Death of a Salesman

INTRODUCTION

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.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

A Raisin in the Sun, a play written by Lorraine Hansberry and produced in 1959, looks at the American Dream through an African-American lens as the Younger family tries to deal with the insurance money they will receive through their grandfather's death. Walter Lee Younger, the patriarch who dreams of owning a liquor store, bears comparison to Willy Loman in his desire to see both himself and his children rise in the world.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Death of a Salesman*
- **When Written:** 1948
- **Where Written:** Roxbury, Connecticut
- **When Published:** The Broadway premiere was February 10, 1949. The play was published in 1949 by Viking Press.
- **Literary Period:** Social Realism
- **Genre:** Dramatic stage play
- **Setting:** New York and Boston in 1948.
- **Climax:** Biff's speech to Willy at the end of Act Two.
- **Antagonist:** Howard Wagner; the American Dream that allows Willy and his sons to delude themselves.

EXTRA CREDIT

Death of a Simpson: Beleaguered, overweight family man Willy Loman has been the genesis not only of live-action domestic sitcoms like *All in the Family* and *Married with Children*, but animated satires like *The Family Guy* and *The Simpsons*, both of which have made knowing reference to *Death of a Salesman* in various episodes.

Salesman in Beijing: In 1983, the People's Art Theatre in Beijing wanted to put on a Chinese-language production of *Death of a Salesman*. Arthur Miller flew to Beijing and spent six weeks directing the cast, though he only spoke two words of Chinese. He documented his experiences in the book *Salesman in Beijing*, published in 1984 with photographs by his wife, Inge Morath.

PLOT SUMMARY

Willy Loman, a traveling salesman, returns home to Brooklyn early from a sales trip. At the age of 63, he has lost his salary and is working only on commission, and on this trip has failed to sell anything. His son Biff, who has been laboring on farms and ranches throughout the West for more than a decade, has recently arrived home to figure out a new direction for his life. Willy thinks Biff has not lived up to his potential. But as Biff reveals to his younger brother Happy—an assistant to the assistant buyer at a department store—he feels more fulfilled

by outdoor work than by his earlier attempts to work in an office.

Alone in his kitchen, Willy remembers an earlier return from a business trip, when Biff and Happy were young boys and looked up to him as a hero. He contrasts himself and his sons with his next door neighbor Charley, a successful businessman, and Charley's son Bernard, a serious student. Charley and Bernard, in his view, lack the natural charisma that the Loman men possess, which Willy believes is the real determinant of success. But under the questioning of his wife Linda, Willy admits that his commission from the trip was so small that they will hardly be able to pay all their bills, and that he is full of self-doubt. Even as Linda reassures him, he hears the laughter of The Woman, his mistress in Boston.

Charley comes over to see if Willy is okay. While they are playing cards, Willy begins talking with the recently deceased figure of his brother Ben, who left home at the age of seventeen and made a diamond fortune in Africa and Alaska. Charley offers Willy a job but Willy refuses out of pride, even though he has been borrowing money from Charley every week to cover household expenses. Full of regrets, Willy compares himself to Ben and their equally adventurous, mysterious father, who abandoned them when they were young. He wanders into his back yard, trying to see the stars.

Linda discusses Willy's deteriorating mental state with the boys. She reveals that he has tried to commit suicide, both in a car crash and by inhaling gas through a **rubber hose** on the heater. Biff, chagrined, agrees to stay home and try to borrow money from his previous employer, Bill Oliver, in order to start a sporting goods business with Happy, which will please their father. Willy is thrilled about this idea, and gives Biff some conflicting, incoherent advice about how to ask for the loan.

The next morning, at Linda's urging, Willy goes to his boss Howard Wagner and asks for a job in the New York office, close to home. Though Willy has been with the company longer than Howard has been alive, Howard refuses Willy's request. Willy continues to beg Howard, with increasing urgency, until Howard suspends Willy from work. Willy, humiliated, goes to borrow money from Charley at his office. There he encounters Bernard, who is now a successful lawyer, while the greatest thing Willy's son Biff ever achieved was playing high school football.

Biff and Happy have made arrangements to meet Willy for dinner at Frank's Chop House. Before Willy arrives, Biff confesses to Happy that Oliver gave him the cold shoulder when he tried to ask for the loan, and he responded by stealing Oliver's pen. Happy advises him to lie to Willy in order to keep his hope alive. Willy sits down at the table and immediately confesses that he has been fired, so Biff had better give him some good news to bring home to Linda. Biff and Willy argue, as distressing memories from the past overwhelm Willy. Willy staggers to the washroom and recalls the end of Biff's high school career, when Biff failed a math course and went to Boston in order to tell his father. He found Willy in a hotel room with The Woman, and became so disillusioned about his former hero that he abandoned his dreams for college and following in Willy's footsteps. As Willy is lost in this reverie, Biff and Happy leave the restaurant with two call girls.

When Biff and Happy return home, Linda is furious at them for abandoning their father. Biff, ashamed of his behavior, finds Willy in the back yard. He is trying to plant **seeds** in the middle of the night, and conversing with the ghost of his brother Ben about a plan to leave his family with $20,000 in life insurance money. Biff announces that he is finally going to be true to himself, that neither he nor Willy will ever be great men, and that Willy should accept this and give up his distorted version of the American Dream. Biff is moved to tears at the end of this argument, which deepens Willy's resolve to kill himself out of love for his son and family. He drives away to his death.

