



Death of a Salesman

Study Guide by Course Hero



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👁 Book Basics

AUTHOR

Arthur Miller

YEAR PUBLISHED

1949

GENRE

Drama

ABOUT THE TITLE

Death of a Salesman refers to the literal and metaphorical death of salesman Willy Loman. The title comes from a line in the play; a character is said to die "the death of a salesman, in

his green velvet slippers" on his way to make another sale—a good death for a salesman.

🕒 In Context

Arthur Miller wrote *Death of a Salesman*, which was first performed in 1949, only a few years after World War II ended in 1945 and within a decade of the end of the Great Depression (1929–1939). Both eras had a significant impact on the work of Miller and on *Death of a Salesman* in particular, which is set in the late 1940s in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Boston.

The Great Depression

With the crash of the stock market in 1929, America plummeted into the worst economic downturn it had ever faced. Many banks, companies, and individual families lost everything, leaving a bruised national psyche that lacked confidence about the future.

For Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* illustrates the personal effects of the Great Depression. The shattered dreams of Miller's family, and of the American people, are reflected in the shattered dreams of Willy Loman. As the protagonist of *Death of a Salesman*, Willy is unable to attain financial or emotional stability despite a lifelong career as a salesman and a long marriage to a faithful and devoted wife.

World War II

The limping U.S. economy improved as parts of the globe plunged into World War II in 1939. The economy shifted into high gear as manufacturers began to develop mechanized weaponry, communication technology, advancements in medicine, and improved transportation to support the war

effort. By the time the war ended in 1945, new technologies focused on domestic improvements, including everything from washing machines and refrigerators to automobiles.

Turning away from the horrors of the Great Depression and the war to the reaffirmation of life back at home, many Americans availed themselves of new technology, creating and embracing a new American consumerism. Thanks to advertising and the new mood of optimism, many people believed they could "have it all"—a nice home, a happy family, and all the products that could keep life running smoothly.

The American Dream

The well-known phrase "the American Dream" was first used by historian James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*. In part Adams describes the dream as a place where "life should be better and richer and fuller ... with opportunity for each according to ability." However, he cautions that the dream is not focused on "motor cars and high wages" but rather on a "social order" in which people are empowered to reach their highest capabilities and "be recognized by others for what they are," an idea Willy Loman returns to again and again as he wrestles with the importance of being well liked.

However, the goal of making the American Dream something concrete rather than philosophical has often eluded Americans such as Willy Loman, as they have struggled to define it within the reality of American living. Some have translated the dream into materialism, while others emphasize simple living. Some view America as the land of opportunity, where everyone has an equal chance of reward as the result of a productive work ethic. Still others argue that aspects of culture such as poverty, classism, racism, and sexism keep the dream elusive for millions of Americans. Writer Thomas Byrne Edsall cautions that America's "growing gulf between the affluent and middle classes [is] anathema to the American Dream." However, for Eleanor Roosevelt, the American Dream remained an "essential task" for Americans, who must be constantly reminded of its "brightness ... splendor and beauty." These contrasting statements testify to the continuing challenges for Americans of both defining and achieving the American Dream.

The American Dream of the 1940s is reflected in Willy Loman's desires to achieve social recognition and material success, but his sense of optimism has long been frustrated, and the technology that promises to make life better and more fulfilling

perpetually frustrates Loman. In the end, the promises of the future ring hollow as Loman's sense of identity is unfulfilled, his relationship with his older son is fractured, and he is unable to adapt to the changing world around him.

Author Biography

Arthur Asher Miller was born into a Jewish immigrant family in New York City on October 17, 1915. Miller's father, a small-business owner in Manhattan, manufactured coats, while Miller's mother taught. The family enjoyed financial success until the stock market crashed in 1929, when, like many other Americans, they lost their savings. This loss forced them to relocate from affluent Manhattan to working-class Brooklyn.

Miller's experience as a teenager growing up in Brooklyn was a mixture of the American Dream and Great Depression-era reality. He was a well-known and well-regarded high school football star; yet after graduation he worked his way through college, earning \$15 per week at an auto parts warehouse. He also took jobs as a truck driver, waiter, and tanker crewman. These experiences never left Miller. Even after his success as a playwright, he continued to work in factories from time to time, saying, "Standing eight hours a day at a machine in one place, you know what it's about."

The effects of the Great Depression on Miller's family and the country would later influence Miller's work and characters, including the ambitions and dissatisfactions of the main character, Willy Loman, in *Death of a Salesman*. *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson wrote that Willy Loman is a man haunted by "the phantom of his life" catching up with him: "suddenly, there is nothing."

Following its opening at the Morosco Theater in New York on February 10, 1949, *Death of a Salesman* became one of the best-known and most highly revered plays of the 20th century. *Death of a Salesman* received many awards, including the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best Play, securing Miller's reputation as one of the country's greatest playwrights. The play has been staged countless times since its original Broadway run, and the 1985 movie version starring Dustin Hoffman and John Malkovich was critically acclaimed.

Miller died on February 10, 2005, at age 89.

Characters

Willy Loman

Willy Loman is a 60-plus-year-old traveling salesman who lives in New York City and struggles to keep a grip on the present because of his deep disillusionment with the trajectory of his life. In his youth, Willy was abandoned by his father. During a trip to find his father, Willy met a successful traveling salesman and determined to become one himself, with the hope of gaining financial success, affirmation, and reputation. Frequently away from home, Willy turned to the company of another woman, and when his son Biff, then a high school senior, discovered his father's infidelity, their relationship changed forever. Willy's delusion builds as the play progresses, and at the end he commits suicide in exchange for life insurance money to provide for his family.

Linda Loman

Linda's primary roles as Willy's wife are supporter, advocate, and defender. Secondly, Linda is the mother of Biff and Happy. The tension of trying to keep her family functional motivates her character. In many ways, she is a typical housewife of her era, focused on her domestic responsibilities and her family.

