

Study material on Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

English PG (401) – Semester-IV

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Brief Biography of Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Manhattan. In the stock crash of 1929, his father's clothing business failed and the family moved to more affordable housing in Brooklyn. Miller was unintellectual as a boy, but decided to become a writer and attended the University of Michigan to study journalism. There, he received awards for his playwriting. After college, he worked for the government's Federal Theater Project, which was soon closed for fear of possible Communist infiltration. He married his college sweetheart, Mary Slattery, in 1940, with whom he had two children. His first play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* opened in 1944, but Miller had his first real success with *All My Sons* (1947). He wrote *Death of a Salesman* in 1948, which won a Tony Award as well as the Pulitzer Prize, and made him a star. In 1952, Miller wrote *The Crucible*, a play about the 1692 Salem witch trials that functioned as an allegory for the purges among entertainers and media figures by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Miller testified before this committee, but refused to implicate any of his friends as Communists, which resulted in his blacklisting. In 1956 he married the film actress Marilyn Monroe. They were divorced in 1961. His third wife was the photographer Inge Morath. Miller continued to write until his death in 2005.

Introduction to *Death of a Salesman*

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* stems from both Arthur Miller's personal experiences and the theatrical traditions in which the playwright was schooled. The play recalls the traditions of Yiddish theater that focus on family as the crucial element, reducing most plot to the confines of the nuclear family. *Death of a Salesman* focuses on two sons who are estranged from their father, paralleling one of Miller's other major works, *All My Sons*, which premiered two years before *Death of a Salesman*.

Although the play premiered in 1949, Miller began writing *Death of a Salesman* at the age of seventeen when he was working for his father's company. In short story form, it treated an aging salesman unable to sell anything. He is berated by company bosses and must borrow subway change from the young narrator. The end of the manuscript contains a postscript, noting that the salesman on which the story is based had thrown himself under a subway train.

Arthur Miller reworked the play in 1947 upon a meeting with his uncle, Manny Newman. Miller's uncle, a salesman, was a competitor at all times and even competed with his sons, Buddy and Abby. Miller described the Newman household as one in which one could not lose hope, and based the Loman household and structure on his uncle and cousins. There are numerous parallels between Abby and Buddy Newman and their fictional counterparts, Happy and Biff Loman: Buddy, like Biff, was a renowned high school athlete who ended up flunking out. Miller's relationship to his cousins parallels that of the Lomans to their neighbor, Bernard.

While constructing the play, Miller was intent on creating continuous action that could span different time periods smoothly. The major innovation of the play was the fluid continuity between its segments. Flashbacks do not occur separate from the action but rather as an integral part of it.

The play moves between fifteen years back and the present, and from Brooklyn to Boston without any interruptions in the plot.

Death of a Salesman premiered on Broadway in 1949, starring Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman and directed by Elia Kazan (who would later inform on Arthur Miller in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee). The play was a resounding success, winning the Pulitzer Prize, as well as the Tony Award for Best Play. The *New Yorker* called the play a mixture of "compassion, imagination, and hard technical competence not often found in our theater." Since then, the play has been revived numerous times on Broadway and reinterpreted in stage and television versions. As an archetypal character representing the failed American dream, Willy Loman has been interpreted by diverse actors such as Fredric March (the 1951 film version), Dustin Hoffman (the 1984 Broadway revival and television movie), and, in a Tony Award-winning revival, Brian Dennehy.

Historical Context of *Death of a Salesman*

During the postwar boom of 1948, most Americans were optimistic about a renewed version of the American Dream: striking it rich in some commercial venture, then moving to a house with a yard in a peaceful suburban neighborhood where they could raise children and commute to work in their new automobile. The difference between this and the nineteenth-century version of the same dream, in which a family or a single adventurer went into America's wilderness frontier and tried to make their fortune from the land itself, reflected the country's economic shift from agriculture to urban industry, and then from manufacturing into service and sales. Charley sums up this process at the end of the play when he says about Willy Loman, "He don't put a bolt to a nut... he's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine."

Death of a Salesman Summary and analysis Act I.1

(Loman Home, Present Day):

The salesman, Willy Loman, enters his home. He appears very tired and confused. Linda Loman, his wife, puts on a robe and slippers and goes downstairs. She has been asleep. Linda is mostly jovial, but represses objections to her husband. Her struggle is to support him while still trying to guide him. She worries that he smashed the car, but he says that nothing happened. He claims that he's tired to death and couldn't make it through the rest of his trip. He got only as far as Yonkers, and doesn't remember the details of the trip. He tells Linda that he kept swerving onto the shoulder of the road, but Linda thinks that it must be faulty steering in the car.

Linda says that there's no reason why he can't work in New York, but Willy says he's not needed there. Willy claims that if Frank Wagner were alive he would be in charge of New York by now, but that his son, Howard, doesn't appreciate him. Linda tells him that Happy took Biff on a double date, and that it was nice to see them shaving together. Linda reminds him not to lose his temper with Biff, but Willy claims that he simply had asked him if he was making any money. Willy says that there is an undercurrent of resentment in Biff, but Linda says that Biff admires his father. Willy calls Biff a lazy bum and says that he is lost. Willy longs for the days when their neighborhood was less developed and less crowded. He wakes up his sons Biff and Happy, both of whom are in the double bunk in the boys' bedroom.

Analysis:

At the beginning of the play, Arthur Miller establishes Willy Loman as a troubled and misguided man, at heart a salesman and a dreamer. He emphasizes his preoccupation with success. However, Miller makes it equally apparent that Willy Loman is not a successful man. Although in his sixties,

he is still a traveling salesman bereft of any stable location or occupation, and clings only to his dreams and ideals. There is a strong core of resentment in Willy Loman's character and his actions assume a more glorious past than was actually the case. Willy sentimentalizes the neighborhood as it was years ago, and is nostalgic for his time working for Frank Wagner, especially because his former boss's son, Howard Wagner, fails to appreciate Willy. Miller presents Willy as a strong and boisterous man with great bravado but little energy to support his impression of vitality. He is perpetually weary and exhibits signs of dementia, contradicting himself and displaying some memory loss.