Only his family, Charley, and Bernard attend Willy's funeral. Biff is adamant that Willy died for nothing, while Charley elegizes Willy as a salesman who, by necessity, had nothing to trade on but his dreams. Linda says goodbye to Willy, telling him that the house has been paid off—that they are finally free of their obligations—but now there will be nobody to live in it.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Willy Loman - The salesman of the title, and the husband of Linda. We never learn what he sells, but he has thoroughly bought into a version of the American Dream in which charisma and luck count for more than diligence or wisdom. All his life, he represents himself to his family as being constantly on the verge of huge success, while privately wondering why he has not risen to the heights that he believes he is capable of reaching. Eventually, this schism between his dreams and reality results in mental collapse, in which he relives significant moments from his past without learning the lessons of that past. He invests all his hope in his sons and is disappointed in the way they have turned out, not realizing that his shallow dream of success has influenced both Biff's disillusionment and Happy's shallowness. His death represents a final transformation of himself into a commodity—a life insurance policy—for the benefit of his family, whose love he failed to fully recognize while he was still with them.

Biff Loman - Willy and Linda's elder son. He has always been in the shadow of his father's expectations for him, beginning with his starred career as a high school football player and prospective college student. At that impressionable age, he witnesses Willy's affair with the The Woman, which is enough to shake his faith in everything his father has ever told him. When the play begins, he is grasping for answers in his life,

having worked as a farm laborer for years and still unable to meet his father's standards of success. In the course of the play, he has the revelation that he, like his father, is not destined for greatness. But he realizes that he can still achieve happiness through his own, simpler version of the American Dream: working with his hands in wide-open spaces, doing the things that fulfill him. He represents Willy's better, more honest nature, which Willy tragically turns away from.

Linda Loman - Willy's wife. She remains devoted to him even as he betrays her at two major points during the play: committing adultery with The Woman as a younger man, and committing suicide with the deluded belief that he will solve the family's problems by doing so. As the person closest to Willy, she realizes that he is trying to kill himself, and exhorts her sons to show him more love. However, she is as responsible for his death as any of the other characters, as her encouragement fuels Willy in his doomed pursuit of glory.

Happy Loman - Willy and Linda's younger son. He is the assistant to an assistant manager at a department store, and is always willing to do whatever is convenient: be duplicitous to his family, take bribes at work, or sleep with the girlfriends of his colleagues. At the end of the play he resolves to carry on Willy's legacy by making as much money as possible, which is a twisted misinterpretation of what Willy's death meant. In the importance that Happy places on getting ahead, and in his readiness to delude himself, he represents the worst aspects of Willy's nature.

Ben Loman - Willy's adventurous brother, who has just died in Africa when the play begins. At moments of great stress or doubt, Willy converses with Ben's ghost. Ben is the embodiment of the most old-fashioned aspect of the American Dream, the idea that a man can set out into the wilderness by himself and come back wealthy. Willy regrets not following Ben's path and testing himself against rugged natural settings. Yet he barely knew Ben, and Ben showed contempt for him on his few visits to Willy's home.

Charley - Willy's neighbor, a steady businessman. He is a constant friend to Willy through the years, though Willy is quick to take offense whenever Charley tries to bring Willy's unrealistic dreams down to earth. Charley foresees Willy's destruction and tries to save him by offering him a job. He gives the final elegy about what it meant for Willy to live and die as a salesman.

Howard Wagner - Willy's boss and the son of Frank Wagner, who founded the company for which Willy works. A cold, selfish man, he inherits his success without building anything himself. He refuses to take the personal association between Willy and his father into account when he tells Willy there is no place for him at the New York office. He represents the new, impersonal face of the sales business.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Bernard - Charley's son, he is studious and hardworking. As a boy in high school, he warns Biff not to flunk math, a warning both Biff and Willy ignore. He grows up to be a successful lawyer who is about to argue a case before the Supreme Court.

The Woman - Willy's mistress in Boston, during the time that Biff and Happy were in high school. She is a secretary to one of the buyers, and picked Willy as a lover because, it seems, she is able to exploit him for gifts.

Stanley - A waiter at Frank's Chop House, who is friendly with Happy but has sympathy for Willy's plight.

Miss Forsythe - A call girl Biff and Happy met at Frank's Chop House.

Letta - A call girl friend of Miss Forsythe.

Jenny - Charley's secretary.

Bill Oliver - Biff's former boss. Though crucial to the plot, he doesn't appear onstage.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American Dream that anyone can achieve financial success and material comfort lies at the heart of *Death of a Salesman*. Various secondary characters achieve the Dream in different ways: Ben goes off into the wilderness of Alaska and Africa and lucks into wealth by discovering a diamond mine; Howard Wagner inherits his Dream through his father's company; while Bernard, who seemed a studious bore as a child, becomes a successful lawyer through hard work. Willy Loman's version of the Dream, which has been influenced by his brother Ben's success, is that any man who is manly, good looking, charismatic, and well-liked deserves success and will naturally achieve it.

Over the course of his lifetime, Willy and his sons fall short of the impossible standards of this dream. But the real tragedy of the play is not that Willy fails to achieve the financial success promised in his American dream, but rather that he buys into the dream so thoroughly that he ignores the tangible things around him, such as the love of his family, while pursuing the success he hopes will bring his family security. By sacrificing himself at the end of the play in order to get his family the money from his life insurance policy, Willy literally kills himself for money. In the process, he demonstrates that the American

dream, while a powerful vehicle of aspiration, can also turn a human being into a product or commodity whose sole value is his financial worth.

FATHERS AND SONS

The central conflict of the play is between Willy and his elder son Biff, who showed great promise as a young athlete and ladies' man, but in adulthood has become a thief and drifter with no clear direction. Willy's other son, Happy, while on a more secure career path, is superficial and seems to have no loyalty to anyone.

