

## ***Death of a Salesman and A Raisin in the Sun: Comparison and Contrast Project***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

By examining literary and cultural elements present in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, students will produce essays, graphic representations, and/or video presentations that will demonstrate their understanding of techniques of comparison-contrast.

I wrote that in the prospectus for my Houston Teachers Institute project. At the time, I must confess, I was not really thinking about what the students would be able to get out of such a study; rather, I was thinking about what I would write if I were to write a critical paper comparing and contrasting the two plays. I was focused on what was interesting to me, never mind what the students would be able to glean from it.

Granted, there is some validity to the belief that the teacher must be engaged in order to engage the students. Yet, as I discovered when the colleagues in my seminar group evaluated what I had written in my prospectus, my project was not as kid-centered as it needed to be to do the job it had purported to do. For one thing, I had allotted only a week's time for an Advance Placement (AP) composition and literature class to read the plays, view the videos, and produce their products. My seminar leader said it best when she wrote in the margin, "I find this difficult to believe." My colleagues endorsed that view, though not so pointedly, when they questioned whether students could be expected to carry out the reading primarily outside of class. I simply was not operating in the real world of secondary education.

In my defense, I have come to writing curriculum for high school students as a novice. Though I have been an English teacher for years, most of my more recent experience has been in college, and my professional writing has been in critical articles written with no particular hope that my students would ever even see them, much less learn from them. So here I was in a brave new world, charged with writing curriculum for high school students. As the HTI seminar progressed, I came to see more accurately what high school students might do with the two plays I had chosen.

Now, after having taught for this school year at an urban high school, where most of my students are immigrants or first-generation Americans, I have come, I hope, to be able to predict more accurately what sort of project my students can and will do, emphasis on *will do*. Because the American experience is novel to most of my students, I find this study of two plays that critique the American experience especially apt. Despite their lack of the sort of fluency present in their native-speaker counterparts, my students demonstrate a curiosity about what might be termed an American character through an examination of the two plays, *Death of a Salesman* and *A Raisin in the Sun*.

## **The Plays**

In both plays we see two marginalized families struggling to make it, to be accepted by the American mainstream, and to achieve the economic success that will, they believe, give them, the acceptance they long for. In both plays the families wish to be validated by the culture around them. In both plays, the dominant culture appears to stand in judgment of the two families who long to be regarded as worthy. Knowing my students' stories, I expect them to be able to see the struggle of their own family in the struggles of the Lomans and the Youngers. I expect them to examine the tension between longing to fit in and, at the same time, maintaining their own personal and cultural identities.

### **Death of a Salesman**

In *Death of a Salesman*, failed salesman Willy Loman, 63, strives to succeed by being “very well liked,” as he feels a salesman must be in order to achieve success. Knowing he is at the end of his career, Willy places all his hopes on his son Biff, a former high school football star who once had the sort of popularity Willy believes essential for making it in America. Biff, however, is still traumatized by an event that occurred in his high school years: his discovering his father in a hotel room with a woman. Willy, perhaps correctly, sees Biff's becoming a ne'er do well as Biff's deliberately spiting Willy for his infidelity. When Biff's petty theft at his big job interview becomes known to Willy, Willy retreats into a restaurant restroom, where the hallucinations he has more and more frequently recur. Willy retreats into a hallucinatory past, to a time before Biff knew the truth about him and he knew the truth about Biff. Deluded that “that boy can be magnificent,” Willy stages an auto accident so that Biff can use the life insurance money to make it in the business world and to achieve his father's dream. Willy leaves his long-suffering wife, Linda, and his other son, Happy (always the lesser son in terms of Willy's affections), to make do, thinking of nothing but proving that Biff can be as much the business hero as he was the gridiron hero. Willy's unfulfilled dream is that America will come to “pay attention” to his son.

The Loman family in some ways mirrors Arthur Miller's. Miller's family, who had lost everything in the Depression, moved to Brooklyn and lived in modest circumstances, rather haunted by their former economic and social success and their struggle to re-attain the American dream—the prosperity they had known when Miller was a boy. Miller's work is no wholesale indictment of material success; it is rather an examination of the particularly American sense that financial success is the result of social acceptance.