Biff Loman

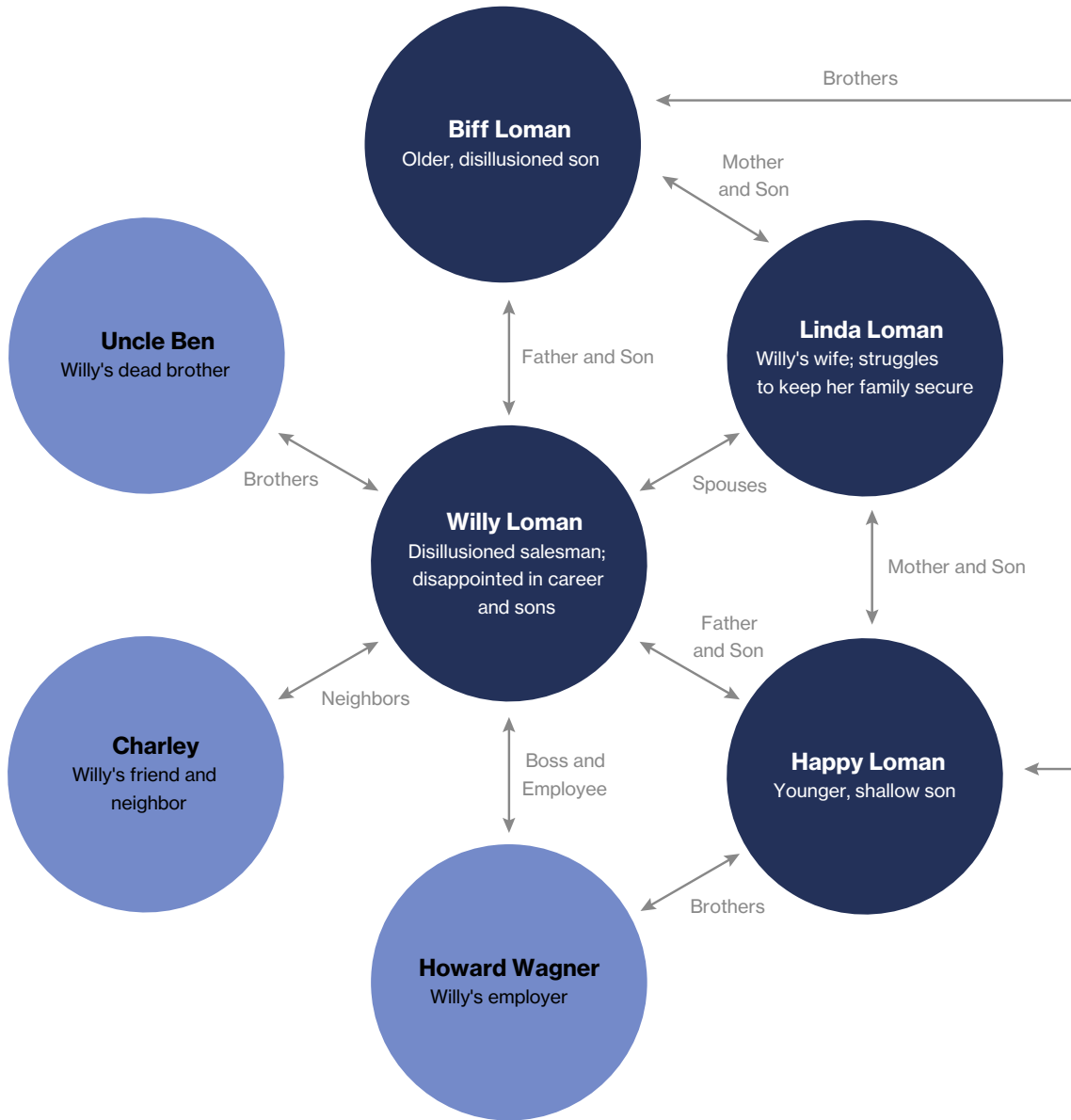
Biff is Willy and Linda Loman's older son, 34 years old at the time of the play. As a child, Biff idolized his father and worked hard to please him, especially through his high school football career. Like his father, Biff values being liked more than adhering to ethical rules and begins a practice of stealing, an act Willy does not condemn. His conflict with his father is driven by Biff's desire to finally come clean and live truthfully.

Happy Loman

Happy, the Lomans' younger son, is a 32-year-old womanizing deceiver who shares many of his father's characteristics. He

seldom presents the truth about himself and is driven only by his desires to find sexual and financial satisfaction. Even after his father's death, Happy is unchanged. He commits himself to fulfilling his father's shallow dream of becoming a successful salesman, always aiming to "come out number-one man."

Character Map



Full Character List

Character	Description
Willy Loman	A disillusioned 60-plus-year-old traveling salesman, Willy (a shortened form of William, meaning "protector"), no longer has a grip on reality and wavers back and forth between his memories and the present.
Linda Loman	Linda, whose name means "beautiful," is the conventional wife of Willy Loman. She helplessly recognizes her husband's disintegrating state of mind and tries to protect him from himself and his sons' judgment.
Biff Loman	Biff, whose name means "punch," is the oldest son of Willy and Linda Loman. At age 34, he tries to reconcile his disappointment in his father and in himself to find a way to live his life more truthfully and authentically.
Happy Loman	Happy, who is not happy, is the womanizing younger son of Willy and Linda Loman. At age 32, he lives life by his own rules without depth or honesty about himself.
Bernard	The son of the Lomans' neighbor Charley, Bernard grew up idolizing Biff. In his adulthood, Bernard is a successful family man and lawyer, who argues a case before the Supreme Court.
Charley	Charley, a successful businessman and longtime neighbor of the Lomans, kindly lends Willy money and even offers him a job, despite Willy's antagonism toward him.
Howard Wagner	Howard Wagner, Willy Loman's current boss, is the son of Willy's first boss; despite the long connection, Howard fires Willy for his poor job performance.
Jenny	Jenny is Charley's secretary.
Letta	A prostitute who meets Biff and Happy at Frank's Chop House.

Miss Forsythe	A prostitute who meets Biff and Happy at Frank's Chop House.
Stanley	Stanley is a waiter at Frank's Chop House, where the Loman men plan to dine.
The Woman	Years in the past, Willy Loman had an affair with a woman; when his son Biff discovers the affair, the father-son relationship is compromised forever.
Uncle Ben	Uncle Ben is Willy's older brother, now dead, who traveled to Africa at age 21 and made his fortune. His success haunts Willy.

Plot Summary

Death of a Salesman takes place in two acts, which cover a 24-hour period, and a Requiem, which is set several days later. The setting is New York City in the late 1940s. Some of the action occurs at the Loman house in Brooklyn. Other action takes place in an office building and a restaurant in Manhattan.

The play begins with Willy Loman returning home late at night from a business trip. He has cut his trip short because he has been unable to make any sales and has nearly crashed the car several times. This is a recent trend for Willy, who is now only paid on commission. He cannot seem to get the sales he needs to earn a decent living. Willy's two adult sons, 34-year-old Biff and 32-year-old Happy, are also home; Biff has just returned from the West to try to find a career in the East.

Throughout the play, Willy moves back and forth between present reality and memories, at times speaking to characters from the past even while in the presence of his family. He recalls earlier times with his sons and the optimism they then had about the future. However, he is also haunted by aspects of his past. He recalls a woman he had an affair with years earlier. He also remembers his brother, Ben.

Willy is disappointed in his lack of success as a salesman—both financially and in terms of his reputation. After talking with his wife, Willy decides to meet with his boss and ask for a salaried position based in New York.

Willy is disturbed by memories of his brother, Ben, now dead,

who traveled to Africa as a young man and became rich in his 20s. Ben's success is a constant reminder to Willy of his own failure to "make something" of himself by becoming a wealthy businessman.

In a conversation with her sons, Linda Loman explains what she knows about Willy's state of mind. In his depression, he is secretly borrowing money from a neighbor and has at least considered suicide. Linda reveals that she finds a rubber tube in the basement with which Willy might asphyxiate himself. She pleads with her sons to reestablish their relationships with their father.

When Willy enters, the family discusses Biff's prospects. Torn between his love of working outdoors and the drive to be a success in the eyes of his father, Biff agrees to seek out an old employer, Bill Oliver, to try to get financial backing to start a sporting goods business with Happy.

Unfortunately, both Willy's and Biff's meetings go poorly. Bill Oliver refuses to give Biff the time of day, so he comes away empty-handed. Willy's boss, Howard, not only denies Willy's request to work locally, but he also fires him for poor performance.

