

Lesson Guidance 4	
Grade	12
Unit	2
Selected Text(s)	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> , 11-19 & “How the world embraced consumerism”
Duration	Approx 2 Days

Plan with guidance from the [ELA Instructional Expectations Guide](#)

Learning Goal(s)

What should students understand about today's selected text?

Students will analyze the early characterization of the main characters, as well as the relationship dynamics between Willy, Linda, their environment, and their commodities in order to visualize these relationships and draw connections between history, the text, and their own experiences.

CCSS Alignment

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

End of lesson task *Formative assessment*

Ask students to collaborate to create mind maps situating Willy and Linda in relation to the commodities around them, using the historical background



	knowledge and spatial awareness they've developed in previous lessons to place them as figures in a specific socio-political setting.
Knowledge Check <i>What do students need to know in order to access the text?</i>	Background knowledge • The Great Depression & The American Dream • Key elements of drama • Key facts about Arthur Miller • The premise of the play (1940s New York, a middle class White family) • Understanding that capitalism is a an economic and political system in which industries are controlled by private individuals and companies rather than owned by the state or by the people • Understanding that capitalism involves consumer culture and the buying and selling of commodities Key Terms (<i>domain specific terms to analyze the text</i>) • structure: the way an author decides to organize and sequence their text • mood: the overall emotional atmosphere of a literary work • symbol: when an object, person, or idea in a text has an additional meaning beyond its literal one. • motif: an idea, symbol, image, or device that occurs multiple times throughout a text Vocabulary Words (<i>words found in the text</i>) • mercurial: subject to sudden or unpredictable changes of mood or mind • turbulent: characterized by conflict, disorder, or confusion; not controlled or calm. • trepidation: a feeling of fear or agitation about something that may happen • crestfallen: sad and disappointed • simonize: to polish (a car)

Core Instruction

Text-centered questions and ways students will engage with the text

Opening Activity:

Think/Pair/Share or Journal Prompt: In your opinion, what does it mean to consume? What products (commodities) do you buy? Do you sell anything?

Student Discourse:

Share out and discuss students' journal entries, using these discussion questions for small group, pair share, or whole class discussion:

1. Why do you think people are so attached to having "new" things?
2. Who benefits from this endless buying and selling?
3. (extension) Is a "democratization of desire" the same thing as actual democracy? (Higgs).

Content Knowledge:



Throughout the reading of the play, students will analyze its use of literary elements, including symbolism, theme, setting, indirect characterization, as well as key aspects of the text's structure: flashback and suspense, dramatic irony, and foreshadowing. Students will track these devices in a [Guided Reading Notebook](#) in order to facilitate the collecting and analysis of evidence for their final Literary Analysis Essays.

Preteach vocabulary words as needed using [an explicit vocabulary routine](#).

Shared Reading:

[Play this snippet of the score, composed by Alex North.](#)

Questions for discussion: How does the music make you feel? What mood does it evoke?

Define mood: the feeling or attitude that a text produces in its audience. Music can be "read" like a text.

As the music fades out (play it until "The Flute has faded away...." top of p. 13), begin to act out pages 11-19 out loud: Teachers might have students take turns volunteering to act as characters in the scenes or play sections of a film adaptation. This scene's characters are Willy and Linda. As students read, they will add entries to their Guided Reading Notebook, tracking literary devices to use in their literary analysis essays.

Reading Questions:

1. **p. 13.** Where do you see foreshadowing on this page? Will this end well for Willy? Consider the title of the book...
 - a. Foreshadowing: "I'm tired to the death" (13).
2. Discuss how the stage directions contribute to Linda's characterization during these opening pages. "Very carefully, delicately," "Helpfully," "resigned" (13). How would you read this scene differently without the stage directions?
3. **p. 16:** Jot down one word that describes how Willy relates to Linda and one word that jots down how Linda relates to Willy. Share out/compile into a student-facing list.
 - a. Remind students of their journal entries about buying and selling and highlight this exchange from p. 16:
Linda: Willy, dear, I got a new kind of American-type cheese today. It's whipped.
Willy: Why did you get American when I like Swiss?
4. **p. 17:** Define commodity: something that is bought and sold. How does Willy react to Linda's purchase of this new commodity? What does this reveal about Willy as a character? (Attachment to the good old days, fear of change, etc.)
5. Why might Willy be against apartment buildings (17)? What groups of people might live in the adjacent apartment buildings? Discuss Willy's whiteness and racist implications of this sentence: "Smell the stink from that apartment house" (17).
6. Discuss the representation of cars in this section as a key commodity of the time: What abstract ideas do you think cars might represent in US American culture?

Independent Reading and Analysis:

[ELD Tasks & Scaffolding Lesson 4, Act 1 DoaS](#)

[Ask students to work together to read and annotate the pair text, a historical article from the BBC.](#) This is a complex text, so they will benefit from working together to make sense of it.

Use the annotation strategies that best fit their students' needs and excerpt the text as they see fit. [Here is a possible excerpted version and strategy \(reader response\).](#)

If time is limited, consider simply sharing the last paragraph of the article.

Pair Text Reading Questions:



1. When in history did poor or working class people begin to have access to “new” products? What effect did this have?
2. How did labor activism free up more time for workers to become consumers?
3. What are two implications of the idea that under capitalism, needs can be manufactured as easily as commodities?
4. How did radio and TV increase consumer culture in the USA?
5. In your own words, paraphrase this sentence, “Though it is status that is being sold, it is endless material objects that are being consumed” (Higgs)? Then, discuss whether you agree or disagree with Higgs’ perspective. Where do you see the selling of status around you today?
6. What is “planned obsolescence”? Where do you see it today?
7. Do you have an “unquenchable thirst” for products? How does this endless searching affect Willy?

Formative Assessment:

Students will collaborate (in pairs or small groups) to create and present a [mind map](#) depicting Linda and Willy’s relationship amongst themselves as well as their relationship to their home and to **commodities**. Their mind maps must use both visuals and words to represent the relationships between the characters, and between the characters and their commodities.

Guiding questions: How do Willy and Linda treat each other? How do they relate to their home environment? How do they relate to their belongings (the car, cheese, glasses, shoes, even their sons)? What motifs and symbols have already appeared in the play that can be tracked in your Guided Notebook?

Optional Extension Activity:

Ask students to write a paragraph that responds to this prompt, using properly embedded and cited evidence from both *Death of a Salesman* and Kerryn Higgs’ article.

Writing Prompt: How does the consumer culture that Higgs describes in her article connect to pages 11-19 of *Death of a Salesman*? How might Willy’s “strange thoughts” be a representation of the dissatisfaction of capitalist life? Please cite at least one piece of evidence from the play and one from the article in your paragraph.

[ELD Tasks & Scaffolding Lesson 4, Act 1 DoaS](#)

Fluency, Comprehension and Writing Supports

Fluency	Fluency Protocols
Sentence Comprehension	Juicy Sentence protocol with sample sentence “The commodification of reality and the manufacture of demand have had serious implications for the construction of human beings in the present day, where, to quote philosopher Herbert Marcuse, “people recognise themselves in their commodities”” (Higgs).
Writing	Pattan Writing Scope and Sequence Quality of Writing:



II: Content:
C: Select content to achieve purpose
D: Write using domain specific vocabulary

Additional Supports

ELD Practices

English Language
Development ELA
Tasks and Scaffolding

ELD Tasks & Scaffolding Lesson 4, Act 1 DoaS

SpEd Practice

Practices to promote Tier 1 access

MTSS Practices

Practices to promote Tier 1 access

Enrichment Practices

Practices to promote Tier 1 access