### ***A Raisin in the Sun***

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, a father's life insurance also precipitates the action. Walter Younger had labored all his life to provide for his family, African Americans who live on the south side of Chicago. This play begins rather than ends with the insurance payment. In *Raisin* there is also a surviving wife, Lena, and two grown children, Beneatha and

Walter Lee. Each of the Youngers has a dream, a way of moving himself or herself from the margins into the center of American culture. Walter Lee wants to make it as a businessman; Beneatha wants to make it as a physician; and Lena wants to make it as a homeowner, someone who has her own yard and garden. Each wants to use the insurance money to fulfill the dream. Lena decides upon a compromise. She takes a portion of the money for a down payment on the house in a white suburb, but leaves enough for Walter Lee to buy his liquor store and for Beneatha to go to medical school. Lena shows her faith in Walter Lee by trusting the money to him, only to have the money stolen by an unscrupulous business partner. While being focused on this financial setback that keeps them from achieving the American dream, the Youngers are confronted by racism in the form of a white man from the neighborhood where Lena has bought the house. He tempts the Youngers by offering to buy their house at a considerable profit. Walter Lee assumes the stature of his deceased father, standing up to the white man so that Lena can have her dream. The Youngers move themselves from the margins to the mainstream of American culture of the 1950s by moving to the suburbs, despite the inevitable negative response of their new neighbors. The Youngers defy the naysayers by taking their place as typical Americans.

Though comfortably middle class, Hansberry's own family mirrors the Youngers. When Hansberry was a girl, her family moved from the south side of Chicago to an all-white neighborhood, which led to an intense court fight for their right to live in that neighborhood, a battle eventually won in the U.S. Supreme Court. Though Hansberry's life was one of activism for civil rights and women's rights, her play is more than a commentary on race in America. True, the characters are African American, but they are still American, and American audiences of all races can identify with their struggles as a family and their struggle to achieve the American dream.

### **Comparing and Contrasting the Plays**

These plays are rich for comparison as they examine the theme of what it means to succeed in America, inasmuch as the two plays treat similar figures, themes, and situations, set in approximately the same time in American history. My students should come to an understanding of how two important artists, Miller and Hansberry, have interpreted the American experience, especially the quest of the American dream.

In seeing how the Lomans and the Youngers pursue that dream, my students will begin to see the experiences of their own families with an appropriately analytical eye, seeing in the struggles of the plays' characters the pitfalls and occasional triumphs inherent in pursuing the dream. Both plays underscore and critique the American penchant for assigning personal worth based on economic gain. In *Willy*, students will see the folly of a man who carries into his mature years the childish values of the high school, where being a star athlete and being popular – “very well-liked” – guarantee inevitable success in life. Even among students whose families are generations removed from their immigrant forebears, the foolishness of following the questionable high school

values of worship of the popular crowd should resonate as they come to terms with the pressures in their own lives to uphold similar values such as the need to be well-liked, to fit in, or to be validated by the culture around them.

It is fairly easy for students to see Willy's notion of the way to achieve economic success as destined for failure. In fact, it might be argued that Willy's fatal flaw is not in his goal—economic success for his family—but in the means to achieve it. Willy seems to feel that popular opinion is everything and that personal integrity, such as being faithful to one's wife or telling the truth to one's family, is irrelevant as long as no one knows. Neither play says that having money is in itself a bad thing, thereby allowing for that component of the American dream. Rather, they show that the measure of a person must be judged apart from his or her pocketbook and separate from popular opinion.

That Willy has it all wrong is not hard for students to see. It is not quite as easy to see what is wrong with Walter Lee's plan for making it big. Walter Lee, unlike Willy, seems realistic enough to have a dream of material pleasures somewhat distanced from what those pleasures indicate about the value of the person who has them. Walter Lee's plan does not have the invalid moral premise as Willy's. Granted, Lena questions the morality of Christians opening a liquor store, suggesting that selling liquor on the south side of Chicago could be harmful to the inhabitants. But the quibble is more Lena's than Hansberry's. Walter Lee's failed dream leads him to reevaluate the notion that material success will necessarily make him a worthwhile person. Walter Lee examines his values and changes them; Willy never sees that what he seeks is unworthy.

I would hope that by comparing these characters' motives and actions, students will examine their own relationship to material things. Especially with gifted and talented students, a comparison of the treatment of the American dream could lead to a critique of capitalism itself, a topic well worn by Miller and not at all ignored by Hansberry. Students will be able to do research about what the authors say directly about capitalism and about the economic system itself. With AP 12<sup>th</sup>-graders, the project may also lend itself to team-teaching with economics and government teachers, especially if the students are also taking AP government or perhaps AP American history. Advanced students can come to see the problem of moral worth being connected to economic status as having origins in the Puritan ethic, the concept of the Elect. Such an examination lends itself to further-team teaching with AP American history as students investigate life in the 1950s, the civil rights movement, and the pursuit of the American dream as it manifested itself during this time.

