that moment, Willy realizes that Biff always loved him. As Linda tries to get Willy to bed, Ben reappears and reminds him of the insurance policy that would be left behind if he dies. With this Willy gets in the car, drives away and crashes the car. We are taken a few days into the future where we see the Lomans, Charley and Bernard together at Willy's grave. Linda comments that there weren't a lot of people at the funeral, but Charley reminds them all that Willy was a great man. We are left with Linda telling Willy that the house is finally paid off and that they are finally free.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY: There are many flashbacks woven into the play. How do you think we'll travel between the past and present? How do you think that the staging or lighting will change for the flashbacks? Write down or draw out your ideas and share them with your classmates. Be sure to justify your artistic choices.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: Do you think that the transitions between present and past were effective? How were you able to tell what was in the present versus what was in the past? Discuss your ideas with your classmates.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: The Lomans have a dynamic family with many ups and downs. How does your family compare with the Lomans? What events of their lives resonate with your life and family? Do you consider the Lomans an average American family? Discuss your thoughts with your classmates.

WHO'S WHO

Willy Loman - An insecure traveling salesman. Willy believes in the American Dream. His mental health is unraveling and often his past blends with the present.

Linda Loman - Willy's loyal and loving wife. She has kept the family together through everything and her strength and determination support Willy until his downfall.

Biff Loman - Willy's 34 year old son. Biff was a high school football star. Willy holds high expectations for Biff which he is unable to meet. He is still searching for his place in life.

Happy Loman - Willy's 32 year old son. Happy has lived in Biff's shadow all of his life but compensates for his lack of self-esteem by having multiple relationships. He works as an assistant at a department store.

Ben - Willy's wealthy older brother who recently died. Willy speaks to Ben frequently in daydreams. Willy considers Ben a symbol of success that he wants for himself and his sons.

Charley - Willy's neighbor. Charley owns a successful business. Willy is jealous of Charley's success, but takes money from Charley to pay his bills. Willy admits that Charley is his only friend.

Bernard - Bernard is Charley's son and a successful lawyer. Bernard's success is difficult for Willy to accept because his own sons' lives are not like Bernard's.

The Woman - Willy's mistress when Happy and Biff were in high school. The Woman gives Willy attention and admiration which boosts his ego, but leads to a falling out between him and Biff.

Howard Wagner - Willy's boss and son of the original owner of the company. Willy named Howard at his birth, but Howard treats Willy with disregard and eventually fires him.

Stanley - A waiter at Frank's Chop House.

Miss Forsythe and Letta - Two young women whom Happy and Biff meet at the restaurant.

Jenny - Charley's secretary.

VOCABULARY

Pompous: having the attitude of people who speak and behave in a very formal and serious way because they believe that they are better, smarter or more important than other people

Anemic: not strong or impressive; weak

Remiss: not showing enough care and attention

Watch-fob: a short chain attached to a pocket watch

Philandering: having sexual relations with many women

Valise: an old fashioned small suitcase

Undercurrent: a hidden feeling or tendency that is usually different from the one that is easy to see or understand

Crestfallen: very sad and disappointed

Spiting: deliberately annoying, upsetting or hurting someone

Saccharine: a type of sweetener

Red Grange: a famous football player for the Chicago Bears

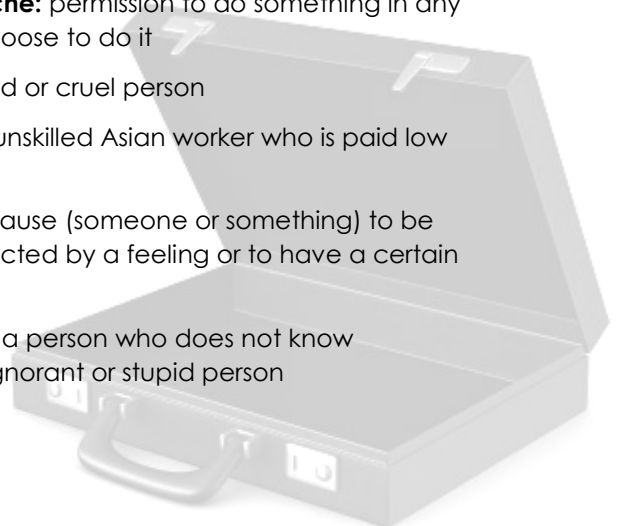
Carte blanche: permission to do something in any way you choose to do it

Louse: a bad or cruel person

Coolie: an unskilled Asian worker who is paid low wages

Imbue: to cause (someone or something) to be deeply affected by a feeling or to have a certain quality

Ignoramus: a person who does not know much; an ignorant or stupid person



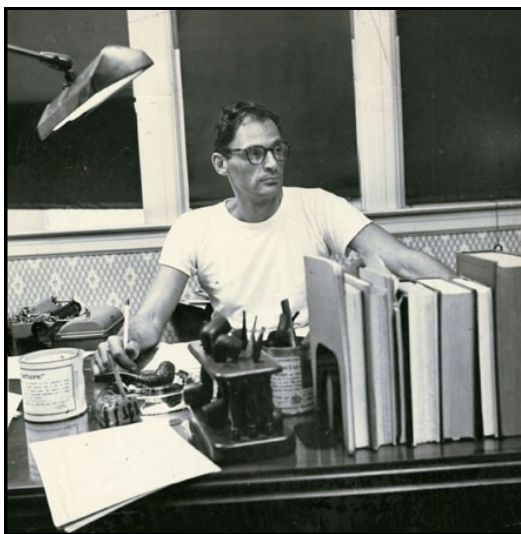
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arthur Miller was a prominent figure in American literature and cinema for over 61 years. Born October 17, 1915, Miller is considered one of the greatest American playwrights of all time. He was raised in Harlem, New York City until 1929 and then moved to Brooklyn with his family.