When Happy, Biff, and Willy finally gather at Frank's Chop House that night for dinner—a meal intended to celebrate Biff's success—nobody is in the mood to party. Biff and Willy argue, and Willy's sons leave him at the restaurant while Willy is overwhelmed by memories of Biff's discovery of Willy's affair years ago in Boston. It becomes clear that Biff's disillusionment with his father—and perhaps with life—stems from the discovery that his father is not the fine, upstanding man he believed him to be.

Once Willy is back at home, his distress and disconnection from reality continue as he plants seeds in the backyard in the hope of building a garden. In his despair, he has an imaginary conversation with his brother, who reminds Willy that he has a life insurance policy worth \$20,000.

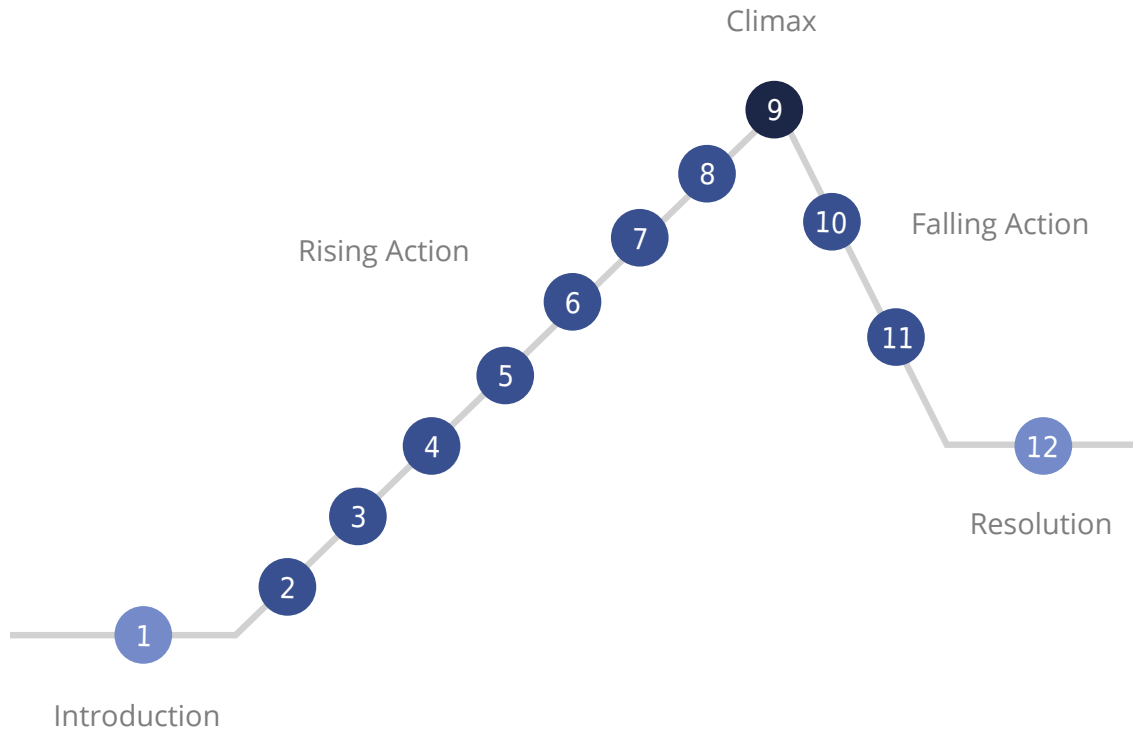
Back inside the house, Willy and Biff have a final confrontation in which Biff calls Willy a "phony" and announces a plan to leave the family for good. Yet Biff is also clearly saddened by these events and goes to his room crying. Moved by his son's tears, Willy decides to put his suicide plan into action to provide the funds his family needs for the future.

After everyone else has gone to bed, Willy leaves the house,

drives away quickly, and intentionally causes a car accident, which kills him.

In the Requiem of the play, the family and their neighbors, Charley and his son Bernard, reflect around the grave on Willy's life. Biff clearly recognizes that his father "had the wrong dreams." Happy is unable to face reality, declaring that Willy's life goals are admirable. Linda, although grieving deeply, acknowledges that the money from Willy's sacrifice has in fact set the family "free."

Plot Diagram



Introduction

1. Willy Loman returns home early from a business trip.

Rising Action

2. Willy and Linda discuss their financial situation and sons.
3. Willy remembers his sons' previous approval and affection.
4. Linda reveals Willy's true state of mind to her sons.
5. Biff visits Bill Oliver to ask for investment money.
6. Willy visits his boss, Howard, and gets fired.
7. Willy and his sons gather for dinner and argue.
8. Willy remembers Biff's discovery of Willy's affair.

Climax

9. After this discovery, Biff thinks of his father as a phony.

Falling Action

10. Willy determines to get life insurance money for his family.
11. Willy kills himself by crashing his car.

Resolution

12. Linda grieves at the grave, declaring financial freedom.

Timeline of Events

About 15 years earlier

Flashback: Willy and his sons talk as Bernard appears and suggests that Biff might fail math.

Same day and the past

Willy and Charley play cards; Ben shows up in short flashbacks to discuss his success.

Same day

The family discusses Biff's prospects, including an idea to meet with Bill Oliver.

Same day

Happy, Biff, and Willy meet for an unsuccessful and tense dinner at Frank's Chop House.

Several days later

Late 1940s; late at night

Willy returns home and talks to Linda about the difficulties of his job; his sons talk upstairs.

Past and the next day

Flashback: The Woman is introduced while, in the present, Willy gets angry with his wife, Linda.

Same day

Linda reveals to her sons that Willy is borrowing money and considering suicide.

Same day

Willy meets with his boss, Howard, to propose a new work arrangement and ends up getting fired.

Same day

After a final confrontation between Willy and Biff, Willy commits suicide by crashing his car.

Willy Loman's family and Charley bury Willy and reflect on his life.

🔍 Section Summaries

Arthur Miller did not break the play's acts into scenes. This study guide breaks down each act into sections as groups of characters change.

Act 1, Section 1

Summary

The play opens in the present between Willy and Linda Loman in their home.

The stage directions describe a flute that plays in the background as Act 1 begins. The audience sees the Lomans' "small, fragile-seeming" home in Brooklyn, New York. The house is shadowed and physically crowded by the large apartment buildings around it.

Late at night, Willy Loman returns from a business trip earlier than expected. Linda, his wife, gets out of bed to greet him. Willy confesses that he was unable to make any sales and became confused on his trip, forgetting that he was driving and veering off the road—something that has become a pattern. Willy's confusion will only increase as the play continues. His wife, ignoring his confusion, encourages him to talk to his boss about getting a stationary job in the corporate office, since he has been working for the company for many years and deserves it.

Willy and his wife then discuss their son Biff, who has recently returned to New York from the West and is asleep upstairs along with his brother, Happy. The couple talks about Biff's inability to find stable, high-paying work and the ongoing tension between Biff and Willy about what it means to be a success.

Analysis

As Willy describes losing his way on the trip, he is also expressing how he has lost his way in life, admitting that he "can't seem to—keep [his] mind to it." Working only on commission now, Willy is frustrated by his inability to reach the American Dream of financial success and social recognition for

which he has been striving his whole life.