By delving into Willy's memories, the play is able to trace how the values Willy instilled in his sons—luck over hard work, likability over expertise—led them to disappoint both him and themselves as adults. The dream of grand, easy success that Willy passed on to his sons is both barren and overwhelming, and so Biff and Happy are aimless, producing nothing, and it is Willy who is still working, trying to plant seeds in the middle of the night, in order to give his family sustenance. Biff realizes, at the play's climax, that only by escaping from the dream that Willy has instilled in him will father and son be free to pursue fulfilling lives. Happy never realizes this, and at the end of the play he vows to continue in his father's footsteps, pursuing an American Dream that will leave him empty and alone.

NATURE VS. CITY

The towering apartment buildings that surround Willy's house, which make it difficult for him to see the stars and block the sunlight that would allow him to grow a garden in his back yard, represent the artificial world of the city—with all its commercialism and superficiality—encroaching on his little spot of self-determination. He yearns to follow the rugged trail his brother Ben has blazed, by going into the wildernesses of Africa and Alaska in search of diamonds, or even building wooden flutes and selling them on the rural frontier of America as his father did. But Willy is both too timid and too late. He does not have the courage to head out into nature and try his fortune, and, anyway, that world of a wild frontier waiting to be explored no longer exists. Instead, the urban world has replaced the rural, and Willy chooses to throw his lot in with the world of sales, which does not involve making things but rather selling oneself.

Biff and Happy embody these two sides of Willy's personality: the individualist dreamer and the eager-to-please salesman. Biff works with his hands on farms, helping horses give birth, while Happy schemes within the stifling atmosphere of a department store. While Willy collects household appliances and cars, as the American Dream has taught him to do, these things do not ultimately leave him satisfied, and he thinks of his own death in terms of finally venturing into nature, the dark jungle that the limits of his life have never allowed him to enter.

ABANDONMENT AND BETRAYAL

Inspired by his love for his family, Willy ironically abandons them (just as he himself was abandoned by his father when he was three). The tragedy of Willy's death comes about because of his inability to distinguish between his value as an economic resource and his identity as a human being. The Woman, with whom Willy cheats on Linda, is able to feed Willy's salesman ego by "liking" him. He is proud of being able to sell himself to her, and this feeling turns to shame only when he sees that by giving stockings to The Woman rather than Linda, he is sabotaging his role as a provider. He doesn't see that his love, not material items, is the primary thing Linda needs from him.

The link between love and betrayal is present throughout the play: part of Biff's revelation at the play's end is that Willy has betrayed him by encouraging him to settle for nothing less than greatness, thus making the compromises of the real world impossibly difficult. Happy, and even Linda, also betray Willy out of a kind impulse to not shake him out of his illusions, which forces Willy's fragile mind to deal alone with the growing discrepancy between his dreams and his life.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

RUBBER HOSE

The **rubber hose** is a symbol of Willy's impending suicide. Linda finds it hidden behind the fuse box in the cellar, and the "new little nipple" she finds on the gas pipe of the water heater leads her to the conclusion that Willy had planned to inhale gas. Like Willy's other attempted method of suicide—driving off the road in the car he uses to travel to work—the rubber hose points how the conveniences such as the car and water heater that Willy works so hard to buy to afford might, under their surface, be killing him.

STOCKINGS

During his affair with The Woman, Willy gives her the intimate gift of **stockings**. Biff's outburst at discovering Willy with The Woman—"You gave her Mama's stockings!"—fixes the stockings in Willy's mind as a symbol of his betrayal. He has let his wife down emotionally, and he is siphoning the family's already strained financial resources toward his ego-stroking affair.

SEEDS

"I don't have a thing in the ground!" Willy laments after both his sons abandon him in Act 2. The sons he has cultivated with his own values have grown to disappoint him, none of his financial hopes have borne fruit, and he is desperate to have some tangible result of a lifetime of work. By planting vegetable seeds, he is attempting to begin anew. But as Linda gently reminds him, the surrounding buildings don't provide enough light for a garden. Willy's attempt to plant the vegetable **seeds** at night further reinforces the futility of his efforts.

FLUTE

The **flute** music that drifts through the play represents the single faint link Willy has with his father and with the natural world. The elder Loman made flutes, and was apparently able to make a good living by simply traveling around the country and selling them. This anticipates Willy's career as a salesman, but also his underused talent for building things with his hands, which might have been a more fulfilling job. The flute music is the sound of the road Willy didn't take.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Death of a Salesman* published in 2011.

Act 1 Quotes

I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts.

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Willy Loman, a traveling salesman, arrives home to his wife Linda. She is surprised to see him back so soon, and he explains that he couldn't make it to his destination. He was distracted and kept pulling his car over at the side of the road. She asks him what's wrong and, avoiding the truth, he tells her: "I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts."

Here, we begin to see the slow unraveling of Willy Loman; a man with an unrealistic view of the American Dream. He measures the worth of his own life in the amount of money he has, yet we will come to learn that he will never attain what he dreams of. *Death Of A Salesman* is Arthurs Miller's commentary on that American Dream and how it can break people.In the 1940s and 50s a blue collar job, like a salesman was what people aspired for. They believed that work meant wealth. Yet Willy Loman feels a sense of purposelessness that he can't define. He doesn't understand that the ideal of the American Dream has betrayed him—it is the unrewarding nature of his job and his constant idealism of what it means to be wealthy that leaves him directionless.

Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it.

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Willy asks Linda about how his two sons, Happy and Biff, are doing. Linda tells him that they are getting along and that she loves watching them shave together. We learn here that they are grown men. Willy comments on Linda's remarks with this quote.