Students should see themselves in the play not merely in terms of the pursuit of high school popularity and material wealth, but also in terms of their respective places within their families. Both plays present the typical two-child American family, dominated by the figure of the father. In each play, the ambitions of a father, though unfulfilled for him, live on for the elder sons in a sort of challenge, command, and perhaps even taunt as both sons must confront the dream their respective fathers have/had for the family. I

would expect students to examine what messages their own parents send them, especially where the message of familial obligation comes into conflict with the society around them. Both plays show families struggling to achieve the American dream, each with internal and external impediments to making it in America. I would expect that immigrant and first generation Americans would be especially moved to view their own families' American dreams in comparison to the dreams set forth by the Lomans and the Youngers. Students will start to see their own cultural notions of what it means to be a father and what it means to be a mother in terms of what it means to be an American father and an American mother.

Both plays are set approximately in the 1950s, a time when the desire to be “normal” and to fit in was perhaps more acute than in previous eras—when the goal was to be the perfect American family, living an idealized life of ease and happiness, in contrast to the struggle the prior decades of the Depression and WWII had demanded. It was a time when America itself had succeeded by prevailing over hard times and prodigious enemies. It was a time when the perception was that Americans “had it made,” leaving those without economic success and its attendant social acceptance to feel inadequate, ashamed, and alienated, living on the margins of the good life they saw all around them. Students should consider their own time in comparison to the setting of the plays in order to see what forces, if any, are permanent in American life and what forces are time-bound, peculiar to a moment in history. Moreover, students will examine what forces within their own families are universal or permanent and which are merely situational.

It would seem to me that the theme of fitting in while maintaining an independent familial and personal integrity would speak especially to the LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students. Of course, the universal adolescent longing to fit in offers much to any adolescent audience. In addition to their private adolescent longings, students should come to see in the plays' two families grounds for comparison with their own family relationships.

Besides developing students' skills in comparing and contrasting in more than one medium, (i.e., essay, poster, discussion, or debate) the assignment will allow students to see how the two plays fit into the continuum of drama universal, especially as the two plays exemplify or differ from precursor dramas. This study offers an opportunity to contrast comedy with tragedy and to address the issue of tragedy and the common man. In examining the apparent triumph of the Youngers and the perhaps inevitable tragedy of the Lomans, students, especially in an AP class, will take up the issue of social determinism as a theme in the two plays. Students will, no doubt, wonder why the Youngers seem to prevail while the Lomans fail. Is it a moral failing? Is success within the control of the characters? It might seem that the Youngers face obstacles far harder to overcome than do the Lomans, whose obstacles may be perceived to be of their own making, as the men of the families adhere to such questionable values of the culture as the belief that economic success is the key to happiness.

In the AP classes, especially, the two plays may call into question the American economic system and capitalism in general. I can foresee students doing research on the positions of the two playwrights on the question of earning a living in America, a subject upon which Miller focuses throughout his works.

What is more, I would hope that students would examine what being a woman in America means. In the two mothers, one sees typical—perhaps even stereotypical—mother figures. Linda Loman is a self-effacing, self-sacrificing, stay-at-home mother whose greatest concern is the fragile ego, the dignity, of her husband. I find myself wanting Linda to speak up for herself, to stand up to Willy, yet she demurs.

In *Lena Younger*, we see the familiar African-American matriarch, yet, despite Lena's strength and considerable power within the family, it is clear that her deceased husband was a man to be respected in his own right. While acknowledging the differences between these two characters, students should examine how these two characters are alike and consider what influence American society has on determining a woman's sense of self-worth. Are there universals of motherhood presented in these plays? What do the playwrights wish for us to see in these two mothers? Such a question lends itself to researching what the playwrights have to say about feminism, an issue addressed overtly by Hansberry almost as frequently as racism. In fact, the project lends itself to debate, with one side taking the position of Miller on the topic of feminism, and the other side taking the position of Hansberry. Then, too, students could conduct a debate on such topics as American capitalism from the points of view of the respective playwrights.

The possible comparable elements of the plays show a wealth of possibilities that take the project far beyond the simple mechanics of comparison and contrast. Rather, students, even in classes not designated as gifted and talented, should come away from the study having carried out the activities at the top of Bloom's Taxonomy, as students evaluate their own lives in terms of American culture.

## **IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

This unit is intended for use in two types of classrooms: English IV AP composition and literature and English III American literature. In both situations, a significant number of students will be immigrant or first-generation Americans. In addition to stimulating critical thinking at the upper reaches of Bloom's Taxonomy, the unit will cover the ordinary basics of comparison and contrast as it is detailed in project CLEAR, the prescribed curriculum for Houston ISD. For regular classes, the unit should last four weeks. I would expect the unit to take no more than two weeks in AP classes, assuming the students are highly motivated intrinsically to read on their own. If not, it will take at least another week, for a total of three weeks in AP.