Linda, in contrast, shows little of Willy's boisterous intensity. Rather, she is dependable and kind, perpetually attempting to smooth out conflicts that Willy might encounter. Linda has a similar longing for an idealized past, but has learned to suppress her dreams and her dissatisfaction with her husband and sons. Miller indicates that she is a woman with deep regrets about her life; she must continually reconcile her husband with her sons, and support a man who has failed in his life's endeavor. Linda exists only in the context of her family relationships. As a mother to Biff and Happy and a husband to Willy, and must depend on them for whatever success she can grasp.

Act I.2

At thirty-four, Biff is well-built but somewhat worn and not very self-assured. Happy, two years younger than his brother, is tall and powerfully made. He is a visibly sexual person. Both boys are somewhat lost, Happy because he has never risked defeat. The two brothers discuss their father. Happy thinks that Willy's license will be taken away, and Biff suggests that his father's eyes are going.

Happy thinks that it's funny that they are sleeping at home again, and they discuss Happy's "first time" with a girl named Betsy. Happy says that he was once very bashful with women, but as he became more confident Biff became less so. Biff wonders why his father mocks him so much, but Happy says that he wants Biff to make good. Biff tells Happy that he has had twenty or thirty different types of jobs since he left home before the war, and everything turns out the same. He reminisces about herding cattle in Nebraska and the Dakotas. But he criticizes himself for playing around with horses for twenty-eight dollars a week at his advanced age. Happy says that Biff is a poet and an idealist, but Biff says that he's mixed up and should get married.

When Biff asks Happy if he is content, Happy defiantly says that he is not. He says that he has his own apartment, a car, and plenty of woman, but is still lonely. Biff suggests that Happy come out west with him to buy a ranch. Happy claims that he dreams about ripping off his clothes in the store and boxing with his manager, for he can "outbox, outrun, and outlift anybody in that store," yet he has to take orders from them.

Happy says that the women they went on a date with that night were gorgeous, but he gets disgusted with women: he keeps "knockin' them over" but it doesn't mean anything. Happy says that he wants someone with character, like his mother. Biff says that he thinks he may work for Bill Oliver, whom he worked for earlier in life. Biff worries that Bill will remember that he stole a carton of basketballs, and remembers that he quit because Bill was going to fire him.

Act I.3

This segment of the act takes place in the kitchen years before. Willy reminds Biff not to make promises to a girl, because girls will always believe what you tell them and Biff is too young to be talking seriously to girls. Willy surprises the boys with a new punching bag, and as Happy exercises he brags about how he is losing weight. Biff shows Willy a football he took from the locker room, but Willy tells him to return it. Biff tells Willy that he missed him when he was away on business. Willy says that someday he'll have his own business like Uncle Charley. Willy says that he'll be

bigger than Charley, because Charley is liked, but not well-liked. Willy promises to take his boys on business and show them all of the towns in New England and introduce them to the finest people.

As Happy and Biff toss the football around, Bernard enters. Bernard is worried because Biff has a state exam (Regents) the following week and has yet to study for them. Bernard heard that Mr. Birnbaum will fail Biff in his math class if he does not study, and reminds Biff that just because he has been accepted to UVA the high school does not have to graduate him. Willy tells Bernard not to be a pest, and Bernard leaves. Biff says that Bernard is "liked, but not well liked." Willy says that Bernard may get the best grades in school, but when he gets out in the business world people like Biff and Happy will be five times ahead of him.

Linda enters, and after the boys leave she and Willy discuss the troubles that Willy has been having in his business. Willy worries that others laugh at him, but Linda reassures him, saying that he is successful because he is making seventy to a hundred dollars per week. Willy also worries that people respect Uncle Charley, who is a man of few words. Linda tells him that few men are as idolized by their children as Willy is.

The major conflict in *Death of a Salesman* is between Biff Loman and his father. Even before Biff appears on stage, Linda indicates that Biff and Willy are perpetually at odds with one another because of Biff's inability to live up to his father's expectations. As Linda says, Biff is a man who has not yet "found himself." At thirty-four years old, Biff remains to some degree an adolescent. This is best demonstrated by his inability to keep a job. He and Happy still live in their old bunk beds; despite the fact that this reminds Linda of better times, it is a clear sign that neither of the sons has matured.

A major theme of the play is the lost opportunities that each of the characters face. Linda Loman, reminiscing about the days when her sons were not yet grown and had a less contentious relationship with their father, regrets the state of disarray into which her family has fallen. Willy Loman believes that if Frank Wagner had survived, he would have been given greater respect and power within the company. Willy also regrets the opportunities that have passed by Biff, whom he believes to have the capability to be a great man.

Miller uses the first segment of the play to foreshadow later plot developments. Willy worries about having trouble driving and expresses dissatisfaction with his situation at work, and Linda speaks of conflict between Willy and his sons. Each of these will become important in driving the plot and the resolution of the play.

Act I.4

(Hotel Room, Past):

Willy crosses from one part of the stage to another, where a woman is standing, putting on her scarf. Willy says that he gets so lonely, and gets the feeling that he'll never make a living for her or a business for the boys. The woman claims that she picked Willy for his sense of humor. Willy tells her that he will be back in about two weeks and that he will see her the next time he is in Boston.

Act I.5

Willy is back in the kitchen with Linda, who reassures him that he is a handsome man. Linda mends her stocking, but Willy tells her that he does not want her to do such menial tasks. Willy returns to the porch, where he tells Bernard to give Biff the answers to the Regents exam. Bernard says that he normally gives Biff the answers, but Regents is a State exam and he could be arrested. Bernard says

that Biff is driving the car without a license and will flunk math. Willy also hears the woman's voice (from the hotel room), and screams for it to shut up. Willy explodes at Linda, saying that there's nothing the matter with Biff. He asks her if she wants Biff to be a worm like Bernard. Linda, almost in tears, exits into the living room.

Act I.6

(Loman Home, Present Day):

Willy tells Happy that he nearly hit a kid in Yonkers. Willy wonders why he didn't go to Alaska with his brother Ben, because the man was a genius: success incarnate. Ben ended up with diamond mines: he walked into a jungle and came out rich at the age of twenty-one. Happy tells Willy that he should retire. Charley enters. As Willy and Charley play cards, Charley offers Willy a job, which insults him. Willy asks Charley why Biff is going back to Texas, but Charley tells him to let Biff go. Willy talks about the ceiling he put up in the living room, but refuses to give any details. When Charley wonders how he could put up a ceiling, Willy shouts at him that a man who can't handle tools is not a man, and calls Charley disgusting.