Once again, Willy has distilled one of the darkest aspects of the American Dream. Like many, he has worked his entire life to provide for his family, so much so that he has missed out on most of his children's' lives. As he traveled, his sons became men. After this moment he tells Linda, that "some people accomplish" things, suggesting that the time he has lost with his children was pointless. He hasn't accomplished anything, quite possibly because he is searching in the wrong places. This quote also foreshadows the ending of the play, when Willy's death indeed pays off the house—but he isn't alive to live in it.

It's a measly manner of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer... To suffer fifty weeks a year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still - that's how you build a future.

Related Characters: Biff Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10-11

Explanation and Analysis

Before this moment Willy complains to Linda about how Biff has done nothing with his life. He is 34 years old, lives at home and barely makes an income. Meanwhile, Biff and Happy have woken up and are discussing their father's health. They are worried about his car accidents and his memory. Thinking about their father causes the boys to discuss their own futures. Here Biff reveals why he doesn't want to be a salesman. He doesn't understand why he has to prioritize making money, especially in the way Willy approves of. He then goes on to discuss his love for working on a farm, in nature. In the countryside, Biff feels, life is simple, natural, and clear. This sentiment is in deep opposition with the blue-collar, city lifestyle of Willy and Happy. Arthur Miller draws this comparison throughout the play, suggesting that the city represents the pursuit of material things, clouding (sometimes literally) the important things in life. Conversely, the countryside represents staying rooted and planted and following the simple passions in life.

❝ Manufacturers offer me a hundred-dollar bill now and then to throw an order their way. You know how honest I am, but it's like this girl, see. I hate myself for it. Because I don't want the girl, and, still, I take it and - I love it!

Related Characters: Happy Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Happy and Biff discuss their own futures. When Biff asks Happy about whether or not he likes his job in sales, he says no. He is constantly waiting for a higher up to quit or die, and his life is incredibly lonely. However, Happy does find the prospect of money as an enticing one. Here we see Happy reflect similar sentiments to his father, Willy. He goes on to tell Biff that he has been sleeping with executives' girlfriends in order to get to the top. One woman was his lover just weeks before she got married to his boss. He has also been taking bribes from manufacturers.

Living in Biff's shadow as a child, Happy has always tried to overcompensate for his father's approval. It makes sense, then, that he would pursue the same career as Willy, whether he likes it or not. By revealing his slyness and manipulation, Happy also attempts to prove his own manhood and pride to Biff. In some ways, this again is an example of that distorted American Dream; to live the life of your father, no matter how much it costs you.

❝ And they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, there'll be open sesame for all of us, 'cause one thing, boys: I have friends.

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker), Happy Loman, Biff Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

After returning home from a business trip, Willy recounts his time away to his sons. He explains that he is very well liked when he travels. On this trip he met the mayor of Providence and sat down with him. He also brags about his fame and friends.

This moment is a stark contrast from Willy's first entrance and dialogue with Linda. Here, Willy is putting on a show for his sons. Instead of telling them the truth—that he hates his job and feels like his life is pointless—he regales his sons with stories of his travels. There is a sense of pride inherent in being the father for Willy. He must be successful. He must be an example for his sons. Once again, success, wealth and now, being well-liked become more important than happiness; this is Willy's perception of the "American Dream."

❝ *Linda:* Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world—

Willy: Oh, no, Linda.

Linda: To me you are. The handsomest.

Related Characters: Willy Loman, Linda Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Willy and Linda go over his earnings for the week and realize that they still will have some trouble paying the bills. Willy tells Linda that he doesn't feel respected by other people, and part of the reason for this is his weight. Willy overheard a client calling him a "walrus." He is embarrassed by his own body, so Linda replies with reinforcement, telling him that he is handsome. Here we see how loyal Linda is to Willy. Her love for him transcends success or finance. She loves Willy for *Willy*. Willy, on the other hand, is not so loyal to Linda—in fact, he has betrayed her with another woman.Willy's concern for his weight also reveals the idea that as a salesman he must ultimately sell himself.

The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he's rich! The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress!

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker), Ben Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Willy discusses his jealousy for his brother Ben's fortune. Ben came from nothing, but discovered a diamond mine in Africa and got rich. When Willy tells Happy this, Happy wonders how Ben did it. Willy replies with this quote. He tells Happy that dreams are acquired through perseverance, but also great luck. This moment once again plays on the idealized versus realized "American Dream." Adventuring to Africa and making a fortune overnight is Willy's idea of what the American dreamshould be. But Willy actually lives Arthur Miller's reality of the American dream: a blue-collar, middle-class working man who feels aimless and hasn't achieved any sense of fulfillment or happiness for all his striving.

Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way.

Related Characters: Ben Loman (speaker), Willy Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Alone in his kitchen, Willy daydreams about his brother Ben. On stage, Ben will appear through the walls of the house, and Ben then discusses Willy and his father. He describes his father to Willy, Linda, Biff and Happy. Ben then play fights with Biff and pulls out an umbrella and nearly hits him in the eye. He tells Biff this piece of advice.

Willy has constantly lived in the shadow of his brother Ben, who made a fortune virtually overnight. Willy has had to work his entire life and thus has a skewed sense of what the real American Dream is. He sees it as wealth and monetary success, because of the success of his brother (which was actually based entirely on luck). Furthermore, like Biff and Happy, Willy looks up to his brother. Yet this moment reveals Ben as a cruel person—who knows how many people he has hurt or taken advantage of in order to achieve his "success." Once again, Willy has a warped sense of what is important in life.

Gotta break your neck to see a star in this yard.

