**Essay Prompts for *Death of a Salesman***

**You may only write about the play, not the movie!**

1. Aristotle’s definition of a tragedy is “watching a great man fall.” Pardoning Aristotle’s sexist language for the moment, does Willy Loman’s story fit with this definition? Is Willy Loman a great man, and how does he fall? Was he a doomed tragic hero from the get-go, or could he have been saved, and if so, what would have to have happened differently?
2. What is Willy Loman’s fatal flaw; or, what are all his major faults and flaws? How do they contribute to his downfall?
3. Is Willy a good father, or not? Are Biff and Happy good sons, or good men, or not? Analyze the relationships between Willy, his father (who is talked about, though he never appears in the play), and Willy and his sons, as well as the way they all interact with and treat Linda and other women in the play.
4. How is Willy responsible for the people Biff and Happy have become? What has Willy been taught about life and ‘success,’ what effects do these lessons have on Biff and Happy? Consider the following characters’ ways of achieving success: Ben (Willy’s brother), Willy’s father, Willy’s idol Dave Singleman (Act II), Willy’s old boss Mr. Wagner, Howard Wagner, Linda, Bernard, and Uncle Charley. How did their ideas about success and life affect Willy (even if the only way they affected Willy was that he rejected those ideas) and then Biff and Happy? Consider also: the themes of stealing, ‘personal attractiveness’ and being well-liked, and the way that all the Loman men treat women.
5. Which character in the play is the most heroic, compassionate, sacrificing...? Who makes the most sacrifices; who tries the hardest to hold the family together? Who in the play is most in touch with reality?

**Again, remember, when writing any formal essay you must do the following things:**

**Brainstorm and write down examples from the text of anything that has anything to do with your chosen topic, choose a main argument (also known as your thesis), choose several supporting ideas (in topic sentence form), create an outline, find sections of the play to quote (with page numbers), write a rough draft, revise it for ideas and organization (does it flow well, logically, and make sense—do you have support for each and every claim that you make—that is, do you quote the play at least three times?) and finally edit for conventions as you word process.**

ra consideration, take on this challenge:

A Streetcar Named Desire - Essay Prompt

**You may only write about the play, not the movie!**

1) Take one symbol, or one unified group of symbols and explain how Tennessee Williams incorporates that symbol into the meaning of his play. Make sure to say exactly what your choice symbolizes in your thesis. Here are your choices: Light Color Clothes Sound effects The Bathroom/water Music The Chinese lantern The Streetcar Blanche Stella Stanley The “Quarter” Food and Drink Cigarettes Sweat

2) In many works of literature, past events can affect, positively or negatively, the present actions, attitudes, or values of a character. Write an essay showing how some character’s relationship with the past contributes to the meaning of Streetcar Named Desire as a whole.

3) One definition of madness is “mental delusion or eccentric behavior rising from it.” But Emily Dickinson wrote “Much madness is divinest sense – to a discerning eye-“ Explain how a character’s apparent madness or irrational behavior might be judged reasonable, and explain the significance of the madness to Streetcar Named Desire as a whole.

4) Scenes of weddings, funerals, parties and other social occasions often reveal the values of characters or of the society in which they live. Choose such a scene from Streetcar Named Desire and discuss the contributions of that scene to the meaning of the whole work.

5) In literature, a confidant (male) or a confidante (female), often a friend or relative of the hero or heroine, is sometimes present when the main character needs a sympathetic ear. According to Henry James, this character van be as much “… the reader’s friend as the protagonists. Choose such a character from Streetcar Named Desire and discuss the various ways this person functions in the work. ( What are Williams’ purposes in creating this character?)

.Compare and contrast the American Dream as held by Willy, Biff, and Happy Loman, an **Again, remember, when writing any formal essay you must do the following things:**

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