Uncle Ben enters, a stolid man in his sixties with a mustache and an authoritative air. Willy tells Ben that he is getting awfully tired, but since Charley cannot see Ben, Willy tells him that for a second Charley reminded him of his brother Ben, who died several weeks ago in Africa. Ben asks Willy if their mother is living with him, but Willy said that she died a long time ago. Charley, who cannot see Ben, wonders what Willy is talking about. Finally Charley becomes unnerved and leaves.

Analysis:

If Charley and Bernard are the symbols of tangible material success in *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's older brother Ben symbolizes the broadest reaches of success, which are intangible and practically imaginary. Whether Ben is a Horatio Alger figure, a character whose history is to be taken literally, is disputable; some aspects of his biography are so romanticized and absurdly grandiose that it is likely that the information that Miller gives concerning Ben is filtered through Willy Loman's imagination. When Ben appears in the play, it is only as a representation of Willy's imagination. For Willy, Ben represents fantastic success gained through intangible luck rather than through the boredom of steady dedication and hard work; Ben has gained what Willy always wanted but never could achieve.

The encounter between Charley and Willy illustrates that Willy feels some jealousy toward his friend for his success. Willy offers advice to Charley at every opportunity in an attempt to assert some dominance over him. He interprets a man as a person who can handle tools well, returning to a physical definition of manhood in comparison to monetary or status-based definitions that would assert Charley's superiority.

Likewise, Charley seems to realize Willy's envy, and behaves tentatively toward his friend. Although he does injure Willy's pride by offering him a job, Charley does so tentatively, for he has great pity for Willy that he knows he must mask. Charley does, however, give the most sound advice to Willy, advising him to let Biff do what he pleases and leave for Texas.

Act I.7

(Loman Home, Past):

While Willy talks with Ben, Linda (as a younger woman) enters. Willy asks Ben where his father is, but Ben says that he didn't find his father in Alaska, for he never made it there. Ben claims he had a very faulty view of geography and ended up in Africa instead of Alaska. Willy was only three years,

eleven months old when Ben left. Young Biff and Happy enter, and Willy introduces them to Uncle Ben, a "great man." Ben boasts that their father was a very great man, an inventor who could make more money in a week than another man could make in a lifetime. Willy shows Biff to Ben, and says that he's bringing up Biff to be like their father. Biff and Ben start to spar; Ben trips Biff, then tells him never to fight fair with a stranger, because he will never get out of the jungle that way. Ben leaves, wishing Willy good luck on whatever he does.

Charley returns, and reprimands Willy for letting his kids steal lumber from the nearby building that is being refurbished. Willy says that he reprimanded them, but that he has a "couple of fearless characters" as his children. Charley tells him that the jails are full of fearless characters, but Ben says that so is the stock exchange. Bernard enters and says that the watchman is chasing Biff, but Willy says that he is not stealing anything. Willy says that he will stop by on his way back to Africa, but Willy begs him to stay and talk. Willy worries that he's not teaching his sons the right kind of knowledge. Ben repeats that when he walked into the jungle he was seventeen, and when he walked out he was twenty-one and fantastically rich.

Act I.8

(Loman Home, Present Day):

Ben leaves, but Willy still speaks to him as Linda enters. Willy wonders what happened to the diamond watch fob that Ben gave to him when he came from Africa. Linda reminds him that he pawned it to pay for Biff's radio correspondence course. Biff and Happy come downstairs in their pajamas, and ask Linda how long Willy has been talking to himself. Linda says that this has been going on for years. Linda says that she would have told Biff, if he had an address where he could be reached. She also says that Willy is at his worst when Biff comes home, and asks Biff why they are so hateful to one another. Biff claims that he is trying to change.

Linda asks if he thinks about Willy. She says that if Biff has no feelings for his father, then he has no feeling for her either. Linda says that Willy is the dearest man in the world to her, and she won't have anyone making him feel unwanted. Biff tells her to stop making excuses for Willy because he never had an ounce of respect for her. Happy tells Biff not to call their father crazy. Biff says that Willy has no character. She tells him that Willy never made a lot of money, and that he is not the finest character, but he is a human being and "attention must be paid" to him.

Linda recounts the indignities that Willy has suffered, such as having to borrow money from Charley, and she calls Happy a philanderer. Biff wants to stay with his parents and promises not to fight with Willy. Biff says that Willy threw him out before because his father is a fake who does not like anybody who knows the truth about him. Linda says that Willy is dying and that he's been trying to kill himself. When Willy had his car accident in February, a woman saw that he deliberately smashed into the bridge railing to drive his car into the river. Willy has also tried to use the gas line to kill himself. Biff apologizes to Linda and promises to stay and try to become a success. Happy tells Biff that he never tries to please people in business, and that he whistles in the elevator.

Willy enters and tells Biff that he never grew up, and that Bernard does not whistle in the elevator. Biff says that Willy does whistle, however. Biff tells Willy that he's going to see Bill Oliver tomorrow to talk about the sporting good business. Happy says that the beauty of the plan is that it would be like they were playing ball again. Willy says that it is personality that wins the day. After the boys leave, Linda worries that Oliver won't remember Biff. Willy says that if Biff had stayed with Oliver he'd be on top now. Willy reminisces about Biff's ball game at Ebbets Field. He promises that the next day, he'll ask Harold if he can work in New York.

Biff finds Willy's rubber tubing behind the heater, and is horrified.

Analysis:

Miller, who returns to the present reality of the play in this segment, definitively establishes that the "flashbacks" occur in the context of Willy Loman's imagination and are a symptom of a larger dementia. Linda attributes her husband's hallucinations to Biff's presence, likely a sign that Biff reminds Willy of his failures as a father and as a businessman. However, the aspect of Willy's dementia that Miller focuses on during this segment of the play is the effect which it has on Linda. She has been the one to deal with Willy's erratic behavior alone, and doing so has made her age considerably. She is her husband's only defender, even when this role threatens to further exacerbate the conflicts that her family faces.

