It is said that when *Death of a Salesman* was first performed on Broadway, grown men wept in the aisles. Arthur Miller is arguably America’s foremost playwright as well as one of our fiercest social and political commentators. This course will explore eight of his pivotal works including *All My Sons, The Crucible, A View from the Bridge, A Memory of Two Mondays, After the Fall, Incident at Vichy, The Price*, and the life and times of Willy Loman.

“Every man does have a star,” states the main character of one of Miller’s plays, “The star of one's honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once it's out it never lights again.” From Joe Keller to John Proctor to the confessional of Quentin, Miller was obsessed with morality in all its forms, what it means to be an American, and what it means to pursue the American dream. Strongly influenced by all the great dramatists that had come before him, he put everything he had into his plays and forced our society to take a hard look at itself.

The fact that his work is still performed today speaks volumes to the classicism of his writing and the urgency of his message.

Required books:


Week-by-week assignments:

**June 24** – Read and discuss *All My Sons*. Based on the true story of an aeronautical corporation that conspired with army inspection officers to approve defective aircraft engines intended for military use, this story of Joe Keller and his family has strong links to both Greek tragedy and the plays of Henrik Ibsen. It startled audiences when it was first performed with its depiction of
an ordinary American man striving for decency and success but failing himself and his country because of his fatal flaw. And it put Miller on the map as a force to be reckoned with.

**July 1** - Read and discuss *Death of a Salesman*. This play was originally intended to be performed on a set that resembled the interior of the head of Willy Loman. Instead, Miller allowed Willy’s house to become the setting for his story, which would take place on the very last day of his protagonist’s life as he attempts to ascertain whether he is worth more dead than alive. Brooks Atkinson wrote, “By common consent, this is one of the finest dramas in the whole range of American theater.”

**July 8** - Read and discuss *The Crucible*. Written as a response to Senator Joe McCarthy and the House of Representatives’ Committee on Un-American Activities, this dramatization of the Salem witch hunts pitches John and Elizabeth Proctor against the fake accusations and collective hysteria of their community. “I was drawn to this subject,” Miller stated, “because the historical moment seemed to give me the poetic right to create people of higher self-awareness than the contemporary scene affords.”

**July 15** - Read and discuss *A View from the Bridge*. “What struck me first about this tale when I heard it one night in my neighborhood,” wrote Miller, “was how directly, with what breathtaking simplicity, it did evolve.” Set in an Italian neighborhood near the Brooklyn Bridge, this play employs a chorus and narrator in the character of a lawyer named Alfieri who feels compelled to tell us the tale of Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman working on the docks who has an unnatural attachment to his niece. Miller went on to say, “It seemed to me, finally, that its exposed skeleton, so to speak, was its wisdom and even its charm and must not be tampered with.”

**July 22** - Read and discuss *A Memory of Two Monday*. This one-act play, which is based on Miller’s own experiences, focuses on a collection of hopeless and haunted American workers earning their livings in an auto parts store during the Great Depression. It was originally performed with a one-act version of *A View from the Bridge* but stands on its own as a theatrical undertaking that is more concerned with its characters than its story.

**July 29** - Read and discuss *After the Fall*. Considered by many to be Miller’s most autobiographical play, this controversial work concerns Quentin, a lawyer moving between three women in his life. In its depiction of Maggie, a showgirl with a self-destructive streak, one critic proclaimed that Miller had created “the most vivid, pitiable, terrifying female character in the American theatre since Blanche Dubois.” Remarkably candid and always surprising, this work also revisits many of Miller’s earlier concerns such as the crash of the stock market, the Holocaust and McCarthyism.

**August 5** - Read and discuss *Incident at Vichy*. A murder mystery in reverse, this one-act drama set in a detention room in occupied France focuses on nine men and a boy who are suspected to be Jews. They have been picked up at random from the streets for a purpose that is
unknown to them. One by one, they are called into the next room where they are interrogated by a German officer, and one by one they are led to their doom.

August 12 - Read and discuss *The Price* from Arthur Miller. In the characters of the brothers Victor and Walter, Miller could easily have been telling the stories of Willy Loman’s two sons Biff and Happy thirty years on. These men approaching fifty sort through the remnants of their parents’ estate as well as their own lives, while Victor’s wife, Esther, acts as a referee in a battle between two siblings, and a canny antique dealer named Solomon bears witness. Clive Barnes called this work, “One of the most engrossing and entertaining plays that Miller has written. It is superbly, even flamboyantly, theatrical...complying with the classic unities of time, place and action.”

All readings are subject to change.