Students will read the plays in literature circles as delineated by project CLEAR in the regular classes with each student taking a specific, designated role within the circle. The required designated roles for literary circles as, according to Harvey Daniels in *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice* in Book Clubs and Reading Groups, are as follows:

1. Connector—a student who is assigned the role of one who connects the reading to life, personal experiences and other works on literature. The connector serves to appeal to the associative capacity of students.
2. Questioner—a student assigned the role of one who is always wondering and analyzing, asking questions such as where is the text going, how did the author evoke a particular feeling, or is this a plausible outcome.
3. Literary luminary/passage master—a student assigned the role of one who returns to memorable or important sections of the text to savor, re-reads, analyzes or shares key passages aloud.
4. Illustrator—a student assigned the role of one who reminds the group that skillful reading requires visualizing and invites graphic, non-linguistic responses to the text

In addition to the required roles of connector, questioner, literary luminary, and illustrator, optional roles to be filled as needed include summarizer, researcher, vocabulary enricher/ word wizard, and travel tracer, scene setter (18, 103).

After reading the plays, students will examine the concepts of both the American dream and the American self. To understand the American self, students will read Crèvecoeur's "What is an American," comparing Americans today with Crèvecoeur's observations of American life in the 1780s. Crèvecoeur was a French immigrant whose *Letters from an American Farmer* articulated the status of an American, a new being different from the European. He gives characteristics, showing how the American differs from the European. Immigrant students, especially, should find what Crèvecoeur has to say meaningful. Students will examine which characteristics of Americans observed in 1780 remain typical and what new qualities they see in Americans and in the families in the plays.

Students then will examine the characters of the plays by Crèvecoeur's criteria and will also examine members of their families by the characteristics they have decided are typical of Americans. To understand the American dream, students will view graphic representations from the Time Life American Century series, *The American dream: The 50s*. Then they will make collages showing representations of the American dream as pursued by the Lomans and by the Youngers.

After they have read the two plays and come to understand the meaning of the American self and the American dream, students will be prepared to view film versions of both plays. In addition to passively viewing the plays, students will act out scenes in preparation for their own comparison/contrast productions. Following their reading, viewing, and scene recreation, students will answer factual questions about the events of

the plays in preparation for higher order thinking activities. In other words, they will take a test over the contents of the plays.

After students have demonstrated a familiarity with the content of the plays, they will be introduced (or reminded) of comparison-contrast constructs through the use of graphic organizers, such as the Venn diagram, the outline, and others. Students will be told that each of them is required to produce a comparison-contrast essay of at least five solid paragraphs, following the subject-by-subject plan or the feature-by-feature pattern. In addition, each student will participate as part of their literary circle in a project in which each of them will have designated responsibilities. For the AP classes, students will incorporate documented research sources into both their individual essays and into their group project.

To decide upon the various comparable pairs, students will brainstorm, calling out possible topics for comparison. Such brainstorming will probably include the following comparable pairs: Willy and Walter Lee, Lena and Linda, the 1950s and our own time, names in the two plays (Biff and Beneatha, for instance), two approaches to gaining wealth, being an outsider (Jewish and African-American, for instance, or being a woman in a male-dominated world), the role of the fathers, the role of the mothers, the authors' backgrounds growing up, time in the two plays, two approaches to the American dream, elements of the American dream, sports and jazz, fitting in vs. standing out, comedy and tragedy, authors' social agendas, and other issues that will emerge naturally from the students.

Once comparison pairs are established, students will work in groups, performing research to be presented to the rest of the class. Topics for research might include conformity in the 1950s, the relationship between fathers and sons (cf. Freud), the relationship between mothers and sons (cf. D.H. Lawrence), the common man as tragic hero, and the American dream in the 1950s, Aristotle on tragedy, Langston Hughes poem, "A Dream Deferred," and other topics that will emerge during the study. Each student will have a role to play in the group: two researchers, one presenter, one illustrator, and one scriptwriter. Students in the class will use rubrics to evaluate each group's presentation. Student evaluations of the groups' effectiveness will be taken into account in the assigning of students' grades for the project.

After group presentations have been made, I will re-teach the comparison essay, using the subject-by-subject and feature-by-feature outlines. I will have the outlines created in a Word document and then projected on the monitor from my computer. Then students will work independently at their desks, devising their rough drafts. This should take no more than one 100-minute period.

At the next class meeting, students will form in their groups for peer editing. Students will provide copies of their paper for each group member. Then each student will read his or her paper aloud while the group marks his or her paper. After the

reading, each group member will be required to give both accolades and suggestions for improvement. Finally, students will complete a rubric checklist for each paper. Students will then bring in polished, finished papers to turn in at the beginning of the next class.

After the papers are complete, students will view selected scenes from two video versions of each play. Then students will form up in their groups again to defend their group's choice for the more compelling version of that groups designated scene.