Shortly after graduating from high school in 1932, Miller attended the University of Michigan and worked several small jobs in order to pay for tuition. He first majored in journalism and became a reporter and night editor for *The Michigan Daily*, the student paper. During this time he also wrote his first work, *No Villain*, for which he won the Avery Hopwood Award.

After receiving the award, Miller switched his major to English in order to further study ancient Greek dramas as well as the works of Henrik Ibsen. While studying English, Miller wrote *Honors at Dawn* which also received the Avery Hopwood Award.

After graduating in 1938, Miller joined the Federal Theater Project, a New Deal agency established to provide jobs in theater, despite being offered a job as a scriptwriter for 20th Century Fox. He felt it important to support the working man during the re-establishment of the American economy. With the Red Scare and Communism becoming more threatening, Congress shut down the project and Miller began working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard while continuing to write radio plays. Two years later, he married Mary Slattery, the daughter of an insurance salesman and his college sweetheart.



The next several years were difficult for Miller. In 1944, he wrote *The Man Who Had All the Luck* which won the Theater Guild's National Award, but only ran for six performances. He also published his first novel *Focus* and adapted George Abbott and John C. Holm's *Three Men on a Horse* for the radio. Both were

opened to little acclaim. Toward the end of the 1940s things started looking up for Miller. In 1947, *All My Sons* was produced at the Coronet Theater and ran for 328 performances. It was directed by Elia Kazan, with whom Miller would continue his professional and personal relationship, and it won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award as well as two Tony Awards. Despite its

success, many believed it was unpatriotic.

In 1948, Miller built a small studio in Roxbury, Connecticut. This became his getaway, as well as his future home, and he wrote many pieces here including *Death of a Salesman* which premiered in 1949 at the Morosco Theater in New York City. It was also directed by Kazan and was a huge success, winning a Tony for Best Play, a New York Drama Critics' Award and a Pulitzer Prize. It ran for 742 performances.

Soon after, Kazan was brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and, in 1952, named eight people from the Group Theater who, in the 1930s, and along with himself, had been members of the American Communist Party. After Miller spoke with Kazan about his testimony, he ended the friendship fearing he may also be brought before the committee. Miller then went to

Salem, Massachusetts to research the witch trials of 1692 and wrote *The Crucible*, a parable play in which he compared the situation with HUAC to the witch hunts in Salem. *The Crucible* opened at the Beck Theater on Broadway in 1953, but was considered unsuccessful at the time. However, today it is one of Miller's most frequently produced plays.

In 1956, Miller and Mary Slattery divorced and not even a month later, he married Marilyn Monroe with whom he'd had a brief affair several years prior. HUAC saw this and took advantage of the publicity and subpoenaed Miller to appear before the committee. Before appearing, Miller asked the committee to not ask him to name names and the chairman agreed. At the hearing, Miller gave a detailed account of his political activities during the 1930s and was then asked to reveal names. Miller refused to do so and he was found in contempt of Congress. He was fined \$500, sentenced to 30 days in jail, blacklisted and his US passport was revoked. However, less than a year later his conviction in 1957 was overturned by the court of appeals which found that Miller was misled by the chairman of HUAC. After this, Miller began working on *The Misfits*, a film starring Monroe and Clark Gable. Shortly after the premier, Monroe and Miller divorced and a year later Miller married his final wife, photographer Inge Morath.

Seven years later, *After the Fall* was produced. This play reflected Miller's own experiences during his marriage to Monroe and reunited him with Kazan. The show opened at the Anta Theater in Washington Square Park. In 1965, Miller was elected International PEN's (an organization dedicated to promoting literature in society) president, the organization's first

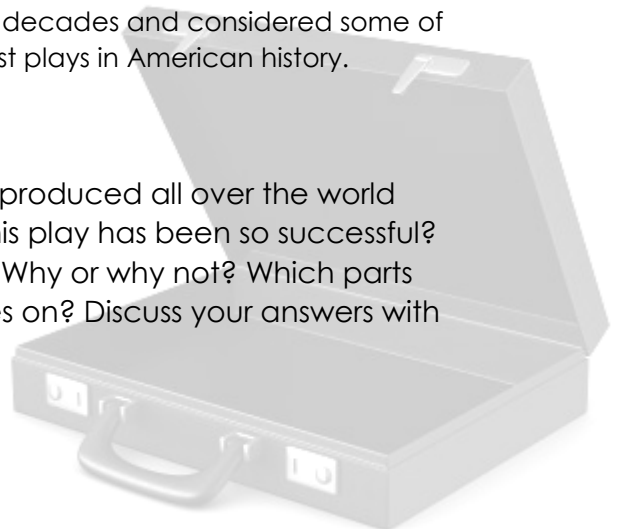
American president. He held this position for four years and is often credited as the one who changed PEN from a mere literary group to, what he called, "the conscience of the world writing community."