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Ben is leaving Willy's imagination, but Willy begs him to stay. He wants to learn from him—he asks Ben how he can teach his boys about making something of themselves. Ben replies by telling him to simply walk into the "jungle." Willy is then snapped out of his memory by Linda asking him to come up to bed. Willy replies with this quote.

The jungle is an elusive concept in the play. It was Ben's literal way toward fortune, but it also represents jumping into life and working at full force. Furthermore, Miller draws a stark contrast between nature and the city. For Willy, the jungle and the stars at night represent passion and what is natural, yet he is stuck in a city life, where he must work tirelessly for no gain. Stars are impossible to see in the city. They are clouded by industrialism and tall buildings, much like the life of the Loman men. The reference to him

breaking his neck is a foreshadowing of Willy's own death; the only way he has to escape his own life.

> I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper... But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person.

Related Characters: Linda Loman (speaker), Willy Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Biff, Happy, and Linda are watching Willy unravel. He is talking to himself, and growing erratic and aggressive. Biff makes the mistake of calling his father crazy. Here, in Linda's iconic speech, she explains that her husband is going through a horrible time in his life. No matter his flaws, he is a human being and deserves to be taken care of—deserves the attention and appreciation that he constantly seeks. Unlike the other characters in the play, Linda sees Willy as a hero—his accomplishments are great because of his humanity, even though they may seem small or even pathetic to others. Linda feels as though her sons have betrayed Willy by accusing him of being unhinged or not taking his state of mind seriously. She later reveals that Willy has made several attempts to kill himself—offering a more concrete and urgent reason for why "attention must be paid" to Willy.

> Remember how he waved to me? Right up from the field, with the representatives of three colleges standing by? And the buyers I brought, and the cheers when he came out - Loman, Loman, Loman! God Almighty, he'll be great yet.

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker), Biff Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Happy and Biff throw around the idea of starting their own sporting goods business, and they share with Willy that Biff is going to ask his former boss for money. Willy is thrilled by the idea, and throws in a slew of suggestions and thoughts on how they should present themselves. Here, he reflects on a football game where he saw his son Biff being cheered, his own last name ringing around the stadium. This again shows Willy's warped mixture of nostalgia and idealism—he celebrates this heroic moment of the past, even though Biff has gone on to not really accomplish anything. Willy has specific ideas about what "success" is, and his sons fail themselves in trying not to fail their father.

Act 2 Quotes

> *Willy:* Your father came to me the day you were born and asked me what I thought of the name of Howard, may he rest in peace.
>
> *Howard:* I appreciate that, Willy, but there just is no spot here for you.

Related Characters: Willy Loman, Howard Wagner (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59-60

Explanation and Analysis

Willy goes to meet Howard Wagner, the son of the owner of the company he works for. Encouraged by Linda to find a job that will keep him in New York, and always one for a business deal or "sale," Willy comes into the meeting optimistic. He asks Howard to keep him in New York on a lower salary, and in this moment, Howard refuses. Although only 36 years old, Howard acts patronizingly towards Willy here. He is a much younger man, but like so many others in Willy's life, doesn't respect him. Willy brings up how he helped Howard's father choose his name as a baby.

Although Willy idealizes these kinds of connections, and assumes that being likable and loyal is the ultimate recipe for success, here that idea is shot down. Willy's connection to Howard's father fits in with Willy's ideas of how business works, but to Howard—who, we presume, is more concerned with profit than indulging in nostalgia—this just isn't that important. Thus the very things that Willy counted on here abandon and betray him.

Do you know? when he died - and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston - when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that.

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

After Howard refuses to give Willy a position in New York, Willy tries to get him to change his mind by explaining his long history and passion for sales. When he was young he met a man named Dave Singleman, a traveling salesman. Inspired by his stories of travel and fortune, Willy realized in that moment that being a salesman was his passion. In the present, Willy admires the way the Dave was respected after his death, having died the death of a true traveling salesman.

Always on the search for the American Dream, young Willy Loman idealized the life of being a traveling salesman. He saw Dave's fortune and fame as a direct result of his career, and thus followed in his footsteps. He also uses this story to share how much the sales world has changed.

In terms of plot, the description of the larger-than-life Dave's death is darkly contrasted with Willy's own impending death. Willy dies the "death of a salesman," just like Dave, but Willy is mourned by almost no one.

The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that.

Related Characters: Charley (speaker), Willy Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Willy enters into Charley's office to ask him for a loan, having just been fired by Howard. Charley had previously offered Willy a well-paying job, but Willy had proudly refused to take it (Willy has always felt very competitive towards Charley). Charley tells Willy that he doesn't understand why he wants to borrow money, but won't take a job. Willy explains that he was fired by Howard, but also repeats his philosophy that in order to succeed, one must be impressive and likable. He believes that his involvement in Howard's childhood should have given him a leg up. Here, Charley tries to tell Willy that those things—his relationships, being well liked or successful—don't matter in the world of real capitalism. The American Dream is much harsher than Willy's idealized vision of it. Once again Willy has spent so much of his life worrying about his *image* of success that he has lost the meaning within his own life.

Funny, y'know? After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive.

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

After arguing about whether or not Charley should give Willy a loan, Charley finally caves. He throws money on the table and Willy tells him that after all of the bills and expenses, he is probably worth more dead than alive. Here, Willy verbally communicates the idea that he has been suggesting throughout the play; self worth is measured in wealth. Without wealth in life, he is likely worth more dead (as he would be able to give his family life insurance money). In his mind, it is worth more for him to be dead than it is to live the aimless and mediocre life he is living. He also refers to the city landscape here, revealing another moment where the city and countryside are used to compare different qualities and priorities in life. This skewed sense of self-worth and the meaning of life foreshadows what will ultimately become of Willy Loman.