The theme of Nature versus Man-Made Environment is also introduced in this first section. Willy, driving alone and lost, longs to be unfettered from the city and is drawn to nature, where "the trees are so thick, and the sun is warm." Back at his home, Willy complains of how boxed in they are with car-lined streets where "you can't raise a carrot in the back yard." The desire to grow something in nature circles back at the end of the play when a delusional Willy tries to plant a garden in his dark city yard.

Linda's unwavering love and devotion are clear from the beginning of the play, where the stage directions describe how "she more than loves him, she admires him," because she shares Willy's hopes and dreams. This description provides an early clue regarding Linda's intentional blindness to Willy's true nature.

As is his tendency, Willy moves from despairing about himself to judging others, in this case his son Biff. The ongoing tension between Willy and his son Biff over what it means to be successful becomes clear as Willy and Linda reflect on an argument the two men had earlier that day. Willy is unable to accept, despite his own struggles with the American Dream, that his son may not fit the mold his father wants to force him into. Willy accuses Biff of being lazy, while his mother claims he is merely lost.

Act 1, Section 2

Summary

Biff and Happy talk in their bedroom in the present as Willy talks to himself downstairs.

The setting shifts to the Lomans' sons' bedroom, where both 30-something men are staying because of Biff's visit. The stage directions state that both are dreamers who are lost in their own ways.

Happy confesses to his brother that his father is showing strange behavior, including confused driving and talking to himself or an imagined Biff.

The boys reminisce, particularly about their past experiences with women. They then discuss Biff's relationship with Willy

and Biff's ongoing struggle to decide what work will fulfill him in life.

Happy reflects on his own discontent with his low-level job, his loneliness, and the quality of people around him. Biff brainstorms about getting some investment money from a former employer, Bill Oliver, to start a ranch.

Downstairs, Willy is heard talking and laughing to himself in a confused way.

Analysis

Happy is a womanizer who speaks about women only as conquests, but he also acknowledges that despite having his own apartment, car, and women, he is still lonely. Presented with the option to leave with Biff, however, Happy reveals his real drive to be a success in his need to "show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade." Happy is a victim of his own self-deception and has no real moral center: he sleeps with the fiancée of the vice president of the store, and he acknowledges behaving this way repeatedly.

The conversation also reveals more about Biff's tension with his father as well as his own inner tension between the craving for an adventurous outdoor life and the need to succeed according to his father's formula for success. Biff admits that he does not even know what he is supposed to want. Biff, in many ways much like Willy, has a longing for nature and an abhorrence of the business life—phone calls, selling, keeping stock, and so on—particularly "when all you really desire is to be outdoors."

Biff's past is marked by some deception, which is first revealed when he brings up the idea of visiting Bill Oliver to ask for an investment. Apparently, when he worked for Oliver years ago, Biff stole a carton of basketballs and lost his job as a result. However, Happy and Biff both spin the truth about what really happened for their own benefit and to avoid facing the truth about themselves.

Act 1, Section 3

Summary

Willy experiences his first memory flashback with his boys and then with Linda.

Already talking to himself in the background, Willy now comes into view in a flashback.

He gave advice to his sons about women as they washed the car. Biff presented his father with a new football, one that he stole from the locker room. Willy's initial disapproval turned to admiration of his son's ambition.

The boys discussed a future trip together as well as the upcoming big football game, in which Biff later played a starring role. Biff and his father were eager to impress one another, and the family's hopes ran high that Biff would attend the University of Virginia. Bernard entered and raised the question about whether Biff would be able to graduate because of his poor grade in math.

When Linda entered, the couple discussed Willy's commission, the family's finances, and the money they owed on several of their appliances. Willy's optimism faded as he privately told his wife that people laughed at him and did not like him. Linda praised Willy for being the "handsomest man in the world" just as the laugh of an unknown woman is heard offstage.

Analysis

The tone of Willy's memory is initially happy as he looks back on his time with his sons and his dreams for his own and their futures. However, by the end of this section, he is full of doubt and disillusionment because he does not believe he is well liked. Fluctuating between self-promotion and despair, Willy is unable to make peace with who he really is.

Willy hints at the American Dream again when he describes the road trip he and his sons will take together sometime when it will "be open sesame for all of us ... I have friends," suggesting that connections with important friends will open doors to the American Dream for Willy and his sons. He also holds tightly to the hope that his son Biff will go to an important university and earn a name for himself. Yet as the phrase "open sesame" indicates, these dreams are illusions.

The incident with the stolen ball reveals some cracks in Willy's

moral code. Instead of playing the fatherly role and disciplining Biff, he embraces the notion that the rules do not apply to Biff because he is special and has the kind of ambition that makes a person successful. Willy makes similar exceptions for himself, as seen when his affair is revealed.

In this section of the play, the line between truth and lies continues to be murky. Is Willy always reliable when he speaks about his success, or is he spinning the truth to his own advantage? Willy adjusts the truth when he discusses his income with Linda, first suggesting that he is making a higher commission than he really is. It is only after further discussion that it becomes clear that they are struggling to make ends meet.

This section also reveals more about Willy's idea that being liked and having a good reputation are the keys to success. He explains that "the man who makes an appearance ... is the man who gets ahead" and brags that people up and down New England know who Willy Loman is.

Although Willy embraces an American Dream that promotes progress, he appears unable to accept some elements of a changing world. For example, the technological advances of the car and refrigerator cause him frustration and distress, revealing an ongoing cycle of consumption and repair. Like so much of the American Dream, the notion of deep satisfaction that stems from progress may be an illusion.

Act 1, Section 4

Summary

Willy's past affair is revealed, and the neighbor Charley offers Willy a job in the present.

Still in the past, Willy talks to the woman with whom he had an affair as a younger man and to whom he gave some new stockings. Gradually, the action changes to Willy talking to Linda, still in the past, about not mending stockings in front of him and Biff's need to study in light of his poor math grades.

Back in the present, Willy explains to Happy why he has returned early from his trip, and Charley, the next-door neighbor, shows up for a game of cards. During the game, Charley interjects a job offer for Willy, but Willy claims he does

not need a job.

Analysis

The first details of Willy's affair with The Woman are revealed. In addition to showing a new level of deceitfulness on Willy's part, it also shows his deep need to be liked. He is pleased when The Woman tells him that she picked him and that he is a wonderful man. Only a few lines later, Linda calls Willy "the handsomest man."

In the flashback, Willy gives the woman silk stockings, a luxurious and intimate gift at the time, even as his wife will repair her damaged ones. An offstage laugh from The Woman is heard again, continuing to haunt Willy and emphasize his deceit.

It is clear that Willy alternates between excessive praise of and excessive harshness toward Biff, never able to settle on a realistic view of his son or provide the guidance and leadership that Biff needs.

Willy is also unable to be truthful with his generous neighbor Charley, who is able to see through Willy's façade. Instead, Willy's pride makes him rude and disrespectful to someone he should view as a friend.

Act 1, Section 5

Summary

In an imagined scene from the past, Ben talks about his success to Willy.

As Charley and Willy continue to play cards, Ben Loman enters from the past. Willy asks him a number of questions about their past, including the fate of their father. Ben reveals that their father, a flute maker, took the family across the country before eventually abandoning them. Ben reveals his own tale of success in the diamond mines of Africa, where he became rich by the time he was 21.

Trying to impress Ben, Willy brags about his sons, who have been stealing, and asserts that he is raising them well. Ben reassures him that they are "outstanding, manly chaps!"