During the 1970s, Miller experimented a lot with theater, producing many one act plays including *Fame* and *The Reason Why*. He also traveled with his wife quite often and in 1983 went to China to direct *Death of a Salesman* at the People's Art Theatre in Beijing. The play was very successful and in 1984 Miller wrote *Salesman in Beijing*, a book about his experiences in China. Three years later, Miller published his memoirs and autobiography *Timebends: A Life*.

In the 1990s, Miller produced three new plays and in 1997 a film of *The Crucible* opened. Miller spent much of 1996 working on the screenplay for the film. In 1999, *Death of a Salesman* was revived on Broadway and was once again a huge success, winning a Tony for best revival. Three years later Miller was awarded Spain's Principe de Asturias Prize for Literature as the undisputed master of modern drama.

In 2004, Miller opened his final play, *Finishing the Picture*, at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. A year later he died at his home in Roxbury. In his lifetime Miller won seven Tonys, an Olivier Award, an Obie Award, the John F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award, the National Book Award and the Jerusalem Award. Despite the hard economic and societal times Miller wrote in, he continued to write and produce works that have been studied for decades and considered some of the greatest plays in American history.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY: *Death of a Salesman* has been produced all over the world since it was first produced in 1949. Why do you think this play has been so successful? Do you feel that everything in the play is still relevant? Why or why not? Which parts affected you the most? Why do you think the play lives on? Discuss your answers with your classmates.



FIRST REHEARSAL NOTES

When rehearsals for a show begin, The Rep always hosts a first rehearsal event. At the first rehearsal the director discusses the play and what he or she hopes to accomplish. Mark Clements, Artistic Director for The Rep, is directing the final show in The Rep's 2010/2011 Season and here is what he has to say about *Death of a Salesman*...

"This is the third time I've been associated with this play. It is like one of those plays that is a theatrical version of having *Dark Side of the Moon* or *Abbey Road* in your record collection. It's a play that I think inspired me to want to work in the theater more than any other play. I argue that it is, if not the best, one of the best plays to be written in the last 50 years, maybe more. I think it's a play that has significant

importance and it has had more influence than probably any other play. Not only has he [Arthur Miller] written an epic play and this one, to me, like it is to many people, speaks volumes. I do believe

that when we are still here in a thousand years time, I can still see this play being performed along with the great canons of Shakespeare. I feel enormously privileged to be working on it again. And there is a very good chance that I'll get it right this time. I feel very confident about that because we have such a formidable cast with us... It's a dream cast; it's perfect so I'm really excited about working with everyone.

Not only do we have a formidable cast, but we have a great design team too. We have Todd

Rosenthal as the scenic designer. He's done this beautiful set. One of the things that we wanted to do was make it so it was fluid. I'm not a great fan of the turn table, if you will, and we wanted to come up with something that will allow us to move. These two tracks move backwards and forwards and for the final part of the requiem this moves back and will entirely leave the stage

and leave a hole in the ground for the grave. It is a tremendous design. When I went to see Todd in his studio in Chicago to look at the white model, and it hasn't changed much since then, I walked in and it really took my breath away. I could see how beautifully it's going to flow. We also have a terrific lighting designer, Jeff Nellis, who did *Cabaret* and *Bombshells*. He's

someone I've really enjoyed working with. I think he'll just paint beautiful pictures on the stage. We have Rachel Healy, our marvelous costume designer, and she's come up with some fantastic renderings.

There's a wonderful book called *Salesman in Beijing* which Arthur Miller wrote in the late 1980s about his journey with the play. He was asked to go and direct a production of *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing, which was an interesting challenge because Chinese actors were not exposed really to western culture. It's witty and it's an important theatrical document whether you're interested in *Death of a Salesman* or not. His notes are so concise and clear about



The set model for *Death of a Salesman*. At left, the part of the set that will track back and forth across the stage.



working on this play. Often times he would, and I as well, hear that this is a depressing play, but I feel like it offers wonderful and uplifting experiences with beautiful words and beautiful acting. I hope that we will give the audience something very uplifting. I think it's a play that is incredibly hopeful. There are hopeful people at the end. One thing that links all the characters in the play is that they all love Willy in some way, shape or form. Willy is a dreamer, he's an optimist, he's a simple soul, a misguided soul. It

touches into the heart of humanity and it's hard to like him sometimes, as annoying as he is and indicative as he is, but everyone can feel some sense of empathy with him and relate our own lives to him as well. I think it's going to be a fascinating journey as we pull this text apart and see how it's vital to us right now and how to make it interesting and important to a new generation... I am looking forward to working on the piece and I hope we do it justice and fulfill the promise that we can deliver this show."

And here's what Arthur Miller has to say about *Death of a Salesman*...

“With [the play] *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams had printed a license to speak at full throat, and it helped strengthen me as I turned to Willy Loman...I had known all along that this play could not be encompassed by conventional realism, and for one integral reason: in Willy, the past was as alive as what was happening at the moment, sometimes even crashing in to completely overwhelm his mind. I wanted precisely the same fluidity in the form [of *Death of a Salesman*].

By April 1947 I felt I could find such a form, but it would have to be done in a single setting, in a night or a day. I did not know why. I stopped making my notes in our Grace Court house in Brooklyn Heights and drove up alone one morning to the country house we had bought the previous year.