Finally, students will write a one-page evaluation of the unit, evaluating their own contributions and making suggestions for fine-tuning the assignment to be used by future classes.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan One—Pursuing the American Dream**

#### ***Objective***

The student will use representations to understand an abstract concept, in this case, the meaning of the American dream.

#### ***Materials***

- *The American dream: The 50s*, a volume of the Time Life photo-book series, Our American Century
- An opaque projector
- A variety of consumable magazines
- Scissors
- Paste
- Poster board

#### ***Procedure***

The class will begin with a think-pair-share in which student pairs make a list of five characteristics of the American dream.

Think-Pair-Share is a process in which students are paired to answer higher order questions. Students are given a thought-provoking question and then are given three minutes or so to come up with individual answers. At the end of the “think” time the two students in a pair share their answers. Then the groups share results with the class.

Then, using the opaque projector, we will view excerpts from *The American Dream: The 50s*. I will ask students to identify which illustrated manifestations of the dream were adhered to by the Lomans and which by the Youngers.

Finally, working in pairs, students will make an American dream collage with one half of the poster representing the Lomans and the other half representing the Youngers.

I will post the collages around the room for the other students to view and critique.

## **Lesson Plan Two—What Is an American?**

### ***Objectives***

- Students will examine what it means to be an American, what characteristics are typical and what characteristics essential, if any, to being an American.
- Students will understand and appreciate an essay.
- Students will analyze contrast in an essay.
- Students will make a Venn diagram analyzing characters from the plays as typical Americans.

### ***Materials***

- A class set of copies of Michel-Guillaume de Crèvecoeur's "What is an American?"
- A large easel with large notepad or a computer connected to a classroom monitor.
- Plain 8½ x 11-inch paper for diagrams.

### ***Procedure***

To open this lesson, which will be done after students have read both plays, I will ask students to perform a think-pair-share exercise. Think-pair-share is a process in which students are paired to answer higher order questions. Students are given a thought-provoking question and then are given three minutes or so to come up with individual answers. At the end of the "think" time the two students in a pair share their answers. Then the groups share results with the class.

Each pair will make a list of five things they believe to be typical characteristics of Americans, answering the question, "What are Americans like?"

Then the pairs will share their answers, and one class scribe will write the answers on a large easel or record it on the computer connected to the monitor where everyone can view the list. I will introduce a Crèvecoeur's essay, written in the 1780s, think-pair-share is a process students are paired to answer higher order questions. Students are given a thought-provoking question and then are given three minutes or so to come up with individual answers. At the end of the "think" time, the two students in a pair share their answers. Then the groups share results with the class.

Explaining how important it has been, Crèvecoeur, a French immigrant, observed that Americans were significantly different from Europeans, despite their being European immigrants.

With our list of American characteristics in mind, students will perform literary circle readings of “What Is an American?” (Literary circles are described in the Project CLEAR curriculum. A group of five students reads a work or passage together, with each student performing a designated duty.) In the literary circles, students will make a list of characteristics Crèvecoeur attributes to Americans. Students will compare Crèvecoeur’s list to their own list by making a Venn diagram.

After we have made our Venn diagrams, I will conduct direct instruction to show the comparison-contrast structure of Crèvecoeur’s essay, focusing on contrast.

To check for understanding, the literary circles will make a Venn diagram analyzing one of the plays’ characters in terms of American characteristics. Each circle will analyze a different character and then display their diagrams.

To conclude, students will make Venn diagrams analyzing a member of their own family as American. (This lesson may take more than one day.)

For homework, have students make a list of ten pairs of items from the two plays that can be compared and contrasted.

### **Lesson Plan Three—Is it a Comedy or a Tragedy?**

#### ***Objectives***

- The student will understand the characteristics of comedy and tragedy.
- The student will demonstrate an understanding of the principles of classification.

#### ***Materials***

- Photocopies of an excerpt on tragedy from Aristotle’s *Poetics*.
- Photocopies of an excerpt from Louise Cowan’s introductory essay in *The Comic Terrain*.
- Photocopies of Miller’s “Tragedy and the Common Man.”
- A large easel with large notepad or a computer connected to a classroom monitor.

#### ***Procedure***

To begin, the class will perform a think-pair-share. Think-Pair-Share is a process in which students are paired to answer higher-order questions. Students are given a question and then are given three minutes or so to come up with individual answers. At the end of the “think” time the two students in a pair share their answers. Then the groups share results with the class.

I will ask students for examples of tragedies. Then I will ask for examples of comedies. The scribe will make a list from the responses. After the responses are written on the board, typed onto the monitor, or written on the easel, I will ask what common

elements the tragedies have. Next, I will ask the common elements of the comedies. I will conclude by making the point that the terms comedy and tragedy have specialized meanings in the context of drama.

