



Themes Across Time

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. **RL 3** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a drama. **RL 5** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact. **RL 7** Analyze multiple interpretations of a drama, evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

DID YOU KNOW?

Arthur Miller...

- was once rejected by the University of Michigan because of low grades.
- was once married to film star Marilyn Monroe.
- wrote *Death of a Salesman* in six weeks.

from *The Crucible*

Drama by Arthur Miller



Video link at
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VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML11-134A

Meet the Author

Arthur Miller 1915–2005

Arthur Miller once paid playwright Edward Albee a compliment, saying that his plays were “necessary.” Albee replied: “I will go one step further and say that Arthur’s plays are ‘essential.’” Miller’s plays explore family relationships, morality, and personal responsibility. Many critics consider him the greatest American dramatist of the 20th century.

A Born Playwright Miller was born in New York City in 1915 into an upper-middle-class family. However, the family’s comfortable life ended in the 1930s when Miller’s businessman father was hit hard by the Great Depression. Unable to afford college, Miller worked in a warehouse to earn tuition money. He eventually attended the University of Michigan.

While in college, Miller won several awards for his plays. These successes inspired him to pursue a career in the theater. His first Broadway hit, *All My Sons* (1947), was produced when Miller was still in his early 30s. However, it was his masterpiece *Death of a Salesman* that made Miller a star. The play won a Pulitzer Prize in 1949 and earned rave reviews from both critics and the public.

Dramatic Years Miller’s rise to fame occurred during a difficult period in

American history. In the 1940s and 1950s, a congressional committee was conducting hearings to identify suspected Communists in American society. Miller himself was called before the congressional committee and questioned about his activities with the American Communist Party. Although Miller admitted that he had attended a few meetings years earlier, he refused to implicate others. For his refusal, he was cited for contempt of Congress—a conviction that was later overturned.

The hearings provided the inspiration for his 1953 play *The Crucible*, set during the Salem, Massachusetts, witch trials of 1692. Miller wrote the play to warn against mass hysteria and to plead for freedom and tolerance.

The Curtain Closes In the 1970s, Miller’s career declined a bit. The plays he wrote did not earn the critical or popular success of his earlier work. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, he enjoyed a resurgence with revivals of *Death of a Salesman* on Broadway. He even directed a production of the play in Beijing.

To the end of his life, Miller continued to write. “It is what I do,” he said in an interview. “I am better at it than I ever was. And I will do it as long as I can.”

Author Online

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