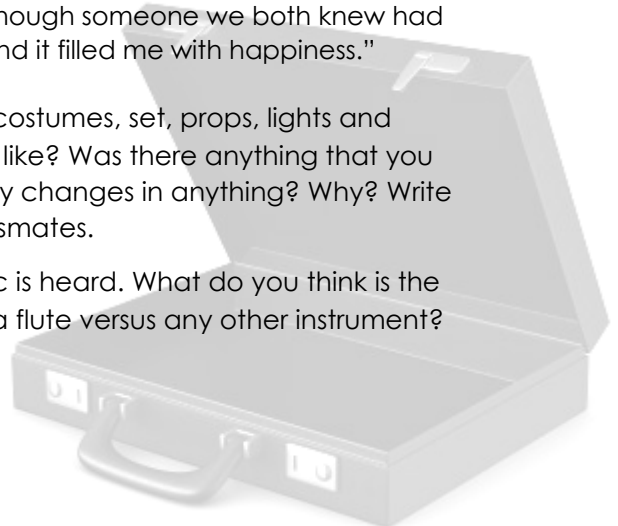
I started writing one morning...[and] wrote all day until dark, and then I had dinner and went back and wrote until some hour in the darkness between midnight and four. I had skipped a few areas that I knew would give me no trouble in the writing and gone for the parts that had to

be muscled into position. By the next morning I had done the first half, the first act of two. When I lay down to sleep I realized I had been weeping - my eyes still burned and my throat was sore from talking it all out and shouting and laughing. I would be stiff when I woke, aching as if I had played four hours of football or tennis and now had to face the start of another game. It would take some six more weeks to complete Act II...

I did not move far from the phone for two days after sending the script to [director Elia Kazan]. By the end of the second silent day, I would have accepted his calling to tell me that it was a scrambled egg, an impenetrable, unstageable piece of wreckage. And his tone when he finally did call was alarmingly sombre. "*I've read your play.*" He sounded at a loss as to how to give me the bad news. "*My God, it's so sad.*" "*It's supposed to be.*" "*I just put it down. I don't know what to say. My father...!*" He broke off, the first of a great many men - and women - who would tell me that Willy was their father. I still thought he was letting me down easy. "*It's a great play, Artie. I want to do it in the fall or winter. I'll start thinking about casting.*" He was talking as though someone we both knew had just died, and it filled me with happiness."

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: Discuss the technical aspects (costumes, set, props, lights and sound) of the show with your class. What did you especially like? Was there anything that you didn't like or didn't make sense? Would you have made any changes in anything? Why? Write down some of your thoughts and share them with your classmates.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: Throughout the play, flute music is heard. What do you think is the significance of this? Why do you think Miller chose to have a flute versus any other instrument? Discuss your ideas with your classmates.



THE AMERICAN DREAM

Picture this: an immaculate two story house with shutters, a beautifully groomed lawn and garden, a white picket fence, a husband and wife outside sipping lemonade with their two children playing with their dog on a bright and sunny day. Seem unrealistic? For most, probably. Yet, for many this is the quintessential picture of the American Dream and over time it has changed for everyone. One of the main themes of *Death of a Salesman* is the quest for the American Dream. In recent years, the term has often been interpreted to mean making it big or being extremely successful. However, does achieving the American Dream truly mean being rich? Or is there more to it?

The American Dream began with the birth of America; forever set in stone in the Declaration of Independence: "...all men are created equal... with certain inalienable rights" including "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." This dream is at the very core of our identity as Americans. Life in America offers personal liberties and opportunities unlike any other nation in the world. The belief that hard work leads to new opportunities, new economic and social freedoms and a better way of life resonates across all American citizens, no matter age, status or race.

The American Dream has manifested in different ways throughout America's history.

We have seen freedom from strict government rule, freedom from slavery and more. Yet it seems that few people are achieving the American Dream. Despite everything that has been conquered, the people of America are not quite accomplishing as much as they would like. In 2010, the unemployment rate in

America was 9.9% and currently the national debt is approximately \$14 trillion. The average household income in 2009 was around \$58,000. Approximately 77% of Americans graduate from high school, but only 28% of Americans have graduated from college. Racial inequalities still exist in our country and others are discriminated against for their religion.

As America continues to change over

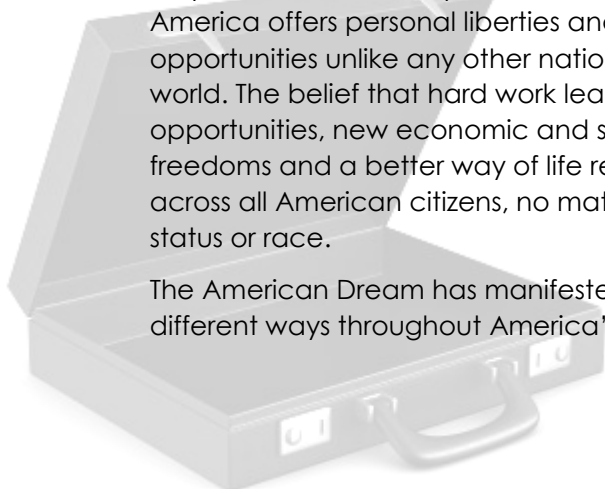
the decades, so does the definition of the American Dream. Here are what some people believe:

"I look forward confidently to the day when all who work for a living will be one with no thought to their separateness as Negroes, Jews, Italians or any other distinctions. This will be the day when we bring into full realization the 'American Dream' – a dream yet unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed."