Miller deals with the indignities that Willy has suffered largely in terms of their effect on Linda. Since her existence and identity depend entirely on her husband, she staunchly defends him even when she realizes that he does not deserve to be defended. When she tells Biff that he cannot love her if he does not love Willy, Linda essentially chooses her husband over her children. She does this largely out of a strong feeling of duty toward Willy, for she knows that she is the only person who shows any concern for whether he lives or dies. Significantly, she centers her defense of Willy on his status as a human being and not his role as a father or husband. In these respects, Linda thus admits Willy's failures but nevertheless still maintains that "attention must be paid" to him. This declaration is significant in its construction; Linda declares that someone must regard Willy, but does not specify anybody in particular, thus avoiding a particular accusation of her sons. She condemns society in general for the ill treatment of her husband. As shown by Linda's condemnation of Happy's philandering and Biff's immaturity, Linda has few qualms about confronting her sons, yet when she demands attention for her husband she does not lay the blame only on them.

However, as Miller ennobles Linda as the long-suffering and devoted wife, he nevertheless shows Willy Loman to be undeserving of the respect and admiration Linda accords him. Biff emphasizes the fact that Willy has no sense of character and no respect for Linda, while hints about her physical appearance emphasize that Linda has aged considerably because of her demanding husband.

The final segment of the first act serves as a turning point for Biff, who realizes that he must "apply himself" as his parents have demanded of him. This revelation comes when Linda reveals that Willy has attempted suicide, finally focusing on the severity of his plight. Willy's suicide attempts are the mark of a failed man, but, more importantly, show the disparity between his aspirations and his actual achievements.

Biff's idea of a sporting goods business with his brother demonstrates the various character flaws of Biff and his father. It continues the family emphasis on appearance and personality over substance and achievement. Biff places his aspirations for success on Bill Oliver just as his father depended on Frank Wagner; Linda rightly worries about this, thinking that Bill Oliver may not remember Biff. Finally, the idea of the sporting goods business emphasizes the immaturity of Biff and Happy; both men want to work in sporting goods as an attempt to relive their youth and high school athletic glory. Even Willy himself sees this as an opportunity for himself and his sons to regain what they had lost decades before.

Act II.1

(Loman Home, Present Day):

Willy sits at the kitchen table the next morning. He claims that he slept well for the first time in months. Linda says that it was thrilling to see the boys leaving together, and says that Biff had a new, hopeful attitude. Willy dreams about buying a little place in the country. Linda asks Willy if he will talk to Howard today, and he says that he will tell Howard to take him off the road. Linda tells

him that he is supposed to meet the boys for dinner at Frank's Chop House. As soon as Willy leaves, Linda gets a phone call from Biff. She tells him that the pipe that Willy connected to the gas heater is gone; Willy must have taken it away himself. She is disappointed to learn that Biff is the one who took it away.

Analysis:

The second act begins with a dramatic shift in tone from the previous act, as Willy now appears cheerful and optimistic. Most importantly, the pipe connected to the gas heater with which Willy tried to commit suicide is now gone; Linda automatically assumes that Willy took it away himself, although this will come into question later in the play.

But the sense of optimism that dominates the start of the act is somewhat unfounded. His change in mood is entirely based on Biff's meeting with Bill Oliver, trumped up in Willy's mind to a sure-bet business plan. Willy has gone from suicidal to confident and cheerful in the matter of one night, despite the fact that nothing concrete has been resolved, because the dream of the Oliver plan gave him hope.

II.2

(Wagner's Office, Present Day):

Willy enters the office of his boss, Howard Wagner, a thirty-six year old man sitting at a typewriter table with a wire-recording machine. Howard plays Willy recordings of Howard's daughter and son. Willy tries to tell Howard what he wants, but Howard insists on playing a recording of his wife. Willy tells Howard that he would prefer not to travel anymore, but Howard says Willy is a road man. Willy says that he was in the firm when Howard's father used to carry him as a boy. Howard does not have a spot.

Willy talks about how being a salesman used to be a position that had personality in it and demanded comradeship and respect, but today there is no room for friendship or personality. Willy keeps asking for lower and lower salaries. Howard's father made promises to Willy, he cries, but Howard tells him to pull himself together, and then leaves. Willy leans on the desk and turns on the wire recorder. Willy leaps away with fright and shouts for Howard. Howard returns and fires Willy, telling him that he needs a good, long rest. Howard tells him that this is no time for false pride and he should rely on his sons.

Analysis:

In this segment of the second act, Arthur Miller uses Howard Wagner as a symbol of progress and innovation in contrast with Willy Loman's outdated notions of business tactics. Most of the details in Howard's office emphasize technological innovation and novelty, from his well-appointed, modern office to the recording machine that fascinates Howard. This shows that Howard is more interested in the future than the past, as he ignores Willy to consider his new machine. In contrast, Willy speaks not of his future with the company but with his history and past promises. That Willy is frightened by the recorder is a symbol of Willy's obsolescence within a modern business world; he cannot deal with innovation. Even his values, as he notes, belong to a different time. Willy speaks of a past time when being a salesman demanded respect and friendship, a time that has clearly passed, if it ever existed at all.

Willy once again falls prey to his idea that personality and personal relationships are critical factors in the business world. He cites the memory of Howard's father bringing Howard as a newborn to the office and his own role in helping to name the boy. While personally relevant, in terms of the business world this fact bears little weight.

II.3

(Loman Home, Past):

Howard exits and Ben enters, carrying his valise and umbrella. Willy asks him if he has secured the Alaska deal. The younger version of Linda enters, and she tells Ben that Willy has a great job in New York. She tells him not to go to Alaska. She wonders why everybody must conquer the world, and tells Willy that he's well-liked, and that Old Man Wagner promised that Willy would be a member of the firm someday. Young Biff enters with Young Happy. Willy insists that it is "who you know" that counts, but Ben leaves. Young Bernard arrives, and begs Biff to let him carry his helmet, but Happy wants to carry it. Willy prepares to escort them to the championship game. Willy tells Charley that he cannot go to Biff's baseball game because there is no room in the car. Willy is insulted when he thinks that Charley forgot about the game. Willy prepares to fight Charley.

Analysis:

Miller once again shifts the setting of the play to an earlier date in order to contrast Willy's present experiences with those of his idealized past. The reappearance of Ben is symbolic of the dreams Willy Loman has sacrificed for a more secure - and more mundane - existence. This segment gives some indication that Linda has, in some respects, limited her husband by forcing him to take a more stable path. She claims that not every man has to conquer the world, perhaps assuming that Willy Loman is not a man capable of doing so.

However, Miller reemphasizes Willy's belief in personal connections as the critical factor in business. By this point in the play, Willy's claim that it is "who you know" that counts has been thoroughly disproved, for Willy was fired by a man whom he has known since his birth.