I even believed myself that I'd been a salesman for him! And he gave me one look and - I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been!

Related Characters: Biff Loman (speaker), Bill Oliver

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Biff returns from trying to meet with his former boss, Bill Oliver. He waited all day in his office and when Bill came out, he didn't even recognize Biff. He looked at him and walked away, and Biff couldn't find the courage to speak to Bill. This causes Biff to wonder why he even thought he could become a salesman in the first place. Biff is in the same dangerous, self-destructive cycle as his father. Parallel to Willy's moment with Howard, Biff has been abandoned by someone he had an idealized view of. In his fantasy, he imagined Bill Oliver as his friend and business associate, loving his ideas—but similar to his father, Biff's dreams have warped his expectations of reality. Bill does not care about him, and Biff will never be what he truly wants to be.

But it'll go on forever!

Dad is never so happy as when he's looking forward to something!

Related Characters: Biff Loman, Happy Loman (speaker), Willy Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

After telling Happy the story of his encounter with Bill Oliver, Biff reveals that when no one was looking he snuck into Oliver's office and stole his fountain pen. Biff then tells Happy that he wants to confess to their father, so that Willy can see that Biff is very different from what he appears to be. Happy suggests that instead of telling Willy the truth, they convince him that Oliver agreed to speak with Biff and is looking over their offer. Happy knows that Willy's joy and self-worth hinges on his dreams, so he encourages his brother to lie in order to keep their father happy. Biff, on the other hand, feels he needs to prove something to his father, whom he always felt never understood him.

She's nothing to me, Biff. I was lonely, I was terribly lonely.

You - you gave her Mama's stockings!

Related Characters: Willy Loman, Biff Loman (speaker), The Woman, Linda Loman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

While Biff tries to confess about his meeting with Bill Oliver to his father, Willy sinks into another memory. He goes back to the day he found out Biff flunked math. After failing his course, Biff took a train to visit Willy in Boston, and he found him with another woman in his hotel room. Willy tried to hide his mistress in the bathroom, but eventually she comes out, asking Willy for her stockings that he promised her: Linda's stockings. Biff is heartbroken at his father's infidelity. Once again, the stockings are used as a symbol of betrayal. They are the image that Biff and Willy carry with them, a emblem of that night. After that moment, Biff tells Willy that he won't be retaking math or going to college. Throughout the play Willy has been blaming *math*as the reason why Biff hasn't been successful, when in reality it was this shattering moment of disillusionment. The man that Biff had always looked up to is now a fraud. This forever warps Biff's idea of the "American Dream"; something he once defined as the dream of his father's. He now sees that it is all a sham, and is left directionless in life.

I've got to get some seeds, right away. Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground.

Related Characters: Willy Loman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Willy's fantasy about his affair dissolves and he finds himself in the bathroom of the restaurant he was in with his sons. When he returns to the table he sees that his sons are gone—they've paid the check and he is alone. Willy asks his server, Stanley where he can find some seeds to plant. Stanley tells him to go to a hardware store nearby. Willy exits.

Seeds here become a symbol of Willy's desire to die and leave something, no matter how small, behind him. He has nothing to care for anymore. His sons don't respect him, he has just had a vivid memory of his betrayal of his wife, he has lost his job, and he has lost his own sense of self worth. Miller also brings up the idea of nature versus city once again. If the city represents the clouded, capitalistic American Dream, coming back to nature, to the simple planting and reaping of seeds, represents the idea of finding truth and connection. Additionally, unlike Willy, seeds are planted—they are rooted to the ground, and do not travel or move. Willy is desperate for roots and desperate for growth, and he sees death and the planting of seeds as the only way to accomplish this.

> Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?

Related Characters: Biff Loman (speaker), Willy Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Biff and Happy return home, and Linda is furious that they abandoned their father at the restaurant. She tells both of them that they must leave the house and move out if they want to save their father. Biff approaches Willy, who is outside, rambling to himself and planting the seeds he has bought. Biff confesses everything that happened with Bill Oliver, and tells Willy that he is leaving the house. Willy is stuck in his fantasy world, and he doesn't believe that Biff doesn't have a meeting with Oliver. Biff grabs the rubber hose that Willy used to try to kill himself with earlier in the play. He tells his father that killing himself won't make him a hero, and that he has been living in fantasy; he has unrealistic ideas of success and fortune. He tells his father the thing he, Biff, truly loves: being outdoors. He then begs his father to let go of his dreams to save his own life. In this moment, Biff attempts to shatter his father's dreams from a place of love. Biff knows that Willy's delusions of what life *should* be are killing him, and this is Biff's last-ditch effort to save his father.

> The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy.

Related Characters: Ben Loman (speaker), Willy Loman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

After what seems to have been a revelatory moment with his family, Willy sinks back into his delusions, hearing the voice of his dead brother Ben telling him that "The jungle is dark but full of diamonds." Unbeknownst to his family, Willy turns and listens to this voice. In his delusional state, Ben tells Willy that with money, Biff will be magnificent one day. Ben urges Willy to not give up on his dreams, and to instead return to the "jungle." In a moment alone, Willy agrees. He chooses to abandon his family for the ultimate search of wealth; his life insurance policy. That night, he takes his car and kills himself. His American Dream has been realized, and he has at last reached the dark "jungle" of both death and money.

> There were a lot of nice days. When he'd come home from a trip; or on Sundays, making the stoop; finishing the cellar; putting on the new porch... You know something, Charley, there's more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made.