– Martin Luther King, Jr.



As some immigrants enter America, the Statue of Liberty is the first thing they see. For many, she is the iconic symbol of America and of the American Dream.



"The essence of the 'American Dream' is the understanding that we are here on this earth and in this land for a higher purpose: to discover—and develop—to the fullest of our God-given potential."

– Steve Forbes, President of Forbes, Inc.

"What the American people hope—what they deserve—is for all us, Democrats and Republicans, to work through our differences; to overcome the numbing weight of our politics. For while the people who sent us here have different backgrounds, different stories, different beliefs, the anxieties they face are the same. The aspirations they hold are shared: a job that pays the bills; a chance to get ahead; most of all, the ability to give their children a better life."

– President Barak Obama

So, how many people are indeed achieving the American Dream? According to the National League of Cities not many believe they are. After polling Americans in 2004 this is what the NLC discovered:

- Fifty-three percent of African-Americans said they are not living the American Dream; 36% of Hispanics and 32% of Caucasians have the same view.

- Almost twice as many single parents (52%) as married parents (27%) report they are not living the American Dream.

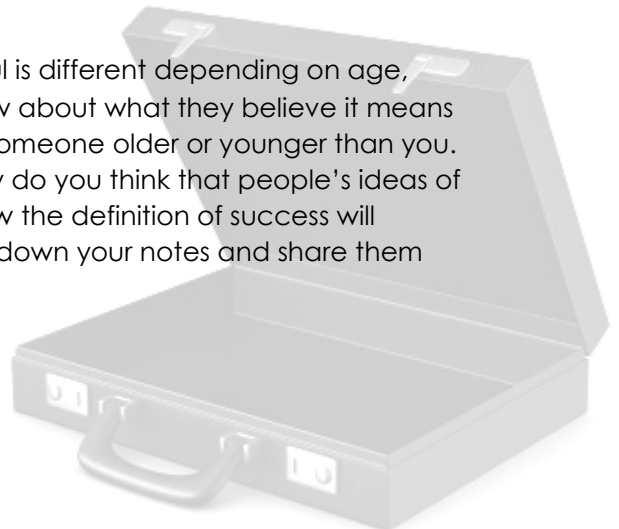
- More than half of renters (52%) and 28% of home owners find they are not living the American Dream.

If so many people feel that they are not living the American Dream, what is hindering them from achieving it? One of the main reasons is financial stability. America's economy is still recovering from a recession with many people struggling to find employment and maintain steady income. Others believe that the educational system is not adequate and does not teach students to be independent and hard working citizens. The majority of Americans say the government is to blame. Over 70% of Americans feel that the government is not doing enough to help people achieve the American Dream. Without cooperation between the different branches of government and political parties continually in conflict, citizens feel that their chances of being successful are diminished.

So what is the American Dream for 2011? What are Americans striving for? Is it money? Success? Fame? Equality? Or just a sense of accomplishment? How will you know when you have achieved the American Dream?

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY: What do you think it means to be successful? How will you know when you've made it? Answer these questions and then think about the obstacles you might need to overcome? How do you think you'll handle these issues? Share your thoughts with your classmates.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY: Everyone's idea of being successful is different depending on age, race, culture and more. Find three other people to interview about what they believe it means to be successful. You could speak with a parent, a sibling, someone older or younger than you. Share what you have discovered with your classmates. Why do you think that people's ideas of success are different? Do you think that in 50 years from now the definition of success will change? What do you think it might be at that time? Write down your notes and share them with your classmates.



MILLER'S INSPIRATIONS FOR SALESMAN

Article courtesy of Goodman Theatre

Death of a Salesman began as a short story that Arthur Miller wrote at the age of 17 while he was working for his father's company. The story told of an aging salesman who cannot sell anything, who is tormented by the company's buyers and who borrows change for the subway from the story's young narrator.

After finishing the story, Miller wrote a postscript on the manuscript saying that the real salesman on whom the story is based had thrown himself under a subway train. Many years later, on the eve of the play's Broadway opening, Miller's mother found the story abandoned in a drawer.

In his autobiography *Timebends*, Miller related that he found inspiration for that short story and the play in his own life. Miller based Willy Loman largely on his own uncle, Manny Newman. In fact, Miller stated that the writing of the play began in the winter of 1947 after a chance meeting he had with his uncle outside the Colonial Theatre in Boston, where his *All My Sons* was having its pre-Broadway preview. Miller described that meeting in this way:

"I could see his grim hotel room behind him, the long trip up from New York in his little car, the hopeless hope of the day's business. Without so much as acknowledging my greeting he said, 'Buddy is doing very well.'"