Bernard and Charley's reappearance in this segment foreshadow their later roles in the play. This segment reestablishes the contentious relationship between Charley and Willy, who is shocked to think that Charley may not be in total awe of Biff's athletic achievements. It also reiterates the way in which Bernard remained in Charley's shadow. The dynamic among the characters has obviously shifted, and Miller's insertion of a flashback at this point foreshadows a later development of the dynamic between the Lomans, Bernard, and Charley.

II.4

(Charley's Office, Present Day):

Bernard, now mature, sits in Charley's office. Willy talks to Bernard, who tells him that he's going to leave for Washington soon. Willy tells Bernard about the deal with Bill Oliver, and asks Bernard his secret. Willy wonders why Biff's life ended after the Ebbets Field game. Bernard asks why Willy did not tell Biff to go to summer school so that he could pass math. Around that time, Biff disappeared for a month to see his father in New England, and when he came back he burned his UVA sneakers. Bernard wonders what happened in New England.

Charley enters and tells Willy that Bernard is going to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court. Charley gives Willy some money. Willy complains about Howard firing him, but Charley says that things like naming a child do not matter: the only thing that matters is what you can sell. Charley offers him a job again, even though he admits that he does not like Willy and Willy does not like him. Willy refuses once more, and Charley realizes that the sticking point is jealousy. Charley gives him money for insurance, and Willy remarks that a person is worth more dead than alive. Willy tells Charley to apologize to Bernard for him, and, on the verge of tears, tells Charley that he is his only friend.

Analysis:

Miller juxtaposes the unsuccessful Willy Loman with the great successes of Bernard and Charley in this segment. Miller continues to develop Willy Loman as a pathetic and deranged character who hallucinates and shouts to himself as he walks through the hallway of an office building. Bernard, in contrast, is a successful man, esteemed in his profession and content with his private life.

The portrayal of Bernard that Miller offers in this segment is ironic, considering Willy's previous comparisons of Bernard to his sons. While Willy believed that Bernard's more serious behavior and lack of "personality" would hobble him once he entered the business world, the opposite seems to be the case. While Happy is at best moderately successful and unhappy, and Biff is an outright failure, Bernard, whom Willy believed to have skills not applicable to the business world, is an obvious success. Bernard himself even seems to realize that Willy's expectations for his sons have been thwarted, and holds back from telling Willy the reason why he is going to Washington in order to avoid embarrassing him.

Bernard also serves to elucidate the development of the relationship between Willy and Biff Loman. Bernard can pinpoint a turning point in their relationship, citing a specific time after which Biff's attitude toward his father changed. Bernard seems to attribute this occurrence to Biff's current failure, claiming that Biff never wanted to go to summer school or graduate high school after visiting his father in New England. Miller makes it clear that Willy is directly responsible for Biff's failures. According to Bernard's interpretation of the event, Biff is nearly self-destructive, ruining his chances for a stable future in order to spite his father.

Charley also represents a degree of success and serenity that Willy is unable to achieve. It is Charley who best identifies the problem with Willy's philosophy of business: Willy wrongly believes that it is personality and intangible factors that are critical to success, while Charley knows that it is in fact more concrete factors such as sales that determine whether a man is successful. Charley also realizes the degree to which Willy is jealous of him and his son; he believes that this is the reason that Willy will not accept a job from him.

The relationship between Charley and Willy is not based on affection, but rather on custom and a developed sense of obligation. Charley admits that he does not like Willy and Willy dislikes him in return, but Charley is in fact Willy's only friend. This declaration is one of the few moments in the play in which Willy seems to realize and acknowledge his own pathetic state. This is accompanied by Willy's claim that a person is worth more dead than alive, which emphasizes Willy's suicidal state and foreshadows events to come.

II.5

(Restaurant, Present Day):

At the restaurant, Stanley the waiter seats Happy. A lavishly dressed girl enters and sits at the next table, and Happy tells Stanley to bring her champagne. Biff enters as Happy flirts with the girl, who is named Miss Forsythe. Happy tells Miss Forsythe that Biff is a quarterback with the New York Giants. Happy asks the girl out, and asks her if she can find a friend for Biff. The girl exits, and Happy remarks that girls like that are why he can't get married.

Biff tells Happy that he did a terrible thing. Bill Oliver did not remember Biff, and walked away when Biff approached him. Biff stole his fountain pen, though. Biff insists that they tell their father tonight to prove that Biff is not lying about his failures just to spite Willy. Happy tells him to say that he has a lunch date with Oliver tomorrow and to prolong the charade, because Willy is never so happy as when he is looking forward to something. Willy arrives, and tells his sons that he was fired. Although Biff tries to lie to Willy about his meeting with Oliver, Biff and Willy fight when Willy

thinks that Biff insulted Bill Oliver. Biff finally gives up, and tells Happy that he cannot talk to Willy. As Biff tries to explain, Willy imagines himself arguing with Young Biff and Young Bernard about Biff failing math, and imagines Bernard telling Linda that Biff went to Boston to see Willy. Biff continues to explain what happened while Willy imagines the woman in the hotel room. Miss Forsythe returns with another woman and Willy leaves. Biff and Happy argue over who should do something about their dad. Happy denies to the women that Willy is their father.

Analysis:

While Biff's failures and flaws have been a major preoccupation throughout the play, this segment demonstrates how detrimental Happy's character flaws can be. A compulsive womanizer, Happy tells blatant lies to the women that he meets, claiming that Biff is a professional athlete, then gets rid of his father in favor of seducing Miss Forsythe. In the final, most cruel move that Happy makes, he denies that Willy is his father, thus repudiating his father even more callously than Biff has done.

Biff, in contrast, merely continues his pattern of foolish mistakes in this segment. While Biff may have started to fail in order to spite his father, by this point his self-destructive behavior is ingrained. His plan to ask Bill Oliver for money was dubious at best, but Biff made it even more unlikely by pseudo-accidentally pocketing his fountain pen. In contrast to Happy, Biff does show some concern for his father's feelings; he worries that Willy will think that Biff intentionally botched the meeting with Bill Oliver.

