

UNIT 7 The American Dream
Postwar Era 1945 to 1960

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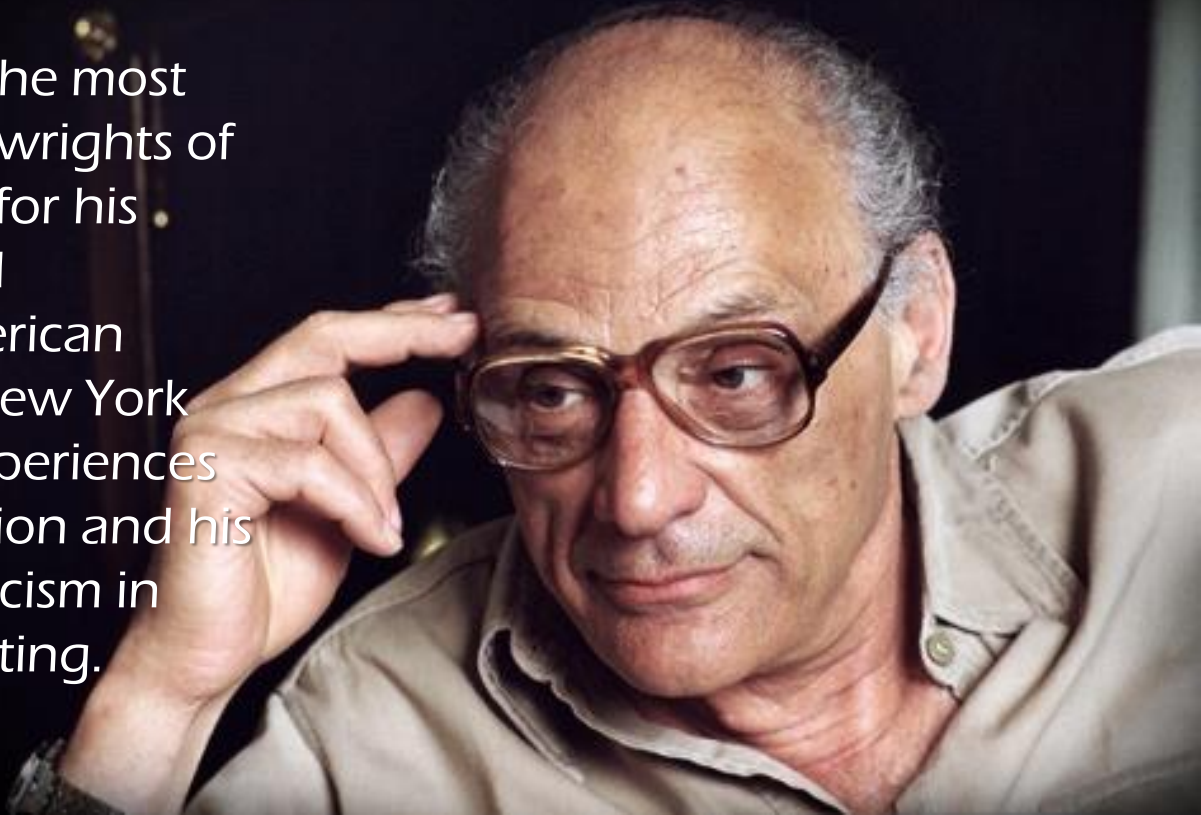
Author Focus:
ARTHUR
MILLER



with Jim Soto

AN AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

Arthur Miller was one of the most renowned American playwrights of the 20th century, known for his exposure of the flaws and contradictions of the American Dream. Born in 1915 in New York City, Miller's childhood experiences during the Great Depression and his exposure to the rise of fascism in Europe influenced his writing.