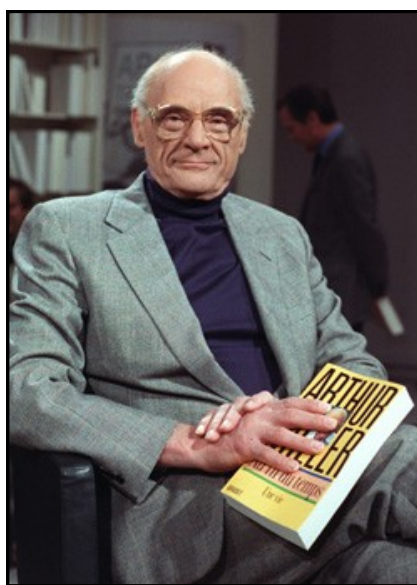
Miller described Newman as a man who was "a competitor at all times, in all things, and at every moment." Miller said that his uncle saw "my brother and I running neck and neck with his two sons [Buddy and Abby] in some horse race [for success] that never stopped in his mind." He also said that the Newman

household was one in which you "dared not lose hope, and I would later think of it as a perfection of America for that reason...It was a house trembling with resolution and shouts of victories that had not yet taken place but surely would tomorrow." The Loman home was built on the foundation of this household.

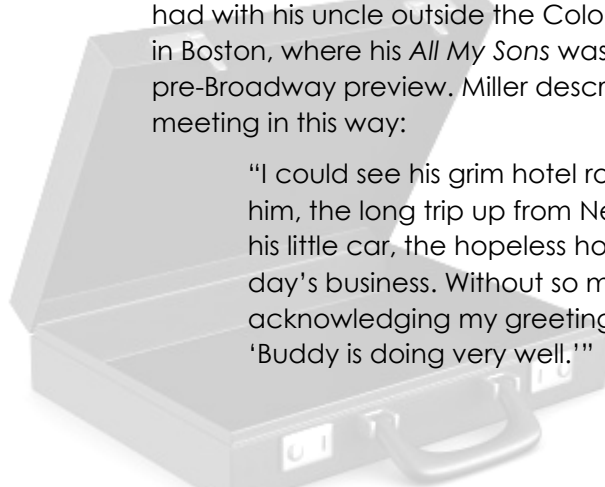
Manny's son Buddy, like Biff in Miller's play, was a sports hero, and like Happy Loman, popular with the girls. And like Biff, Buddy never made it to college because he failed to study in high school. In addition, Miller's relationship with his cousins was similar to

Bernard's relationship with Biff and Happy in *Salesman*. As Miller stated:

"As fanatic as I was about sports, my ability was not to be compared to [Manny's] sons. Since I was gangling and unhandsome, I lacked their promise. When I stopped by I always had to expect some kind of insinuation of my entire life's probable failure, even before I was sixteen."



Miller in 1988 discussing his autobiography in Paris



In *Timebends* Miller described Manny's wife as the one who "bore the cross for them all" supporting her husband, "keeping up her calm enthusiastic smile lest he feel he was not being appreciated." One can easily see this woman honored in the character of Linda Loman, Willy's loyal but sometimes bewildered wife, who is no less a victim than the husband she supports in his struggle for meaning and forgiveness.

Miller met many other salesmen through his Uncle, and they influenced his perception of all salesmen. One man in particular struck Miller because of his sense of personal dignity. As Miller stated in *Timebends*, this man

"like any travelling man...had, to my mind, a kind of intrepid valor that withstood the inevitable putdowns, the scoreless attempts to sell. In a sense [all salesmen are] like actors whose product is first of all themselves, forever imagining triumphs in a world that either ignores them or denies their presence altogether. But just often

enough to keep them going, one of them makes it and swings to the moon on a thread of dreams unwinding out of himself."

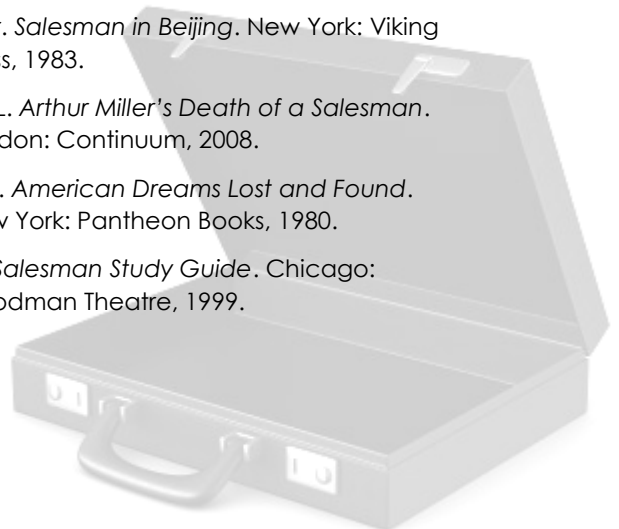
Surely, Willy Loman is such an actor, getting by "on a smile and a shoe shine," staging his life in an attempt to understand its plot.

Because he was so deeply involved in the production of *All My Sons*, Miller did not give the meeting with his uncle more than a passing thought, but its memory hung in his mind. In fact, Miller described the event as the spark that brought him back to an idea for a play about a salesman that he had had 10 years previously—the idea that he had written as a short story. In April 1948 he drove to his Connecticut farm and began to write the play that would become *Death of a Salesman*. As he sat down before his typewriter in his 10 x 12-foot studio, he remembered "all I had was the first two lines and a death." From those humble beginnings, one of American theatre's more famous plays took shape.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY: If you were to write a story inspired by someone, what would it be about? Who would you pick as your inspiration? Pick someone you know or you've met briefly and come up with a short story inspired by them. Why did you pick this person? Share your story and thoughts with your classmates.