To introduce Aristotle on tragedy, I will give a mini-lecture on Aristotle, explaining that the philosopher classified characteristics in order to define the phenomenon he was describing.

Once students know the necessary background, they will meet in their literary circles, with each student having a designated role within the group of five. The groups will be charged with making a list of the characteristics of tragedy and comedy.

The designated roles for literary circles, according to Harvey Daniels, are as follows:

1. Connector—a student who is assigned the role of one who connects the reading to life, personal experiences and other works on literature. The connector serves to appeal to the associative capacity of students.
2. Analyzing, asking questions such as where is the text going, how did the author evoke a particular feeling, or is this a plausible outcome.
3. Literary luminary/passage master—a student assigned the role of one who returns to memorable or important sections of the text to savor, re-reads, analyzes or shares key passages aloud.
4. Illustrator—a student assigned the role of one who reminds the group that skillful reading requires visualizing and invites graphic, non-linguistic responses to the text.

[Note: In addition to the required roles of connector, questioner, literary luminary and illustrator, optional roles to be filled as needed for a particular group class include summarizer, researcher, vocabulary enricher/word wizard, and travel tracer, scene setter.] (18, 103).

When the literary circles have classified characteristics of the two plays, determining what is typical of comedy and what is typical of tragedy in the two plays, a scribe will form each group will write the results on the easels or record them on the computer to project on the monitor. Students should see that *A Raisin in the Sun* is primarily comic and that *Death of a Salesman* is primarily tragic.

Finally, I will ask the literary circles to debate whether a common man can be a tragic hero, using evidence from Miller's play and from real life. (This may take more than one class period.)

#### **Lesson Plan Four—Writing the Comparison Essay**

##### ***Objectives***

- Students will learn to organize a comparison-contrast essay.

- Students will produce a comparison and contrast essay outline.
- Students will compare and contrast elements of their narrowed topics, leading to a thesis statement.

### ***Materials***

- Transparencies for the overhead showing the feature-by-feature plan and the subject-by-subject organizational plan.
- Blank transparencies for the overhead.
- Photocopies of excerpt from *The Lively Art of Writing*, explaining how to make transitions between paragraphs.

### ***Procedure***

First I will ask students to get out their homework from Lesson One, pairs of items from the two plays that can be compared. Then I will ask each student to read the pair that seems most interesting to him or her.

Using a comparable pair from the plays, for instance, Willy and Walter Lee, I will fill in the feature-by-feature outline, taking suggestions from the students. Next, I will model the subject-by-subject outline using another student pair, again taking suggestions from the class.

Each student will then choose his or her own pair of comparable subjects and make an outline on notebook paper, working independently. Following, each student will devise a thesis statement from the comparison that he or she has made in the outline. Students will read their thesis sentences to the class for the class to critique in order to emphasize the point that a thesis must be an opinion, not a mere statement of fact.

Once their thesis statements have been read and approved, students will work independently, writing rough drafts, following their outlines.

For homework, students will read the excerpt from *The Lively Art of Writing* on how to make transitions between paragraphs. Transitions should take an idea from the preceding paragraph and weave it into the first sentence of the new paragraph. Students will add transitions to their rough drafts outside of class and bring the revised drafts back for peer editing during the next class period.

## **Lesson Plan Five—Peer Editing and Revising the Comparison-Contrast Essay**

### ***Objectives***

- Students will develop an awareness that they are writing for actual readers other than merely the teacher/grader.
- Students will practice recognizing thesis statements and transitions in essays other than their own.

- Students will practice proofreading, correcting errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and syntax.
- Students will write a final, fair copy of their essays comparing and contrasting elements of the two plays.

***Materials***

Five photocopies of each student's rough draft.

***Procedure***

Students will work in groups of four or five. Students will read aloud their papers to the group, with group members taking notes on their copy of a particular student's paper. When the student finishes reading, students will give their reaction to the content of the paper, making suggestions and telling the writer what in they found good or compelling.

Next, the group will check to see that there is a clearly articulated thesis at the end of the introduction and that there are transitions at the beginning of each paragraph of the body. Then group will then proofread the paper silently, marking any errors. Following, the student writer will collect the proofread copies.

Finally, using the proofread papers and the suggestions of the group, each student will write a clean, fair final draft of his/her essay comparing and contrasting *Death of a Salesman* and *A Raisin in the Sun*.