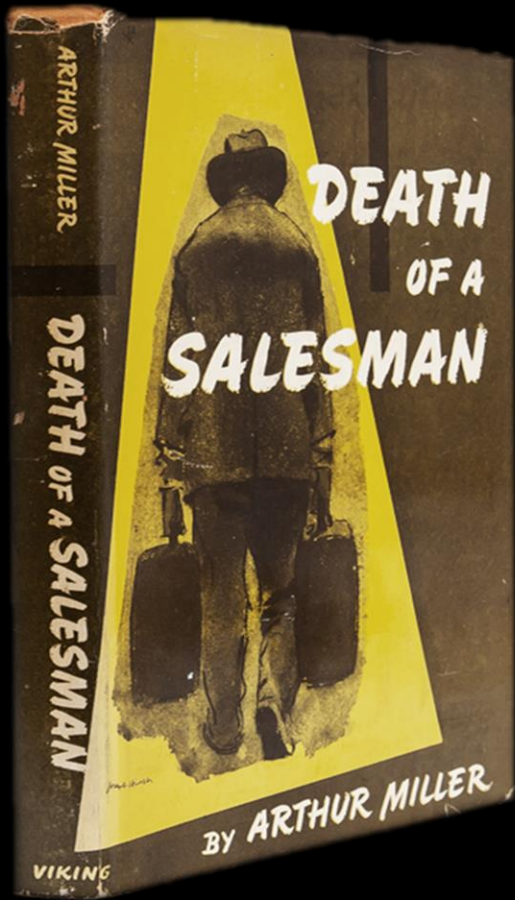


Miller grew up in a Jewish family that faced financial struggles during his childhood. His father's business failed during the Great Depression. Despite financial difficulties, his parents encouraged his intellectual development. Miller attended the University of Michigan, where he began writing and became involved in left-wing politics. His experiences with anti-Semitism would later influence his work, particularly in plays such as *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy*.





His works tackled themes of accusation, mistrust, betrayal, guilt, and morality, and became emblematic of post-war American drama.



Miller's most famous play, **Death of a Salesman** (1949), is a devastating critique of the American Dream and the promise of upward mobility. The play follows the life of a struggling salesman whose quest for success ultimately leads to his downfall. Miller's portrayal of the disillusionment with the American Dream resonated with audiences across the country and became a staple of American literature.

TAKING ON THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

Miller's other works also reflected his commitment to social justice and his belief in the power of art to effect change. **The Crucible** (1953), a play set during the Salem witch trials, was a critique of **McCarthyism** and the political witch hunts of the 1950s. **A View from the Bridge** (1955) examined the plight of Italian immigrants in New York City and the challenges of assimilation.





In addition to his plays, Miller was also an outspoken activist who advocated for civil rights, free speech, and workers' rights. He testified before the **House Un-American Activities Committee** in 1956, and his refusal to name names led to his conviction for contempt of Congress.

Miller used *The Crucible* to explore the fear and hysteria that pervaded American society during the Red Scare and the McCarthy era by utilizing the Salem Witch Trials as an allegory. Miller's opposition to the Vietnam War and his advocacy for nuclear disarmament also made him a prominent voice in the anti-war movement.



ARTHUR AND MARILYN



Miller met **Marilyn Monroe** in 1951, while both were married. After a brief affair, they kept in touch throughout Monroe's brief marriage to Joe DiMaggio and Miller's separation from his wife.



They married in 1956. Their tumultuous marriage lasted five years. The couple decided to split while working on the movie *The Misfits* together, based on a script by Miller.

Miller's impact on American society was profound, both through his writing and his activism. His plays continue to be performed around the world and studied across the country. His commitment to social justice and his belief in the power of art to effect change inspired a generation of artists and activists. Miller's legacy still shapes American culture and politics and reminds us of the need of speaking truth to power and fighting for justice and equality.



Despite his success and critical acclaim, Miller remained committed to his principles and refused to compromise his beliefs for the sake of popularity. He once said, "*The theater is so endlessly fascinating because it's so accidental. It's so much like life.*" Miller's works continue to inspire us to grapple with the complexities of life and society, and to confront the challenges and contradictions of the American Dream.



ASSESSMENT

After reading page 590 in your book, answer the questions below:

1. In what year was Arthur Miller born, and where did he grow up?
2. What was Miller's first successful play, and what themes did it explore?
3. What role did Miller play in the political and cultural movements of the 1950s and 60s?
4. What was Miller's relationship with Marilyn Monroe, and how did it influence his writing?
5. What was the significance of Miller's decision to refuse to name names during the McCarthy hearings?

6. What was the impact of Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* on American theater and culture?
7. How did Miller's personal life and relationships influence his writing?
8. How has Miller's legacy continued in contemporary theater and culture, and what influence has he had on other writers and artists?



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