WORKS CITED AND FURTHER READING

- Miller, Arthur. *Timebends: A Life*. New York, Penguin: 1995.
- Longley, Robert. *Two Thirds Feel American Dream Harder to Achieve*. 1 October 2004. About.com. 7 March 2011. <<http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/moneymatters/a/baddream.htm>>.
- Kamp, David. *Rethinking the American Dream*. April 2009. Vanity Fair. 10 March 2011. <<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2009/04/american-dream200904>>.
- Arthur Miller Society. 11 March 2011. 12 March 2011. <<http://www.ibiblio.org/miller/>>.
- Bigsby, Christopher. *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Miller, Arthur. *Salesman in Beijing*. New York: Viking Press, 1983.
- Hays, Peter L. *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Terkel, Studs. *American Dreams Lost and Found*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Death of a Salesman Study Guide*. Chicago: Goodman Theatre, 1999.



AN INTERVIEW WITH LEE E. ERNST, ACTOR

Interview courtesy of Cindy Moran, PR Director.

Lee E. Ernst, long-time Rep Resident Acting Company Member and inaugural Lunt-Fontanne Fellow, will be tackling the iconic role of Willy Loman under the direction of Artistic Director Mark Clements.

Rep audiences are familiar with Lee's brilliance and versatility as an actor as well as his amazing ability to transform himself for his wide-ranging theatrical roles. Whatever role he tackles, the same care and attention to detail is present as well as a desire to explore the emotional truth of the character he is embodying. Lee spared a few moments from his busy *Death of a Salesman* rehearsal schedule to answer a few questions from Cindy Moran, The Rep's PR Director.

Cindy Moran: *Death of a Salesman* is considered a classic of American theater, but do you find a contemporary relevance in the story? What might that be?

Lee E. Ernst: There are many, relative, thematic threads in *Death of a Salesman*, but the most resilient might be The American Dream itself, the promise that a person can be what he or she wants in this world. Through the Loman family, we are reminded that nothing is cut and dried, and that fulfilling a dream requires a great deal more than merely desiring a particular outcome in life.

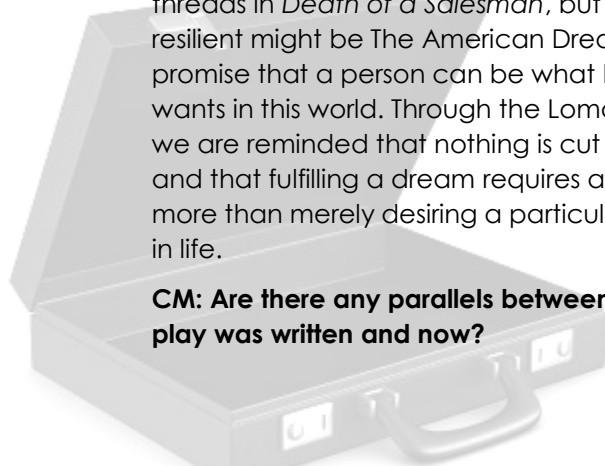
CM: Are there any parallels between when the play was written and now?

LE: This play was written post-WWII. It also flashes back to the year just prior to the beginning of the Great Recession. *Salesman* is filled with parallels, of every stamp. Miller was a genius at reducing his material to universal concepts and exquisitely familiar-seeming people and events. I

don't see how a person can sit in the audience for *Death of a Salesman* and not think, "I know these people. I know what they are talking about. I feel what they are experiencing. I am inextricably bound to this story."

CM: Were you a fan of the playwright Arthur Miller before you were cast? Are there any other Arthur Miller plays that have you performed in?

LE: When I was a sophomore in high school, I played Happy in a scene from *Salesman* for my Honors English Class. My best friend played Biff. We were instantly hooked on Miller, and when we performed the scene, so were our peers. Then, while at the North Carolina School of the Arts, I did the scene again, this time as Biff. I've explored a bit of what it's like to be the children, and that is already enriching the experience as I attempt to bring Willy to life. I also was lucky enough to be in *All My Sons* here at The Rep, with an amazing cast, including Deborah Staples, Jon Daly, Jenny McKnight, and featuring stunning performances by Jim Baker and Rose Pickering as the Kellers. I also had the good fortune to be in Joe Hanreddy's production of *The Crucible* a few years back, with another outstanding cast, Rose and Jim Pickering, Jim Baker, Peter Silbert, Torrey Hanson,



Elizabeth Ledo, Lisa Joyce, John Kishline, Deborah Staples, Richard Halverson, to name a few . . . and Laura Gordon and I played John and Elizabeth Proctor. It was one of the most satisfying productions I had ever played in.

CM: When Mark Clements asked you to play Willy Loman, is this a role you've always wanted to tackle? Have you ever been in another production of *Salesman*?

LE: No, I have never been in a full production of *Salesman* before and I have never seen it on stage. I saw a couple of film versions years ago, but I will get to know this play by wrestling with it, speaking the lines, and feeling the force of its ideas nose to nose with the other actors. Willy Loman is a role that people have brought up to me as one they thought I should play, or should want to play, but I always thought I was too young for it and that it was something I would think about later in my career. As I began to research the role, however, I realized that it is a monster. Miller refers to it in the same breath as *Hamlet*, because of its sheer magnitude and the unrelenting nature of Willy's trajectory and struggle. I now liken it to *Lear*, who is supposed to be 80 years old, but no actor can play the role at 80 because of the incredible demands. That explains why Lee J. Cobb played the original in his thirties, Dustin Hoffman, in his late forties, and even Frederic March took it on a little early. I believe he was 53 at the time. I no longer worry about this being a premature assignment.