The Loman sons' insistence on framing Biff's meeting with Bill Oliver in the best possible terms shows that their true interest in the sporting goods business is not for personal gain, but rather to please their father. Biff believes that he cannot tell Willy the truth about his meeting with Bill Oliver, because Willy will think that Biff purposely sabotaged the meeting as an affront to him. Biff's concern is primarily what his father thinks of him and what affect this will have on him; his failure during the meeting, with the exception of his embarrassment over taking the fountain pen, is barely a consideration unless it involves how his father will react to the event. Miller demonstrates that in spite of his weakness, Willy still dominates his sons, whose actions are based on how their father will react to them.

Willy's hallucination about Young Biff failing math and visiting him in Boston gives a greater indication of the reason why Biff garnered such animosity toward his father. Willy ties Biff's visit to Boston with his affair in the same city; the likely confrontation between Willy's life at home as a father and his life on the road as a salesman seems to provide the motivation for Biff's spiteful, self-destructive behavior.

II.6

(Hotel Room, Past):

Willy follows the Woman as he buttons his shirt. Someone knocks on the door, but Willy says he is not expecting anybody. The Woman claims that Willy ruined her, and that whenever he comes to the office she will make sure that he goes right through to the buyers. The knocking persists, and Willy tells the Woman to stay in the bathroom while he opens the door. It is Biff, who tells Willy that he flunked math. Biff begs Willy to talk to Mr. Birnbaum, his teacher, to convince him to pass Biff.

Biff hears the woman laugh, and she enters from the bathroom. Willy tells Biff that the woman is staying in the next room, which is being painted, so he let her take a shower in his room. Willy throws the woman out, as she claims Willy promised to buy her a pair of stockings. Willy tries to explain that the woman is a buyer, but Biff starts to cry. Willy admits that he had a relationship with the woman, but claims that it means nothing to him, and that he was lonely.

Analysis:

Once again returning to the Loman family's past, Miller finally gives a full explanation for Biff's refusal to take a summer school course, the critical event that determined his chain of failures. It is Willy's infidelity that prompted the change in Biff, as he learned that his father was having an affair with the woman in Boston. Yet the revelation of this reason for Biff's bitterness is not the only example in this segment of how Willy has carelessly ruined the lives of those around him. Willy has ruined the reputation of the Woman, but can offer nothing to her in return. Despite the promises that he has made to her, he denies and discards her. This parallels Willy's earlier insistence that Linda should not mend stockings. Stockings serve as a symbol of what Willy can provide and as a measure of his success.

II.7

(Restaurant, Present Day):

At the restaurant, Stanley stands in front of Willy as Willy shouts at the waiter, thinking that he is Biff. Stanley tells Willy that his boys left with the two women and said that they will see him at home. Stanley tries to help him. Willy asks if there is a seed store in the neighborhood, because he has to buy some seeds to plant. Willy leaves for the seed store.

Analysis:

Yet another humiliation for Willy Loman occurs in this segment: his sons have abandoned him at the restaurant, leaving him alone with the waiter while they go out with the two superficial women. Willy's preoccupation with seeds is symbolic of his realization that he has created nothing permanent or worthwhile in his life. As a salesman, he is merely a liaison for what others create, while the family that he made himself has abandoned him at the restaurant. Seeds symbolize something more permanent and tangible even than his family. This new theme also relates back to Willy's seeming embarrassment at Ben's notion that he cannot hunt or fish in Brooklyn; Willy worries that, as a salesman, he is not close enough to nature. His wish to plant seeds is a way to compensate for this deficiency.

II.8

(Loman Home, Present Day):

Happy and Biff return home to find their mother there. Happy gives her flowers, and tells Linda that he and Biff met two girls. Linda knocks the flowers to the floor at Biff's feet. She asks whether they care if their father lives or dies. She says that they wouldn't even abandon a stranger at the restaurant as they did their father. Linda asks Happy if he had to go to his "lousy rotten whores" tonight, but Happy insists that all they did was follow Biff around trying to cheer him up. Linda throws them out, calling them a pair of animals. Linda says that Willy didn't have to say anything to her because he was so humiliated that he nearly limped when he entered the house. Biff insists that he talk to Willy, but Linda refuses to let him.

They hear a noise outside; it is Willy planting his seeds in the garden. They find Willy outside, carrying a flashlight, a hoe and a handful of seed packets. Willy imagines that he talks to Ben about his own funeral. He says that people will come from miles around, because he is well-known and well-liked, but Ben says he is a coward. Biff tells Willy that he is not coming back anymore and that he has no appointment with Oliver. Willy does not believe Biff, and tells him that he cut down his life for spite. Willy refuses to take the blame for Biff's failure. Biff takes the rubber tube out of his pocket and puts it on the table. Biff asks if it is supposed to make him feel sorry for his father. Biff tells his father that the reason they couldn't find him for months was because he was in jail for

stealing a suit, and that he has stolen something at every good job since high school. Biff says that he is a dime a dozen, and so is Willy, but Willy insists that neither of them are unimportant.

Crying, Biff asks Willy to give up his phony dream. Willy is amazed to realize that Biff likes him. Linda says that he loves him. Willy can't believe Biff cries for him. Happy tells Linda that he will get married and change everything. Everybody goes to sleep but Willy, who remains in the kitchen talking to Ben. He imagines what wonderful things Biff could accomplish with \$20,000 insurance money. Linda calls from her bedroom for Willy to come to bed, but Willy runs out of the house and speeds away in his car. Biff and Happy don jackets, while Linda walks out in mourning clothes and places flowers down on Willy's grave.

Analysis:

The final sequence of the second act parallels the end of the first act in structure and emotional resolution. Linda once again acts as the conscience and voice of reason in the household, berating Biff and Happy for their lack of concern for their father. Biff and Happy, in turn, resolve to do improve themselves: Happy decides to settle down, while Biff breaks down emotionally and cries for his father. Biff admits that he was unavailable for months not because he did not care to contact his parents, but rather because he was in jail. This contradicts earlier indications that he did not care for his parents.

The final confrontation between Biff and Willy seems aligned along different concerns for each man. While Biff focuses on Willy's false dreams for himself and for his sons, Willy seems concerned only with what his sons think of him. Willy still retains a belief that Biff and Happy are important people capable of great success, while Biff takes the more realistic view that they are common people incapable of achieving their unrealistic dreams. This returns to the theme of Willy's boundless aspirations, which guarantee that he will never be satisfied with any degree of success in his real life. It is this inability to fully achieve success that drives Willy Loman to suicide.