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Contains the important Miller essay, "Tragedy and the Common Man."
- Cowan, Louise, Ed. *The Terrain of Comedy*. The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1984.  
The introductory essay defines the characteristics of comedy.
- Daniels, Harvey. *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2001.  
See Lesson Plans for a discussion of how this book can be used in class instruction.
- De Crèvecoeur, Hector St. John. *Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, "What is an American? (1782)"*. 18c.net. 1 May 2004. <<http://www.18c.net/hectstjohdecr.html>>.  
Here you can find Crèvecoeur's 1782 essay in its entirety.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Letters From An American Farmer*. UVA Hypertexts. 1 Jun. 2004. <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/CREV/home.html>>.  
This site contains the full text of de Crèvecoeur's *Letters*.
- Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. Vintage, 1994.  
The text of the classic Lorraine Hansberry play.
- Hughes, Langston. *A Dream Deferred*. 1996. APEX. 1 Jun. 2004.  
<<http://www.cswnet.com/~menamc/langston.htm>>.  
This site contains Hughes poem, and from it one can access other so-called cosmastist writings.
- Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. Penguin USA, 1998.  
The text of the classic Arthur Miller play.

## Supplemental Resources

### Death of a Salesman

Abbotson, Susan C.W. *Student Companion to Arthur Miller*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000.

In the words of the author, this text examines Miller's major works "in a systematic way, at the level of a non-specialist and general reader" (ix).

Abbotson, Susan C.W. and Brenda Murphy. *Understanding Death of a Salesman: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999.

Includes primary texts that speak to the background of the author while he was writing the play.

Ardolino, Frank. "I'm Not a Dime a Dozen! I Am Willy Loman!": The Significance of Names and Numbers in *Death of a Salesman*. *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 11(Aug. 2002): 174+.

Speculates on the nature of the hallucination/imagination scenes; suggests meanings and origins of the various names; calls attention to the use of numbers in the play.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Like Father, Like Sons: Miller's Negative Use of Sports Imagery in *Death of a Salesman*." In *Willy Loman*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1991.

A collection of 16 focused extracts from books and articles, with 10 complete essays providing a selection of criticism focusing on Willy.

*Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1988.

A representative collection of what the editor calls the best essays on the play.

"Death of a Salesman." *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 25 (Mar. 2004): 32+.

The author asserts that Willy has a belief system, a sort of religion in which the power of athletic ability with its attendant recognition are sufficient for business success.

Carson, Neil. *Arthur Miller*. Grove, 1982.

An overview of Miller's major works, with an emphasis on their status as theater.

Comgan, Robert W. *Arthur Miller: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice-Hall, 1969.

A resource for critical information on Miller and his work, especially *Death of a Salesman*.

*Conversations with Arthur Miller*. Ed. Matthew C. Roudane. Jackson: UP Mississippi, 1987.

Transcriptions of 39 interviews with Miller between 1947 and 1986. Notable for personal insights into Miller and the production of his plays, including Miller's theories of tragedy.

Dukore, Bernard F. *Death of a Salesman and The Crucible*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989.

An introduction for beginning students. Analyzes the texts from both literary and dramatic points of view.

Gottfried, Martin. *Arthur Miller: His Life and Work*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003.

Parts of this biography were written with Miller's help and consent, but in the process of this book's composition, Miller withdrew support, refusing further interviews. Much of the text comes from Miller's private papers housed in various university libraries.

Iannone, Carol. *In Arthur Miller's America*. American Jewish Committee, 2003.

This biography of Miller focuses on his desire to "raise awareness, change consciousness, reform society," as a result of his plays.

Murray, Edward. *Arthur Miller, Dramatist*. Ungar Pub. Co., 1967.

Provides analysis of Miller's major works with respect to structure, dialogue, and theme. While not overtly negative, Murray shows distaste for Miller's use of language, calling it "unpoetic."

Miller, Arthur. *"Salesman" in Beijing*. New York: Viking Press, 1984.

Miller's diary account of the famous production he directed Beijing, China, in 1983.

*Modern World Drama*. Ed. Myron Matlaw. Dutton, 1972.

A plot summary with introductory comments situating the play within dramatic literary tradition.

Otten, Terry. *The Temptation of Innocence in the Dramas of Arthur Miller*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

George Lanier says in his review of this book: "Miller's sense of tragedy is focused primarily by an age-old question: To what degree can free will and tragic choice coexist in a universe denied moral agency or divine intervention?"

*The Salesman Has a Birthday: Essays Celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. Ed. Stephen A. Marino. Lanham, MD: UP America, 2000.

An anthology of 10 essays drawn from the Fifth International Arthur Miller Conference. Essays, according to the editor, “focus on the significance of the play’s fiftieth anniversary, its important in the American dramatic canon, and its relationship to Miller’s oeuvre” (viii).

Welland, Dennis. *Miller The Playwright*. Methuen, 1979.  
Considers much of Miller’s work. Includes an essay called “*Death of a Salesman*.” Welland considers the views of several other critics while coming to a positive evaluation of the play.