Related Characters: Biff Loman (speaker), Willy Loman, Charley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

After Willy's funeral, Biff brings up Willy's knack for carpentry as one of his better qualities. So much of their home is Willy's making, and this moment suggests that Willy had skills outside of his failed sales career—he was just too caught up in his own pursuit of wealth, and his idea of success as being "likable," to see it. Biff tries to remember the good in his father, both to celebrate him and, in many ways, to protect himself. He is his father's son, and he sees so much of his own failure as a result of that. Yet the suggestion is that Biff has not yet given in entirely to Willy's delusions—there is still a chance for him to find more fulfillment in life than his father did.

> He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine... A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.

Related Characters: Charley (speaker), Willy Loman

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

After Willy's funeral, the family stands around Willy's grave and talk about his life. Biff tells Charley that Willy had the wrong dreams—he was never meant to be a salesman, and his aspirations were clouded by his desire to be wealthy and well-liked by many. Charley disagrees, and he tells the group that Willy was the truest salesman there ever was. He depended on the happiness and affirmation of his customers. If he didn't have that, his life would shatter. He was exemplary in his profession, which caused him to rely heavily on his own success. This is what really killed him—his failure to continue to receive the affirmation of others, the failure of his own dreams.

> I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home.

Related Characters: Linda Loman (speaker), Willy Loman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Everyone has left the funeral, and Linda stands alone over Willy's grave. In this private moment, she speaks to her deceased husband, telling him that she can't cry. She feels like he is on just another trip, and is bound to come home. She has been abandoned by him, but also cannot yet accept the reality of his death. Linda then tells Willy that she made the final payment on their house—but there is no one there to live in it now. The irony of the American dream is made clear here. Linda was only able to pay for the house, a goal Willy was aiming to achieve, with the insurance money collected after Willy's death. His American Dream has been realized, but he isn't there to see it—it's just empty money, without life and meaning behind it.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

The curtain rises on Willy Loman's house in Brooklyn. The house, with its small backyard, looks fragile next to the tall apartment buildings that surround it. A soft **flute** melody is playing in the background. It is a Monday evening.

Home ownership is a central pillar of the American Dream. But Willy's house has been overwhelmed by the city, just as Willy is himself overwhelmed by the pressures on him.

Willy Loman returns home from a sales trip, carrying two suitcases of merchandise. He is exhausted, or as he puts it, "tired to the death." Linda Loman, who is in bed, comes out to see him. She wonders why he is home early.

The product Willy sells is never revealed, highlighting that what a salesman must really sell is himself. Willy's statement hints at the spiritually and materially unrewarding nature of his job.

Willy tries to avoid talking about the reason for his early return. When Linda presses him, he admits that he lost his concentration while driving and nearly drove off the road. He explains that he opened the windshield of his car to enjoy the scenery and warm air, and became too lost in his dreams to drive.

Opening the windshield signifies Willy's connection to nature, which his city-living, car-driving sales job interferes with. Willy's dreams, rather than motivating him, steer him off course.

Linda brings up what is clearly an old argument between them: she wants him to work in New York, closer to home. But Willy responds that he is a vital salesman in the New England area. He points out that he opened up this market to his company, though he adds that now the founder of the company is dead and his son, Howard Wagner, does not appreciate Willy's history of service.

Willy's remarks about his importance as a salesman must be taken with a grain of salt: a salesman as successful as he claims to be would likely be better off than he is. Nevertheless, he has strived for success, only to be betrayed by his former's boss's son, who inherited success.

The conversation turns to Willy and Linda's grown sons, Happy and Biff, who are upstairs sleeping after a double date. Biff has been working as a farm laborer all over the West, and has returned home for a visit. Willy had fought with Biff a day earlier about the fact that Biff has been content with low-paying manual work for ten years. While criticizing Biff to Linda, he calls Biff a lazy bum and then contradicts himself, praising Biff as a hard worker.

Willy's contrasting statements on Biff's work ethic show how his hopes for Biff have been dashed, but also his capacity for self-delusion. He can't accept that Biff has turned out to be something other than a great man of the world because he can't let go of his American Dream of huge success for himself and his sons.

Linda convinces Willy to go downstairs to the kitchen so that he won't wake the boys. Happy and Biff, who are already awake, wonder if Willy has had another car accident.

Willy's car accidents, at this stage of the play, seem to point to his increasing age and physical fragility. As the play progresses, they will come to mean more.

Recalling his argument with Willy, Biff says that he doesn't know what he is supposed to want. He has tried following his father's salesman path and briefly worked as a shipping clerk, but he felt too constrained. He tells Happy how inspiring and beautiful it is to see a new colt born on the farm where he works. Then he admits to Happy that he has come home because he feels he has been wasting his life and needs a new direction.

The original American Dream involved proving and making a life for yourself by heading out into the wilds of nature, as Willy's father and older brother Ben did, and as Willy himself sometimes wishes he did. But Willy raised Biff to value financial success above all else, and so Biff wonders whether it is wrong to not make money.

Happy, who works at a department store, declares that he is not content either. He claims to feel guilty about his unethical behavior: sleeping with the girlfriends of higher executives and then attending their weddings, and taking bribes from manufacturers to put their items on display.

Happy has inherited Willy's dream of success in sales. Less favored than Biff by Willy when the boys were young, Happy now tries to emulate the examples of aggressive sexuality and dishonesty that Biff displayed as a boy.

Biff decides he will ask his old employer, Bill Oliver, for some money to start a ranch, though he worries that Oliver still blames him for some basketballs that went missing when Biff worked there. Happy is encouraging, and reminds Biff that he is well liked. The boys are embarrassed to hear Willy downstairs talking to himself, and try to go to sleep.