Willy Loman's suicide can be interpreted as a noble sacrifice, driven by the belief that Biff may go into business with the insurance money he gained from his death. Paradoxically, Willy's suicide may be related to his reconciliation with his elder son; having realized how much Biff cares for him and convinced that Biff does not behave out of spite, Willy can now sacrifice himself for his son.

Analysis of Requiem

Charley tells Linda that it is getting dark as she stares at Willy's grave. Deeply angered, Happy tells Linda that Willy had no right to commit suicide. Linda wonders where all of the people that Willy knew are. Linda says it is the first time in thirty-five years that she and Willy were nearly free and clear financially, because Willy only needed a little salary. Biff says that Willy had the wrong dreams and that he never knew who he was. Charley says that "nobody dast blame this man," for Willy was a salesman, and for a salesman there is no rock bottom to the life. A salesman has to dream.

Biff asks Happy to leave the city with him, but Happy says that he's going to stay in the city and beat the racket, and show that Willy did not die in vain. Charley, Happy and Biff leave, while Linda remains at the grave. She asks why Willy did what he did, and says that she has just made the last payment on the house today, and that they are free and clear.

Willy Loman's funeral is a cruel and pathetic end to the salesman's life. Only his family and Charley attend, while none of his other customers, friends, or colleagues bother to pay their respects. However, the funeral rests primarily on Willy's status as a salesman: it is the character of a salesman that determined Willy's course of action, according to Miller. For a salesman, there are only dreams and hope for future sales. Happy and Biff interpret Willy's suicide in terms of these business dreams: Happy wishes to stay in the city and succeed where his father failed, while Biff

rejects the business ethos that destroyed his father and plans to leave New York. Both Happy and Charley frame Willy Loman as a martyr figure, blameless for his suicide and noble in his aspirations, repudiating the humiliations that Willy suffered during the course of the play.

The play ends on an ironic note, as Linda claims that she has made the final payment on their house, creating a sense of financial security for the Lomans for the first time. Willy Loman worked for thirty-five years in order to build this sense of security and stability, yet committed suicide before he could enjoy the results of his labor.

Death of a Salesman Character List

Willy Loman

A sixty year old salesman living in Brooklyn, Willy Loman is a gregarious, mercurial man with powerful aspirations to success. However, after thirty-five years working as a traveling salesman throughout New England, Willy Loman feels defeated by his lack of success and difficult family life. Although he has a dutiful wife, his relationship with his oldest son, Biff, is strained by Biff's continual failures. As a salesman, Willy Loman focuses on personal details over actual measures of success, believing that it is personality and not high returns that garner success in the business world.

Biff Loman

The thirty-four year old son of Willy Loman, Biff was once a star high school athlete with a scholarship to UVA. But he never attended college nor graduated from high school, after refusing to attend summer school to make up a flunked math class. He did this primarily out of spite after finding out that his father was having an affair with a woman in Boston. Since then, Biff has been a continual failure, stealing at every job and even spending time in jail. Despite his failures and anger toward his father, Biff still has great concern for what his father thinks of him, and the conflict between the two characters drives the narrative of the play.

Linda Loman

The dutiful, obedient wife to Willy and mother of Biff and Happy, Linda Loman is the one person who supports Willy Loman, despite his often reprehensible treatment of her. She is a woman who has aged greatly because of her difficult life with her husband, whose hallucinations and erratic behavior she contends with alone. She is the moral center of the play, occasionally stern and not afraid to confront her sons about their poor treatment of their father.

Happy Loman

The younger of the two Loman sons, Happy Loman is seemingly content and successful, with a steady career and none of the obvious marks of failure that his older brother displays. Happy, however, is not content with his more stable life, because he has never risked failure or striven for any real measure of success. Happy is a compulsive womanizer who treats women purely as sex objects and has little respect for the many women whom he seduces.

Charley

The Lomans' next door neighbor and father of Bernard, Charley is a good businessman, exemplifying the success that Willy is unable to achieve. Although Willy claims that Charley is a man

who is "liked, but not well-liked," he owns his own business and is respected and admired. He and Willy have a contentious relationship, but Charley is nevertheless Willy's only friend.

Bernard

Bernard is Charley's only son. He is intelligent and industrious but lacks the gregarious personality of either of the Loman sons. It is this absence of spirit that makes Willy believe that Bernard will never be a true success in the business world, but Bernard proves himself to be far more successful than Willy imagined. As a grown-up, he is a lawyer preparing to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court.

Ben

Willy's older brother, Ben left home at seventeen to find their father in Alaska, but ended up in Africa, where he found diamond mines and came out of the jungle at twenty-one an incredibly rich man. Although Ben died several weeks before the time at which the play is set, he often appears in Willy's hallucinations, carrying a valise and umbrella. Ben represents the fantastic success for which Willy has always hoped but can never seem to achieve.

Howard Wagner

The thirty-six year old son of Frank Wagner, Willy Loman's former boss, Howard now occupies the same position as his late father. Although Willy was the one who named Howard, Howard is forced to fire Willy for his erratic behavior. Howard is preoccupied with technology; when Willy meets with his new boss, he spends most of the meeting demonstrating his new wire recorder.

Stanley

Stanley is the waiter at the restaurant where Willy meets his sons. He helps Willy home after Biff and Happy leave their father there.

The Woman

An assistant in a company in Boston with which Willy does business, this nameless character has a continuing affair with Willy. The Woman claims that Willy ruined her and did not live up to his promises to her. When Biff finds the Woman in Willy's hotel room, he begins his course of self-destructive behavior.

Miss Forsythe

An attractive young woman at the restaurant, who serves the play by allowing Happy to demonstrate his womanizing and seduction habits.

The American Dream in 'Death of a Salesman'- Definition: The American Dream - MONEY, POWER, LUXURY

Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman" is the struggle each character encounters as they try to pursue and define their American Dream.

The American Dream is based on the ideology that everyone, no matter what his origins are, can be successful through his own effort and by cultivating his qualities. The old American Dream was about the desire of a land, where life should be better, fuller and richer for every man.

