

Candidate 2

Death of a Salesman

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for this Course Assessment component.

The candidate was awarded **20 marks** for this Critical Essay.

Question 3

Choose a play which explores an important issue or issues within society. Briefly explain the nature of the issue(s) and discuss how the dramatist's presentation of the issue(s) contributed to your appreciation of the play as a whole.

The candidate has selected the text 'Death of a Salesman' by Arthur Miller and has chosen to write in response to Question 3. This is an appropriate choice of text for this question. From the outset the candidate demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the text, while the essay's committed evaluative stance makes clear that the important issue explored within the text is 'the failure of the American Dream'.

In the skilfully developed second paragraph the candidate displays a perceptive awareness of Miller's use of stagecraft in his opening description of the stage set contrast between Willy's 'small fragile-seeming home' and the 'towering, angular shapes' of capitalist America. This contrast highlights, we are told, Willy's physical and mental entrapment which Miller has symbolised using German expressionist techniques. There is a fluency and depth of candidate knowledge about the devastating effects on Willy of his futile yet relentless pursuit of the American Dream. In paragraph 2, Miller's foreshadowing of Willy's death from his first entrance and the explanation of how his conflict with his son, Biff, has been caused by 'his faith in the Dream' are brought together in an insightful analysis of 'the nature of the issue' which is firmly set in the context of the Dream's failure in American society.

The candidate focuses on one essential means by which Miller presents Willy's deluded belief in the American Dream by discussing one of his 'imaginings'. The example used here is Willy's hallucination in which he has a conversation with his dead brother, Ben. To highlight Miller's effective juxtaposition of the two brothers, the candidate succinctly identifies Ben as the personification of the American Dream and considered by Willy to be 'success incarnate'. Willy's blind faith in Ben's route to financial success leaves the candidate in no doubt that the issue of the failure of the American Dream has entrapped Willy.

The candidate discusses Miller's creation of an initially optimistic frame of mind for Willy when he visits his boss, Howard. Yet again, this shows a judicious and perceptive selection from a thorough knowledge of the text. The candidate effectively sets Willy's plea for a better job 'built upon his dream' of other people's past affection for him against Howard's lack of respect and failure to value Willy's

years of service to his company. With Howard's firing of Willy – a clear indictment of the capitalist system – the candidate reinforces the importance of the key issue in that Willy's pursuit of the American Dream has now left him 'at rock bottom'.

In a smooth progression to the climactic scene between Willy and Biff, the candidate displays a thorough understanding of Willy's 'one shred of hope' in the potential business success of his son. The conflict between the increasing perceptiveness of Biff who recognises 'the lie my whole life has been' and the increasingly 'broken mind' of Willy is handled skilfully, with a blend of the two characters in the present and Willy being forced to relive his son's discovery of his affair in the past. The candidate makes apt reference to Willy's symbolic planting of seeds which 'he knows will not grow' before building to the 'open confrontation' between father and son. There is a fluently structured discussion of Willy's continued belief in the American Dream opposed to Biff's outright condemnation of 'that phony dream'.

In the final paragraph of the essay the candidate neatly sums up Miller's 'various perspectives on Willy's life and death and on the role of the small man with a dream in the oppressive United States'. The candidate confidently ends by acknowledging that Biff's view of his father's 'wrong dreams' accords with Miller's purpose in exploring the failure of the American Dream.

Throughout this essay the candidate has demonstrated thorough knowledge of the text and perceptively selected textual evidence to support a line of argument, which is fluently structured and expressed. We are aware from the beginning to the end that there is a perceptive focus on the demands of the question. Theme, characterisation, conflict, stage set and symbolism have been analysed perceptively in order to convey Miller's presentation of the failure of the American Dream. The candidate maintains a committed evaluative stance with respect to the text and the task. This essay is placed in the 20-19 band at the top end, based on its impressive strengths, and is awarded **20 marks**.