Analysis

A confused, dreamlike effect emerges as the past and present overlap and conversations are hard to follow. The confusion mirrors the confusion in Willy's own mind as he struggles to keep track of reality. He can no longer remember what is real and what is imaginary, what is past and what is present.

The symbol of Distant Lands, in the form of Alaska and Africa, appears, representing Willy's lost chance for escape and freedom. Willy asks Ben the question that has plagued his life: "What's the answer? How did you do it?" Willy reflects on how his own life might have been different if he had followed his brother. Ben repeats his story of success several times in this section of the play, making clear just how much his success eclipses and haunts Willy's.

The flute, a symbol of Willy's father, plays. Willy, who lives in Brooklyn, continues to struggle with his identity, the son of a "wild-hearted man." Insecurely, he defends himself and the way that he raises his sons, although he recognizes the clear difference between his sons' childhood and his own. It is clear that Willy is not grounded in enough of a sense of self to live his life with confidence, and he suffers from his father's betrayal of the family: "I still feel—kind of temporary about myself." Although he is nearing retirement age, Willy is still a wandering young man at heart.

Act 1, Section 6

Summary

In the present, Linda, Biff, and Happy discuss Willy's state of mind.

With Willy out of the house on a walk, Linda and her sons discuss Willy's fragile state of mind. Linda chastises both of her sons for their treatment of Willy and pleads with them to show him more respect and to come around more often. Biff defends himself and tells Linda that Willy has always treated her with disrespect, but Linda will not face that truth. Linda explains to her sons that Willy is not earning salary, is taking loans from Charley, and has tried to kill himself a number of times. In addition to car accidents, Linda discovers a length of pipe in the basement, presumably for a suicide by gas.

Feeling guilty, Biff agrees that it is best for him to try to find a job in the city to help support his parents. Quickly, however, Biff and Happy get into an argument regarding the definition of success.

Analysis

Linda's approach to Willy is unique among the other characters in the play. She is loyal and loving to Willy: "I won't have anyone making him feel unwanted and low and blue." Yet she suffers from her own form of self-deception. She is never able to say to Willy what he needs to hear about his own ambition and need to be liked. Additionally, she lets Willy treat her with disrespect and does not stand up for herself.

In some ways, Biff's inner conflict parallels his father's. He loves to be outdoors, but he feels the need to be successful in the eyes of the world, as well. He is more devoted to his own need to find a sense of success than he is to his family. He lives with an ongoing inner tension between the desire to be an outdoorsman and the desire to earn a name for himself in the business world.

Happy attributes Biff's lack of success in business in the past to an inner failing: "you never tried to please people." Here, Happy reinforces the ongoing theme of a good reputation as a key element in the American Dream.

Act 1, Section 7

Summary

In the present, the Loman family discusses Biff's prospects.

The whole family gathers in the house where the ongoing thread of the argument about Biff's choices and future is interwoven with optimism about the boys starting a sporting goods business. Willy fluctuates between harsh criticism of Biff and unrealistic praise. Willy is rude to Linda for almost anything she says, while Biff defends her, asking Willy not to yell at her.

Biff makes a plan to talk to a former boss about an investment. Willy agrees to talk to his boss, Howard, in the morning. The section ends with Biff taking the rubber tube out from behind the heater without his parents' knowing. This is the end of Act 1

and the end of that day.

Analysis

The theme of the American Dream and Disillusionment and the elements of financial and reputational success continue to develop. Willy mocks his son's dream of living in the West and self-deceptively presents himself as a fine figure in business: "Call out the name Willy Loman and see what happens! Big shot!"

But even as he is praising himself, Willy's insecurities crop up. He is paranoid about being insulted. Willy cannot seem to make up his mind about how to judge his son Biff because he cannot make peace with his own choices. No sooner does Willy criticize Biff than he praises him as a great investment for a business: "There's fifty men in the City of New York who'd stake him."

As the family discusses the possibility of a Loman Brothers sporting goods business, Happy reveals the deep need they all have for a sense of family to trump business success, hoping that "it'd be the family again" and there could be "the old honor, and comradeship"—something the family lacks in all their antagonism and self-deception. This broken family is missing the basic foundation it needs to deal with the world beyond the walls of its house.

Biff again draws attention to the disrespect with which Willy treats Linda, defending her and asking Willy not to yell at her. Yet Linda defends Willy, revealing her level of self-deception. Her identity is wrapped up in Willy and in the hope of his success rather than in an accurate perception of herself.

Act 2, Section 1

Summary

After an optimistic morning in the present, Willy visits his boss, Howard.

The sun is shining the next morning, and Willy cheerfully eats his breakfast, even smiling at Linda. Willy mentions that he would like to buy some seeds and plant something in the backyard. The pair discusses the future and their finances

before Willy leaves to meet his boss, Howard. Hopes are high that he will get a local position and that Biff will get the financial backing he needs. Willy is thrilled to learn that his sons have issued an invitation for dinner at Frank's Chop House.

In a long conversation in Howard's office, Willy makes his request for a new job, referencing his long history with the company and his relationship with Howard's father. Willy has been with the company since Howard was born. Willy also tells Howard the story of Dave Singleman, the salesman who inspired Willy to follow this career path. Instead of listening to Willy, Howard talks only about himself, his family, and a new recording device he has purchased. Then he fires Willy based on his recent performance. Willy is defeated.

Analysis

In the midst of an optimistic dialogue with Linda, the silk stockings appear again. Willy asks his wife to stop mending them—an ongoing symbol of both his long-standing lies to her about his affair and their true financial state.

In his optimistic state of mind, Willy tells Linda he will buy seeds to plant a garden—an impossibility given the lack of sunshine in the yard due to the high-rise buildings that surround the house. His desire to nurture a small piece of the natural world despite the reality of the situation reveals Willy's ongoing self-deception as well as his lack of control over the world around him.

Willy's battle continues with the advances of the modern, man-made environment—a world that Willy says he embraces. He is discouraged by the need to pay his insurance premium, the car mechanic, and the refrigerator repair. He bemoans the ongoing cycle of trying to get ahead. In Howard's office, the wire recorder creates a haunting sense of a future where people's voices can be disconnected from their bodies.

It is in Howard's office that Willy reveals his original motivation to be a salesman when he describes 84-year-old Dave Singleman, a man he met on a train. It is Dave Singleman who died "the death of a salesman," wearing "green velvet slippers" on a train during a business trip. Willy's long description goes unnoticed by Howard, a successful businessman who is too busy to listen to Willy.

Act 2, Section 2

Summary

Willy talks to Ben in a daydream and then talks to Charley in his office in the present.

Ben reappears in Willy's mind, inviting him to join him on his trip to Alaska. Willy declines at Linda's urging. Willy brags to Ben about Biff and Happy and asks Ben to stay and help raise the boys. Willy is unsure that he is a good father.

Ben departs the memory, and young Bernard races in. It is the day of the big football game and hopes are running high. Willy calls it "the greatest day of [Biff's] life."

The next setting is the present-day office of Charley, where the adult Bernard, now a successful lawyer, is visiting. Bernard and Willy discuss Biff, and Willy claims that Biff's life ended after that big football game and the failed math class. Bernard suggests something different—something happened to Biff after he went to visit Willy in Boston that summer.