CM: You've had a wild crazy ride with roles this year at The Rep from *Cabaret's* Emcee, to Bob Cratchit, to Leon and Nick in *Speaking in Tongues*. How do you prepare for an iconic role like Willy Loman?

LE: Mentally I've been preparing by reading a lot of Miller's thoughts about the play. The most seminal for me at this point is *Salesman in Beijing*, Miller's account of a production he directed in China on the heels of The Cultural Revolution, during The Reagan Era. Physically, I'm trying to put on a few pounds, and stay out of the gym; I don't think Willy is the kind of guy who starts his day with push-ups, core work and a protein shake . . . although he does have a

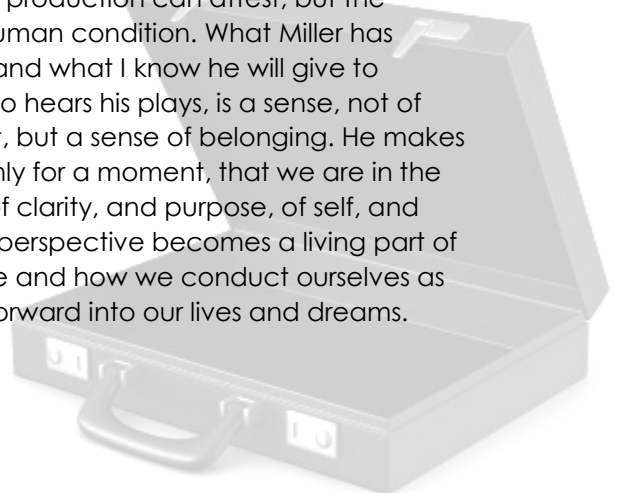
curious interest in nutrition and vitamins . . .

CM: Laura Gordon plays your wife Linda Loman. Have you played any married couples before? Does your working relationship as Resident Acting Company Members help some in the rehearsal process?

LE: I love working with Laura Gordon. She is a great treasure of The Rep. Yes, we've played so many married couples over the years that a check out person at the local grocery store once stopped me to congratulate me on a performance, then commented that it must be nice for me to get to work on stage with my wife, Laura Gordon! She and I have played opposite each other for about 20 years, and that experience goes a long distance when you have to convey familiarity, depth of understanding and genuine concern for a person onstage. It's so much easier when that person is your friend and you really do care about them, and that is true now of so many of the actors I am currently working with. We have formed strong bonds, as friends and colleagues, over many years, and the richness of our relationships in life become interwoven with the fabric of the play.

CM: What are you hoping audiences will take away from this play?

LE: We don't have to take. Miller gives. He truly does. Shakespeare and Miller have come up in the same sentence more than once thus far in our brief rehearsal process. Arthur Miller is not merely a genius and a great playwright, he is a deeply human, provocative, proud, compassionate, simple and complex presence in our world. He has a voice which expresses the human condition, and not only in America, as his Chinese production can attest, but the universal human condition. What Miller has given me, and what I know he will give to anyone who hears his plays, is a sense, not of entitlement, but a sense of belonging. He makes us feel, if only for a moment, that we are in the presence of clarity, and purpose, of self, and that gift of perspective becomes a living part of who we are and how we conduct ourselves as we move forward into our lives and dreams.



VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets, downtown. Our building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our Ticket Office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater and the Intercontinental Hotel. If you walk into the center of this area, you'll see a staircase on your left. You will take this staircase to the Quadracci Powerhouse lobby.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains, and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) at the coat check and enjoy them outside the theater during intermission. Most plays have one intermission that is about 20 minutes long. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the full "running time" of the play.

**For more information on our Education Programs and our productions,
please visit our website at www.milwaukeeerep.com**

Programs in the Education Department receive generous funding from:

The Einhorn Family Foundation	MPS Partnership for the Arts
GE Healthcare	MPS Partnership for the Humanities
Greater Milwaukee Association of Realtors	Northwestern Mutual Foundation
The Harley-Davidson Foundation	Park Bank
Helen Bader Foundation	The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation
Jane Bradley Pettit Foundation	Target
Johnson Controls Foundation	WE Energies

"You need three things in the theatre – the play, the actors and the audience – and each must give something." – Kenneth Haigh

Theater is described as a collaborative art form. The success of a production relies upon every member of the process: playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, actors and the audience. Plays require audiences to give a new life to performances through their careful attention and enthusiastic reactions. The audience has an active role to play and the actors rely on you to be respectful and attentive. Through your observation of sets, costumes, lighting and the work of the actors, you'll be better able to follow the story and enjoy its live presentation. You are important in the final performance and your participation is what makes this process worthwhile.

Milwaukee Repertory Theater Education Department

<http://www.milwaukeeerep.com/education/outreach.htm>

Jenny Kostreva, Education Director

jkostreva@milwaukeeerep.com or 414-290-5370

Rebecca Witt, Education Coordinator

rwitt@milwaukeeerep.com or 414-290-5393