Death of a Salesman: What to Expect

- *Death of a Salesman* is a classic American play by Arthur Miller. This tragedy was first produced on Broadway in 1949, where it won a Pulitzer, a Tony and a New York Drama Critics’ Circle Best Play Award.

- It is directed by Simon Stone, but the text is the original version by Arthur Miller.

- *Death of a Salesman* runs for approximately 2 and half hours including one interval of 20 minutes. The first act runs for approximately 1 hour and the second two for 1 hr & 10 minutes.

- There is a cast of eight actors, four of whom play only one character. The remaining four actors each play two or more characters each. Six of the actors are male and only two are female.

- The central character is Willy Loman, who is a travelling salesman, husband to Linda and father to Biff and Happy, his grown-up sons. Other characters include Ben (Willy's brother), Charley (Willy’s next door neighbour), his son Bernard (Biff’s childhood friend who grows up to be a lawyer), Howard (Willy’s boss), Stanley (a waiter) & various women who Willy, Biff & Happy interact with.

- Arthur Miller’s original playscript includes extended descriptions of the settings of each scene. In this production, these settings (representing various places including the Loman family home, the boys bedroom, a restaurant, a hotel room in Boston, the office of the head company that Willy is a salesman for) are all indicated through the use of just one set item – a 1996 Ford Falcon Sedan, and various prop items, that all come from out of the car. Staging involves multiple uses of this car to suggest these places.

- Actors don’t use American accents, they speak in their own tones. Costume and set design are not period.

- The play explores Willy Loman’s predicament, as he moves towards the end of his working life and wants to collect the rewards he believed he was working towards. He perpetually veers between disappointment and delusional hope in relation to his son Biff, who has never fulfilled his father’s dreams for his future.

- One unique aspect of this play is the way it incorporates flashbacks to happier times in the life of Willy and his family. Mostly these are established through performances – and by the contrasting emotional tone of these early scenes when Willy feels successful in his job and his sons are promising teenagers. Occasionally these flashbacks may be confusing to students, particularly those involving Willy Loman’s memories of his brother Ben, who ‘walked into the jungle and came out rich at the age of twenty-one.’ As the play progresses, and Willy becomes increasingly agitated and disturbed, he hears his brother urging him on to collect his life insurance by going through with his plans for suicide. The play develops a nightmarish quality that is intensified by the overlap of present and past, and we begin to wonder if the ‘past’ flashbacks are even real, or just what Willy’s disordered imagination has begun to produce.

- The play’s conclusion involves Willy Loman’s suicide, which in this production occurs on-stage, in the car. He attaches a hose to the car’s exhaust and tapes up one window. The car fills up with smoke as Willy slumps on the dashboard. In no way does the play itself or this production endorse his action, it is clearly seen to be a mistake, and the result of delusional thinking and the determination to be successful at all costs. Literature from organisation Beyond Blue with helpline numbers will be available in the foyer.

- The play includes no swearing.

- *Death of a Salesman* includes mild sexual references without graphic detail. Happy refers to the women that he sleeps with and one crucial aspect of the plot concerns Willy Loman’s infidelity and affair with a woman he sees while travelling for his job, and the impact of the discovery of this on Biff, his son.

- At one point, an actor appears in her underwear for a short while, it’s suggested that she and Willy Loman have been sexually involved but we see nothing more graphic than kissing and embracing.

- There is the onstage smoking of (herbal and non-toxic) cigarettes and a haze effect is used towards the end of the play but no strobe lighting.

- We will be posting all tickets out to the school address approximately one month prior to the season starting. Full payment for these bookings is required one week after invoicing as this performance takes place at an outside venue; phone our box office on 9699 3444 if you need to check your booking.

- Students need to be briefed about appropriate theatre etiquette before seeing the play. This includes turning mobile phones off for the whole performance and refraining from eating in the theatre.

- Please remind students not to whisper or comment as the performance is live and actors can see and hear them in the audience. Taking notes can be distracting for actors and should never happen during a performance. We encourage laughter and natural reactions to what is happening onstage.