Willy asks Charley for more money, and Charley again offers him work. Willy is too proud to accept the work, despite the fact that he has been fired. There is a flaw in Willy's character here in that he is too proud to accept work but not too proud to ask for money. Not only does Willy reject Charley's offer, but he is rude and disrespectful to him.

Analysis

The tension between nature and the man-made urban environment continues as Ben encourages his brother to embrace the natural world and travel with him to Alaska, but Linda pulls Willy back to the reality of his job in the city where he is "well liked." A defeated Willy breaks down and asks Ben, "What is the answer?"

Tension rises as it becomes clear that Biff discovered something during his summer trip to Boston that changed his life. Both Willy and Bernard trace the change in Biff to that time, although Willy associates it with Biff's failing math and Bernard associates it with the Boston trip.

When Willy turns to Charley, it seems that truth and friendship

might win out. Yet Willy's self-deception is so deep that he cannot come clean and state how bad things really are. The self-deceived Willy turns down work from the one true friend he has and continues to repeat his mantra that "if a man [is] impressive, and well liked," he can be successful in this world.

Charley and Bernard do not brag about themselves, particularly about the fact that Bernard will present a case before the Supreme Court, thus underlining a sharp contrast between their family and the Loman family, whose false pride stands in the way of truth and fulfilling relationships.

Charley foreshadows the play's outcome when he reminds Willy to pay his life insurance and says "nobody's worth nothin' dead."

Act 2, Section 3

Summary

The three Loman men meet at Frank's Chop House in the present.

Happy and Biff arrive independently at Frank's Chop House before their father arrives. In no time, Happy is picking up a woman and trying to procure one for his brother; both women are presumably prostitutes. Biff admits that he waited all day for Bill Oliver, who did not recognize him. In frustration, Biff went into Oliver's office and stole his expensive fountain pen. Distressed, Biff wants to come clean to his father and admit everything. Happy discourages him from telling the truth.

Willy arrives, and before Biff can confess as he wants, Willy confesses that Howard fired him. Pressured to keep things positive, Biff does not tell his father the truth. As Happy begins to weave a lie about Bill Oliver, Biff reluctantly goes along with it.

Analysis

The history of long-standing family lies continues to be exposed. Biff and Willy compete with each other in their need to confess the truth of the day. However, Biff is defeated by his father. Willy's confession about his firing, nevertheless, is quickly overshadowed by self-deception as Willy and Happy

work to create a new lie to cover the reality. Biff struggles between his own urge to finally come clean and the habit of spinning the truth to keep up the illusion of success. Here, Willy acts as a force who actively resists Biff's truth-telling.

Act 2, Section 4

Summary

The Loman men argue in the present, and Biff's discovery of his father's past affair is revealed.

Merging past and present, a young Bernard knocks on the door of the Lomans' house to tell Mrs. Loman that Biff has failed math. At the restaurant, Willy blames Biff for that past failure even as Biff tries to confess his theft of the fountain pen. Willy's frustration boils over, and he tells his son that "you're no good, you're no good for anything."

Willy's confusion and aggression increase. To calm him, Biff holds his father down and tells him that Bill Oliver is having lunch with them the next day. Just as quickly, Willy concocts a tale that Biff can tell to explain the theft of the fountain pen.

The two prostitutes, as well as the woman with whom Willy had an affair, appear amid the growing chaos. The action shifts to Willy and the woman in the hotel room in Boston. Biff shows up to confess that he has flunked math. He discovers the affair, begins to cry, and leaves shouting, "You fake! You phony little fake!"

Back at the restaurant, Willy, who has been abandoned by his sons, speaks to the waiter and leaves.

Analysis

The stage direction "the light of green leaves stains the house" provides another connection to nature that overshadows the chaos playing out in the restaurant.

Time and memory play tricks again, overlapping and adding confusion. Willy blames Biff for failing math when the real failure revealed is Willy's infidelity and its effect on his son. No longer does the young Biff admire his father and want to be like him. Instead, he announces that Willy is a phony. This

moment is the long-hinted-at turning point in Biff's life—the moment the older Bernard refers to when he says that something changed Biff during his trip that summer.

Yet although Biff knows his father's lies, Biff still cares for his father. Biff defends Willy to Happy, explaining that "you don't give a good goddam about him." It is Biff who takes the rubber hose out of the basement to protect his father, and it is Biff who tells the women that Willy is "a fine, troubled prince."

Willy's need to deny his guilt and shame muddies his memory and his ability to stay focused on the present. Unlike Biff, who wants to come clean, Willy's history of lies is too deep. He cannot face them in the light of day.

The stockings again appear as The Woman appeals to Willy for the stockings he promised. The stockings take on their full meaning as a symbol of betrayal when Biff sees them and says, "You—you gave her Mama's stockings!"

Act 2, Section 5

Summary

In the present, the boys return to the house for Biff and Willy's final argument before Willy drives to his death.

Happy and Biff return to home to Linda, who is furious with them for leaving Willy. Meanwhile, a confused Willy is out in the backyard planting seeds. His brother Ben shows up, and Willy talks to him about how good Linda has been and how much she has suffered. Willy considers the proposition of killing himself for the \$20,000 life insurance policy.

Biff tells his father that he plans to leave in the morning for the good of the family. Willy accuses Biff of leaving out of spite, and another argument ensues full of blame and rage. Biff, crying, goes upstairs. However, Biff's tears show Willy he is loved despite everything. Ben appears as a reminder of Willy's plan to get money for the family.

Willy sends Linda to bed, promising to be up soon. Instead, in his dreamlike state, Willy leaves with Ben and drives to his death. Act 2 ends with the sound of a car crashing and then the family gathered around Willy's grave several days later.

Analysis

Linda, who lives in her own world of self-deception, criticizes her sons for being with "your lousy rotten whores," as she defends her husband despite his own infidelity. She does not recognize the overlap between the past and present: the actions of the father are the actions of the sons.

In a last desperate attempt to regain a sense of himself as connected to nature, Willy plants seeds in the backyard, more confused over the distinctions between the past and the present than ever.

As Willy muses over his own funeral, he once again ruminates on the idea of having a good reputation and being known. He claims that his "funeral will be massive," with people coming from all over because "I am known!"

Biff's self-loathing is palpable; his mother cannot make him feel any worse than he already does. Yet he takes the bait again, arguing with his father a final time. The truth about the truth finally comes out: "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!" Nonetheless, new lies emerge regarding Happy's job title and Biff's jail time.

Biff says that neither he nor his father are leaders. Instead, they are workers who are so pumped up by the illusion of the American Dream that they cannot find any happiness in just doing their jobs. Before Willy dies, he ponders for a final time how he can still fulfill the American Dream for his family by getting them the money they need. He still believes that Biff's success will come through performance rather than self-fulfillment.

Willy ends his life by following his brother on "the boat" into the jungle, a natural rather than man-made environment.

Requiem

Summary

In the present, Linda, Charley, Biff, Happy, and Bernard attend Willy's funeral.

A few days later, Linda, Charley, Biff, Happy, and Bernard gather around Willy's grave; they are the only mourners. Linda

wonders whether the poor attendance is because people blame Willy for committing suicide, but Charley reassures her that people understand "it's a rough world." Biff and Happy disagree over their father's dreams. Biff argues that Willy had the wrong dreams; Happy adopts his father's dream of material success. A mourning Linda stays alone at the grave to weep as she tells Willy that they have just paid the last installment on the house and are debt-free.

