

TEACHER'S GUIDE DEATH OF A SALESMAN

To the Teacher

Why should we teach literature? Because it provides students with experiences of people, places, ideas, and language, that they can rarely, if ever, obtain in other ways. The full-length novel or play allows its readers to enter wholeheartedly into the life of another person, adult or adolescent, rich or poor, near or distant. Through a Huck Finn or a Holden Caulfield, students can explore their own youth; or they can experience the varieties of adult life, from the failed success of Jay Gatsby to the noble defeat of Winston Smith.

Novels offer insight into other worlds as well: imaginative recreations of the past, such as *A Tale of Two Cities*, or prophetic visions of the future, as in *Fahrenheit 451*. Books like *The Chocolate War* or *Of Mice and Men* reveal our own and other Americas, while *Hiroshima* and *The Old Man and the Sea* expose us to other cultures and other ways of living and dying.

Through fiction students can consider the special problems of youth, or the universal ones of humanity. They can stretch their abilities to follow the intricacies of a complex plot or a large cast of characters, and they can explore an idea — prejudice, love, war — in depth and from many different vantage points. Finally, the prolonged encounter with a single writer's style helps young people see how each great artist finds a distinctive voice to express a unique vision of the world, and perhaps helps them choose a voice or a vision for themselves.

Yet it is no easy task to teach the complete novel or play in a junior or senior high school English class. Heterogeneous grouping means that students approach a text with widely varying abilities to decipher its language or comprehend its meaning. Many must be taught how to survive the reading process before they can learn to enjoy the reading experience. And other demands — to develop basic skills, expand vocabulary, give attention to the student's own writing — contract the time needed to explore a long work fully. Torn by these varying requirements, teachers often abandon the novel or play as simply too great a task. **NOVEL IDEAS Packets aim to answer the teacher's multiple needs, and to prevent the frustrations often attendant upon teaching literature.**

Packet prepared by Beth G. Davis
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This **NOVEL IDEAS Packet** is designed to be used with the paperback edition of *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller (Penguin, 1987 ed.)

Each packet has been designed to help teacher and student study literature in an efficient, enjoyable, and productive way. This packet has two aims: to provide a series of individualized exercises that can be used with students at different ability levels, and to present materials that will allow the teacher to work with reading comprehension, literary analysis, vocabulary building, and written expression, through the literary work being discussed rather than in isolation from it.

Each packet contains two parts: 1) a Teacher's Guide, and 2) a set of twenty-five Spiritmaster Activity Sheets, providing exercises for students.

The Teacher's Guide gives suggestions for introducing the novel and for supplementing the text with additional reading, writing, oral, and artistic activities. It also describes a variety of techniques for using the Activity Sheets in teaching the book. Among the items included in each Teacher's Guide are: a rationale for teaching the particular text, a synopsis of the book, and historical and/or biographical materials on the author or the era in which the book takes place.

The Activity Sheets are indexed in three ways: by skill area (vocabulary, reading comprehension, literary analysis, and writing activities); by level of difficulty (from less demanding through average difficulty to more challenging); and by appropriate location in the teaching sequence (before, during, or after the reading of the novel). Teachers may therefore choose exactly the right exercise for the day, the objective, and the individual student or the specific group.

The teacher may decide to have students do the Activity Sheets as part of their classroom work, or as homework assignments. Some activities are designed for group discussion, many for individual study, and others for pairs or small groups (assigned randomly or by ability) to work on together. Thus teachers may concentrate on the particular needs of one or several pupils, while allowing others to work on their own, or giving them valuable experience in cooperative learning. Further, each student may focus on the particular area in which he or she has difficulty, instead of having to perform routine exercises in topics already mastered.

Of course, these packets are not designed to replace the teacher's own initiative, or to enforce a single method of teaching. Each teacher can select the materials that are right for his or her individual style of teaching, and for the class' particular needs. Teachers will naturally want to add to the packets from their own insights and concerns. The main responsibility for introducing new skills will still rest with the teacher, but the packet will allow students to develop and reinforce their skills by practice stemming directly from their current reading assignments. With such support, teachers will find their task less arduous, and students will find the encounter with literature more rewarding, and more useful in developing their own skills and abilities.

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