### **A Raisin in the Sun**

Baraka, Amiri. “*A Raisin in the Sun’s* Enduring Passion.” In *A Raisin in the Sun and The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window by Lorraine Hansberry*. Ed. Robert Nemioff. New American Library, 1987. 9-20.  
Poet Baraka shows that the play still has force even in our time.

Carter, Steven R. *Hansberry’s Drama: Commitment amid Complexity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991.  
A detailed study of Hansberry’s entire canon. Chapter Two focuses on the stage version of *A Raisin in the Sun*, and the following chapter discusses the two film versions as well as the hit musical, title *Raisin*, that appeared in 1973.

Cheney, Anne. *Lorraine Hansberry*. Boston: Twayne, 1984.  
In this generally complimentary biography, Cheney cites both Paul Robeson (as political radical) and Langston Hughes (as poet of his people) as major influences on Hansberry. She also defends Hansberry’s assimilationist views, which some African Americans criticized harshly.

Domina, Lynn. *Understanding A Raisin in the Sun: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998.  
This volume contains bibliographic references.

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun: The Unfilmed Original Screenplay*. New York: Plume, 1992.  
Edited by Robert Nemiroff, Hansberry’s husband, the volume includes an introduction by Margaret Wilkerson and an afterword by Spike Lee.

\_\_\_\_\_. *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*. Ed. Robert Nemiroff. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969.  
Hansberry’s husband and executor of her estate has put together bits and pieces of her work—published and unpublished—letters, autobiographical statements, and speeches—which give a clear picture of this extraordinary woman. A work for the stage, it had a long run in off-Broadway theaters.

Keyssar, Helene. *The Curtain and the Veil: Strategies in Black Drama*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1981.

A critical study of African American drama focusing on the ambivalence of black playwrights, with a full chapter devoted to *A Raisin in the Sun*.

*Poetry and Drama*. Ed. C.W.E Bigsby. Deland, FL: Everett/Edwards, 1969.

Volume Two in *The Black American Writer*, this book provides a historical development of African American drama, with a full chapter on Hansberry's plays.

Schreader, Catherine. *Lorraine Hansberry*. Chicago: Campus, 1978.

Part of a series subtitled "They Found a Way," this biography written for young readers stresses events in the playwright's life, which show her determination to succeed. Many photographs.

Schleuter, June, ed. *Modern American Drama: The Female Canon*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1990.

A collection of 22 essays on female playwrights, with a full chapter devoted to Hansberry.

Skolnik, Leslie-Anne. "Lorraine Hansberry." In *Feminist Writers*. Ed. Pamela Kester-Shelton. St. James Press, 1996.

This article shows Hansberry works to be "life and love-affirming," not militant in bringing to the fore the issues of feminism and civil rights.

Tripp, Janet. *Lorraine Hansberry*. San Diego: Lucent Books, 1998.

Examines the life and work of the African American playwright and social activist who received great recognition at an early age.

*Women and American Theatre*. Eds. Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987.

In *Lorraine Hansberry: Artist, Activist, Feminist*, Margaret Wilkerson stresses Hansberry's early awareness of the connection that exists between racism and sexism. She also makes the point that Hansberry understood and tired to dramatize the difference between Lena's notion of material advance for the family and Walter Lee's crass materialism. Furthermore, she asserts that the playwright had come to terms with her lesbianism, but she gives no concrete evidence for this assumption.

### ***Filmography***

*Death of a Salesman*. Dir. László Benedek. Columbia Pictures, 1951. (115 minutes)

The original film version of Miller's wonderful play.

*Death of a Salesman*. Directed by Volker Schlöndorff. Karl-Lorimar Home Video, 1986.  
(130 minutes)

Video version of the play starring Dustin Hoffman and John Malcovich.

*Lorraine Hansberry: The Black Experience in the Creation of Drama*. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1975. (35 minutes)

This is a video program designed for students.

*A Raisin in the Sun*. Dir. Daniel Petrie. Columbia Tristar Home Video, 1999. (128 minutes)

Original 1961 film version starring Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee.

*A Raisin in the Sun*. Dir. Bill Duke. Monterey Home Video, 2000. (171 minutes)

Video version of the play starring Danny Glover and Esther Rolle.

### ***Background Information***

Crèvecoeur, Michel-Guillaume de. "What Is an American?" In *The Language of Literature: American Literature*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Little, 2000.

This state-adopted textbook includes background information on most aspects of American literature and includes most of the canonical texts.

Daniels, Harvey. *Literary Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. Stenhouse, 2002.

As the title makes clear, this book discusses ways of going about and improving group readings and discussions of books

Payne, Lucile Vaughan. *The Lively Art of Writing*. Follett, 1963.

A primer on how to write an essay, this book serves as a helpful reference to composition students, although it is not ideal for reading straight through.