Analysis

The meaninglessness of Willy's preoccupations with social appearance and recognition can be seen in the poor attendance at his funeral. The man who spent his adult life seeking approval from people has none.

Biff's reminiscence of his father is poignant, as Biff seems best able to assess his father's life. Biff recalls the nonfinancial features of his father, such as the effort he put into building their front stoop. "He had the wrong dreams," Biff says, and then, "He never knew who he was." In this analysis, Biff may finally reconcile the differences between his father and himself. This recognition may empower Biff to grow beyond the limitations of his father.

Happy is unable to accept that verdict, however, defending Willy's pursuit of the American Dream. Happy commits himself to the same dream, promising that "Willy Loman did not die in vain." Biff and Happy represent contrasting views of Willy and of the American Dream. Yet the play seems to favor Biff's view, as Biff is the only character whose understanding grows throughout the play, and Happy seems condemned to repeat Willy's mistakes.

In the end, Willy's family is financially better off—"free," as Linda puts it in the final lines of the play. However, the question of freedom lingers. Do the remaining family members have the needed skills to live truthfully? It seems that Biff may now have these skills, but Linda and Happy continue to reside in Willy's delusions. One symbol of these delusions, the flute, continues its melody at the play's end.

“” Quotes

*"The grass don't grow any more,
you can't raise a carrot in the back
yard."*

— Willy Loman, Act 1, Section 1

Willy experiences ongoing tension between the natural and the man-made environments. In the final pages of the play, Willy's delusion leads him to plant seeds in the backyard despite the reality that they will not grow, a metaphor for the American Dream and his family.

*"I don't know what the future is ...
what I'm supposed to want."*

— Biff Loman, Act 1, Section 2

In a conversation with his brother, Happy, Biff reveals his aimlessness. He is lost and does not know which purpose to serve—his own desire to be in the West in the outdoors or the American Dream of his father.

*"To suffer fifty weeks of the year
for the sake of a two-week
vacation ..."*

— Biff Loman, Act 1, Section 2

Biff does not recognize the reward of the American work ethic. He continues to describe his disillusionment with the American Dream and with his father, contrasting it with the kind of life he actually enjoys.

"I'll make it all up to you, Linda."

— Willy Loman, Act 1, Section 4

Willy maintains a sense of guilt regarding his affair. It is unexpected that in the end, Willy's final attempt to "make it up" to his wife is a suicide that provides her with financial security but robs her of her marriage.

*"I walked into the jungle, ... I walked
out ... I was rich."*

— Uncle Ben, Act 1, Section 5

Uncle Ben's statement of success plagues Willy his whole adult life. At times, Willy brags about his brother's success, and at other times, it is clear that Willy is disappointed in his own inability to achieve this kind of success for himself. There is no recognition that Ben's success may have come from unethical practices, just as Biff's stealing is overlooked to focus on his success.

*"Dad left when I was such a baby ...
and I still feel— ... temporary about
myself."*

— Willy Loman, Act 1, Section 5

Willy ties together his sense of betrayal and abandonment in the past with his need for kinship in the present as he begs Ben to stay.

*"A man is not a bird, to come and
go with the springtime."*

— Linda Loman, Act 1, Section 6

When Biff explains that he "can't take hold of some kind of life," Linda responds that a human being needs to settle down; he is not driven by the seasons as a bird is. Yet it is this social pressure to settle down rather than roam that destroys Willy

and threatens to destroy Biff.

"He's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him ... attention must be paid."

— Linda Loman, Act 1, Section 6

Linda defends her husband when she claims that all human suffering requires attention. Painfully, at the end of the play, Willy does "fall into his grave" without any fanfare or attention.

"It'd be the family again. There'd be the old honor, and comradeship."

— Happy Loman, Act 1, Section 7

Happy appeals to both Willy's and Biff's deep needs for family cohesion. He understands that even though they all long for financial success, there is something about family that can provide stability and happiness. Yet the Lomans struggle to define and achieve this quality of family.

"He died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers."

— Willy Loman, Act 2, Section 1

Willy describes the life and death of the salesman who inspires him, Dave Singleman. The outcome of Willy's romantic description of Singleman's life contrasts sharply with the reality of Willy's life. Willy takes his own life, alone and in debt. His funeral is attended only by his family and two friends.

"It's not what you do ... It's who you know and the smile on your face!"

— Willy Loman, Act 2, Section 2

Willy speaks to Ben about his ambitions for Biff, maintaining that it is contacts and being liked that make dreams come true. In reality, the outcome of the play undercuts this claim, as it is Willy's suicide that provides the financial capital for his family's dreams even as it destroys the family.

"After all the highways ... and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive."

— Willy Loman, Act 2, Section 2

Willy recognizes his life insurance makes him more valuable financially than his earnings, and Willy equates his value as a person with his financial worth. It is distressing that a person's life work is worthless and that the best way Willy sees to help his family is through suicide.

"We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!"

— Biff Loman, Act 2, Section 5

Late in the play, after all the arguments, Biff finally states the obvious: the family cannot speak truthfully to each other or about each other, emphasizing the theme of Illusion versus Reality.

"I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you."

— Biff Loman, Act 2, Section 5

Biff states the truth about himself and his father: they are not men who reach the American Dream of financial success. Instead, they are average men who live lives of hard work that result in little wealth or recognition.

Symbols

Distant Lands

Distant geographical locations represent freedom and possibility in contrast to the confinement and death of New York City. In several of Willy's memories, his brother Ben appears and asks him to accompany him to Alaska, a wide-open land of opportunity. In the end, Ben ends up in Africa, another wild and mysterious location, and becomes rich in the diamond mines there by the age of 21. At the beginning of the play, Biff returns from enjoyable work on a farm in the West to try to make a more substantial and traditional living in New York, all the while longing to return to the West to start a ranch. All three distant locations symbolize the possibility of escape and independence.

Stockings

Silk stockings become a symbol of Willy Loman's betrayal and deception. Both Willy's wife and his lover discuss stockings. To be economical, Linda Loman spends time repairing her damaged stockings, a fact that annoys her husband because it emphasizes his failure to provide his family with luxuries. Willy Loman gives new stockings to the woman with whom he is having an affair in Boston. When Biff Loman discovers his father's affair, he shouts, "You—you gave her Mama's stockings!"—a further sign of Willy's betrayal of his family.

Miller's choice of stockings is significant in that during World War II, the materials used to make stockings—silk, nylon, and rayon—were rationed for the war effort. This essential component of a woman's wardrobe was hard to get. This historical context emphasizes Willy's efforts to give The Woman, but not his wife, something rare and valuable and hard to come by. In this way, Willy's gift and The Woman's praise of Willy are more helpful to Willy in maintaining his delusions of success than the vision of his wife mending her torn stockings.

Seeds

The seeds symbolize Willy Loman's longing for nature, something he cannot get in his city dwelling. His desire to plant seeds reveals a healthy need to nurture growth, but it is not well planned or executed. He fails at raising his sons, and he is trapped in a world in which he is unfruitful. When he exclaims that he needs to get seeds, his wife reminds him that there is not enough light to plant a garden. Yet near the end of the play, Willy, in a delusional state, is out in the backyard planting seeds, a last effort to create something fruitful with his life.