The old American Dream was in the minds of the early settlers, who fled from Europe to America. They left Europe, because of the monarchy, which was still suppressing the middle classes. They wanted to leave their past behind. They were fed up with the old, obsolete system. A poem, written by Goethe emphasizes the opinions about the people's past, which was mainly determined by the monarchs. The line: "You don't have decayed castles" embodied their hope and shows, that the old system is out of date. They preferred making a new start now; looking into the future, something which is still significant for Americans today. In America, there has never been any monarchy. That is why many people dreamt of America, where everybody should be free, equal and successful. They dreamt of a perfect society, where the origins should not matter and where everybody should be able to reach whatever he wants to reach. The opportunities should correspond to the own abilities and achievement and not to the circumstances of birth and position. In Europe, there has been a difference between people because of their social status, which cannot be gotten over. But it was very difficult for them to start a new life. That is why it is mainly described as a dream. Money played an important role, too. Not everybody could afford leaving Europe. The American dream was also laid down in the Declaration of Thomas Jefferson, where it is expressed, that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are self-evident rights of the individual.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

And even if they were not able to implement the grand desires they had, they could move westwards. Once there, they could make a new beginning. But soon the idea of a perfect society was perverted into the cliché "from rags to riches". The rank of a person should not be a barrier or influence the future of a person. A wishful thinking which stands for the motivating force of the American civilisation.

The American Dream is represented principally by three characters in the play:

- 1.) Willy's father represents the pioneer spirit. In the days of the gold rush he leaves the family and goes to Alaska. Willy cannot become like him because the time of the pioneers belongs to a past epoche.
- 2.) Ben represents rugged individualism and sudden wealth. Willy, however, is not as adventurous as Ben. He lacks Ben's daring and recklessness.
- 3.) David Singleman represents the success which is due to popularity and personal relationships, but like Willy's father, Singleman belongs to another time. Moreover, it is not certain whether ***respect, and comradeship, and gratitude*** (page 87, line 3f.) of those days really did exist or whether they are only a product of Willy's romantic view of the past.

The "rags to riches" idea—where hard work and persistence, coupled with high hopes and inner and outer struggles that often accompany it, should lead to success—seems timelessly relatable and represents one of the central themes of the story.

Miller fabricated the character of a salesman without an identified product, and the audience connects with him that much more.

Creating a worker broken by a vague, unfeeling industry stems from the playwright's socialist leanings, and it has often been said that "Death of a Salesman" is a harsh criticism of the American Dream. However, according to Miller, the play is not necessarily a critique of the American Dream as our forefathers thought of it.

Happy's American Dream

When it comes to Willy's sons, they each appear to have inherited a different side of Willy. Happy, despite being a more static and one-sided character, is following in Willy's footsteps of self-delusion and pretenses. He is a shallow character who is content with going from job to job, as long as he has some income and can devote himself to his female interests.

Charley's and Bernard's American Dream

Willy's neighbor Charley and his son Bernard stand in opposition to Loman's family's ideals. The protagonist frequently puts both of them down, promising his sons that they will do better in life than their neighbors because they look better and are more liked.

Willy: That's just what I mean, Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer.

Yet, it is Charley who has his own business and not Willy. And it is Bernard's seriousness about school that ensured his future success, which is in stark contrast with the paths of the Loman brothers. Instead, Charley and Bernard are both honest, caring, and hard-working without the unnecessary bravado. They demonstrate that with the right attitude, the American Dream is indeed achievable.

Biff's American Dream

Biff is one of the most complex characters in this play. Although he has felt confused and angry since discovering his father's infidelity, Biff Loman does have the potential to pursue the "right" dream—if only he could resolve his inner conflict.

Biff is pulled by two different dreams. One is that of his father's world of business, sales, and capitalism. Biff is captured by his love and admiration for his father and struggles to decide what is the right way to live. On the other hand, he also inherited his father's sense of poetry and love for the natural life that Willy didn't allow to fully develop. And so Biff dreams of nature, the great outdoors, and working with his hands. Biff explains this tension to his brother when he talks about both the appeal and the angst of working on a ranch:

BIFF: There's nothing more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt. And it's cool there now, see? Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not getting anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old. I oughta be makin' my future. That's when I come running home.

By the end of the play, Biff realizes that his father had the "wrong" dream. He knows that Willy was great with his hands (he built their garage and put up a new ceiling), and Biff believes that Willy should have been a carpenter or should have lived in another, more rustic part of the country. But instead, Willy pursued an empty life. He sold nameless, unidentified products, and watched his American Dream fall apart.

During the funeral of his father, Biff decides that he will not allow the same thing to happen to himself. He turns away from Willy's dream and, presumably, returns to the countryside, where good, old-fashioned manual labor will ultimately make his restless soul content

Rather, what it condemns is the confusion that enters when people take the material success for the end-all-be-all and elevate it above spirituality, connection with nature, and, most importantly, relationships with others.

Willy Loman's American Dream

To the protagonist of "Death of a Salesman," the American Dream is the ability to become prosperous by mere charisma.

Willy believes that charming personality, and not necessarily hard work and innovation, is the key to success. Time and again, he wants to make sure his boys are well-liked and popular. For example, when his son Biff confesses to making fun of his math teacher's lisp, Willy is more concerned with how Biff's classmates react than with the morality of Biff's action:

BIFF: I Crossed my eyes and talked with a lithp.

WILLY [laughing]: You did? The kids like it?

BIFF: They nearly died laughing!

Of course, Willy's version of the American Dream never pans out:

- Despite his son's popularity in high school, Biff grows up to be a drifter and a ranch-hand.
- Willy's own career falters as his sales ability flat-lines.
- When he tries to use "personality" to ask his boss for a raise, he gets fired instead.

Willy is very much concerned with being somebody and paying off his mortgage, which in themselves aren't necessarily bad goals. His tragic flaw is that he fails to recognize the love and devotion that surround him and elevates the goals prescribed by society above all else.

Ben's American Dream

One person Willy really admires and wishes he was more like is his older brother Ben. In a way, Ben embodies the original American Dream—the ability to start with nothing and somehow make a fortune:

BEN [*giving great weight to each word, and with a certain vicious audacity*]: William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich!

Willy is envious of his brother's success and machismo. But Willy's wife Linda, one of the characters who can actually distinguish from true and superficial values, is frightened and concerned when Ben stops by for a brief visit. To her, he represents wildness and danger.

This is displayed when Ben hypes around with his nephew Biff. Just as Biff starts to win their sparring match, Ben trips the boy and stands over him with the "point of his umbrella poised at Biff's eye."

Ben's character signifies that a few people can achieve the "rags to riches" version of the American Dream. Yet, Miller's play also suggests that one must be ruthless (or at least a bit wild) in order to achieve it.