Flute

The play begins and ends with the melody of a flute, and music reappears many times throughout the story. Willy's father, who deserted Willy as a child, was a flute maker and salesman. The instrument, which is "small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon" symbolizes the past for Willy—a connection to nature as well as his sense of abandonment and longing for a deep connection with family. The flute also serves as a signal to the audience that Willy's memories are near and that the past is about to overtake the present.

Themes

American Dream and Disillusionment

A key component to the American Dream is the idea that financial prosperity is available to anyone who works for it. Willy learns the lie behind this proposition even as he watches other characters succeed financially: his brother Ben, his neighbor Charley, and Charley's son Bernard.

Throughout the play, Willy Loman's desire to be well liked and

well respected drive him as much as his desire for financial success. He believes that the American Dream is a two-part idea: financial success and the recognition of that success by society. Willy mistakenly measures his value through the social respect or recognition of others, and he bestows this belief on his sons.

Illusion versus Reality

For Willy Loman, issues of illusion and reality are complicated, and the structure of the play makes these issues complicated for the audience as well, as Miller weaves flashbacks into the present reality of the play. Much of Willy's life of illusion is fueled by his need to manipulate the truth to his own advantage. For example, he spins the facts about his sales earnings, withholding information about his impoverished financial state from his family for the purpose of appearing successful.

One of the most significant illusions, which haunts Willy and ultimately his whole family, is Willy's fidelity to Linda. Instead of acknowledging the truth and accepting responsibility for his betrayal, Willy makes up a story to tell his son, which does not fool Biff. Willy's conflict with Biff comes to a climax when Biff finally names Willy for what he is—a phony.

In fact, the entire Loman family lives under a cloud of illusion and self-deception. They keep information from each other and never speak openly about the family's dysfunction, continuing to behave as if they are a happy family on the cusp of success. While Linda Loman knows the truth about her husband, his deteriorating mental state and suicide attempts, she continues to live a life devoted to Willy. Her self-deception requires that she turn a blind eye to the full effects of Willy's choices.

In contrast, Charley and his son Bernard, who are both financially successful and appear to be happy people, do not seem to suffer from the same kind of self-deception as the Lomans.

Betrayal

As young men, Willy and his brother, Ben, were abandoned by their father when he left the family, presumably for Alaska. This first betrayal in Willy's life is a betrayal of family values as it is a father's responsibility to stay with his family and help raise his sons. Subsequently, Ben, a surrogate father figure, betrayed Willy when Ben left Willy behind to travel to Africa, where Ben made his fortune and then died. Willy also feels betrayed by Ben in that Willy believes that Ben held some secret to success and wealth that he did not share with Willy. In both cases, Willy's father and his brother choose lives of adventure and wealth in place of building family connections.

These early betrayals lead to Willy's betrayal of his own family in various forms. As a traveling salesman, Willy frequently abandons his sons for road trips, leaving them fatherless for long periods of time. He betrays Linda in his affair with The Woman. In the end, Willy acts out the ultimate betrayal of his family when he abandons them through suicide.

Nature versus Man-Made Environment

Although Willy Loman feels driven to be a success as a salesman, he has another conflicting longing that appears throughout the play. He loves nature and the country life. In fact, traveling allows Willy to feel a sense of freedom and participation in the natural world, although he is just driving through it. When Willy is feeling at his worst, he wishes for fresh air, a garden, and the outdoor life. Yet his sense that real success comes from working in a man-made environment keeps him chained to his life in New York City and a job in which he cannot achieve personal or financial success.

Biff also loves nature and faces the same inner conflict as his father. He loves working on a farm in the West, but he has been so indoctrinated by his father's ideas about the American Dream and business success that he cannot embrace what he clearly enjoys. Unable to settle into a satisfying career, Biff moves back and forth between the freedom of the country and

the confinement of the city, for a time subscribing to a dream of owning a sporting goods store with Happy.

Stage Directions

Miller provides stage directions to help a production team enact the play. In addition, the stage directions convey important information regarding the creation of theme and meaning within the play. Stage directions regarding music, physical setting, lighting, and characters work together to create the dreamlike quality of the play, particularly the bleeding between the memory portions and the present reality portions. Repeatedly, the playwright uses music and sound to provide signals for the audience, indicating emotional shifts in mood and tone and movement through time.

Music/Sounds

The play begins and ends with music, and the playwright indicates different qualities of music to represent different characters and moods. For example, the play begins with music played on a flute. The directions explain that the music is "small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon." Within these directions, the playwright sets the mood. Although the setting is a crowded city, the first impression the audience gets is suggestive of the natural environment, a theme that returns again and again throughout the play. The flute signals a sense of longing for something unreachable.

At the beginning of Act 2, the music has a different quality, "gay and bright," suggesting an optimistic mood: with a new day, things might work out. The music provides a sense of hope regarding a resolution to the family's ongoing sadness and conflict.

Whenever Uncle Ben appears on stage, he has a specific accompanying melody, and the laughter of Willy's lover precedes her presence throughout the play, giving the audience constant sound clues regarding movement in time. Even Willy's death is presented to the audience through sound, making Willy's death a sensory experience. The "music crashes down in a frenzy of sound," which then becomes the sound of only "a single cello string."

Physical Setting

Arthur Miller's description of the physical setting serves a larger purpose than mere instructions for the builders of a stage set. From the first page of the play, Miller uses his descriptions to paint a picture of the literal and figurative "fragile-seeming home" where the "air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality." Miller presents the brokenness of the family, their futile dreams, and the reality that rises around and crowds the family.

To further convey the dreamlike quality of the play—and to reveal how Willy is losing his grip on reality—Miller states in the stage directions that the setting is "wholly or, in some places, partially transparent." Neither Willy nor the audience ever knows for sure what is concrete and what is illusion.

Lighting/Effects

Lighting effects and various colors provide the audience with signals regarding theme and mood. The Lomans' "fragile-seeming home" is cast in the "blue light of the sky," while the large apartment buildings that crowd and smother the Lomans' home are shown in "an angry glow of orange." The playwright uses these contrasting colors to suggest that the Lomans are somehow separate and distant from the rest of their environment. Thus, he creates an early sympathy for his characters. How can a family surviving in such a small and fragile home compete against the larger forces of the modern urban landscape around them?

Miller also uses lighting effects such as leaves to cast impressions over the stage. The leaves come and go and support both the dreamlike quality and theme of nature versus man-made environment. In one section, the stage directions state that "the light of green leaves stains the house, which holds the air of night and a dream," drawing a clear connection between light and image and mood and theme.

Characterization

Playwrights typically use dialogue and actions to develop the characterization within a play. Miller's stage directions are unique because they include details about the inner qualities of characters rather than focusing only on the physical details of

their appearances. For example, when Miller describes Linda Loman at the beginning of Act 1, he reveals the nature of her love for her husband: "she more than loves him, she admires him."

Miller also employs the stage directions to give insight into the characters of Happy and Biff. Biff "bears a worn air and seems less self-assured" with dreams that "are stronger and less acceptable" than his brother's. The stage directions indicate that Happy is lost but seems more content because "he has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat." These directions help the actors playing Biff and Happy to understand Biff's inner conflict and Happy's self-delusion, understandings that will inform their portrayals of these characters throughout the play.

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