Biff aims to win his father's approval while staying true to himself. He tries to reconcile both sides of the American Dream: doing the outdoor work he loves and also profiting as a ranch owner. Happy thinks that being well liked guarantees success.

In the kitchen, Willy is lost in a memory, which is acted out onstage. He is remembering a time when Biff and Happy, as young boys, helped him wash the car. Happy tries to get Willy's attention, but Willy is focused on Biff, who is playing with a new football. When Willy asks where he got it, Biff says he stole it from the locker room. Willy laughs, saying that if anyone less popular than Biff took that ball, there would be an uproar. He then goes on to tell the boys how well liked he is when he goes on business trips: he has coffee with the Mayor of Providence, and the police protect his car on any street in New England. He says he will soon open a bigger, more successful business than that owned by their neighbor, Charley, because he is better liked than Charley.

Throughout the play Willy gets lost in his memories. At first it seems these memories of better times provide him with solace. But it quickly becomes clear that the memories actually trace the seeds of his and his family's present troubles. Here, Willy clearly favors Biff over Happy, and also clearly instills in his sons the idea that being well-liked is more important than character. To make himself look successful, he lies to his sons about his stature as a salesman on the road.

Bernard, Charley's son, enters. He wonders why Biff has not come over to study math with him. Biff is close to flunking the subject, and Willy orders Biff to study, but is quickly distracted and impressed by the University of Virginia logo Biff has printed on his sneakers. Willy reasons that with scholarships to three universities, Biff can't fail. When Bernard leaves, Willy asks if he is well liked. His sons respond that Bernard is "liked," but not "well liked." Willy tells his sons that no matter how well Bernard does in school, he doesn't have the charisma to make it in the business world, but that the Lomans do.

In emphasizing "well liked" as the most desirable quality for success, Willy places a higher premium on outward projection than inner strength of character. He dismisses Bernard's hardworking attitude, and implies to his sons, through his disinterest in Biff's issues with math class and his talk of charisma, that they naturally deserve success, and that it will come easily to them.

A younger version of Linda enters. She asks Willy how much he sold on his trip. At first, he claims he made $1,200. Linda calculates his commission and is excited at the high figure. Willy then backs off, amending the amount down to $200. The underwhelming commission from this is $70, which is almost entirely swallowed up by what the family owes on their appliances and the car.

Willy's lie again shows his need to make himself look successful. Linda's excited response shows her willingness to believe in him despite his exaggerations. The endless payments on their possessions hint at how Willy and his family have become slaves to his dream of material comfort.

Sobered by the tiny amount that he has earned, Willy now worries to Linda that people don't seem to like him, which is stopping him from getting ahead. He wonders whether he talks and jokes too much, and confides that once he hit a fellow salesman because he overheard the man making fun of his weight. Linda tells him with fervor that, to her, he is the handsomest man in the world. Willy replies that Linda is his best friend and that he misses her badly when he's on the road.

Linda's love for Willy is steadfast, and isn't based on the money he makes.Willy fails to see this, however, and except for occasional moments like this one in which he admits his vulnerability, he is always trying to confidently "sell" himself, even to his family. His job also takes him away from his family, so that he is seldom around.

As Willy says these words to Linda, The Woman's laughter is heard from the darkness of another part of the stage The scene shifts, and now Willy is flirting with The Woman, a secretary for a buyer at one of the stores in Willy's territory, in a hotel room. She tells him that she picked him out from all the salesmen. He is extremely flattered. She thanks him for the **stockings** he has given her as a gift, and promises that when he returns she will make sure he gets to see the buyers.

The Woman's appearance in Willy's memory at this moment, along with his flattered response to her, suggests that loneliness and insecurity spurred him into the affair. The Woman's ghostly laughter suggests how his betrayal of Linda haunts him. Also notice how, in contrast to Linda's unconditional love, his relationship with The Woman seems almost like a financial transaction of gifts for sex and access.

Willy returns to his conversation with Linda, who is mending her stockings. Willy becomes upset, and orders her to throw the old stockings out. He says that he refuses to let his wife wear an old pair of stockings.

Linda mending stockings reminds Willy that he has betrayed Linda on both emotional and financial fronts.

Willy's memories build to a crescendo. Bernard runs through, begging Biff to study for the upcoming exam. Willy tells Bernard to just give Biff the answers. Bernard refuses, then advises Biff to return the football. Linda complains that she has heard that Biff is too rough with the girls from school, and that their mothers are afraid of him. Willy responds that he will whip Biff when he finds him, but then becomes angry and defends Biff as someone with spirit and personality. To himself, he wonders why Biff is stealing footballs.

Willy's memories reveal how the values with which he has raised Biff have made Biff come to consider himself exceptional and entitled to whatever he wants regardless of how hard he works or whether it harms others. Willy doesn't want to confront the more troubled side of Biff's nature. He'd rather believe Biff has failed him rather than that he's failed Biff as a father.

Happy comes downstairs, distracting Willy from his memories. Happy tries to convince Willy to come upstairs and go to bed. Willy wonders aloud why he didn't go to Alaska with his brother Ben, who started with nothing and made it rich by discovering a diamond mine in Africa.

Ben is Willy's idealized version of the American Dream: an adventurer who struck out into the wilderness and became fabulously wealthy. He regrets settling for his "lesser" dream of becoming a successful salesman.

Charley, who has heard the voices in Willy's house, comes over from next door to see if Willy is all right. The two men play cards. Charley suspects from Willy's early arrival home that work is not going well for him, and offers him a job. Willy refuses, taking this friendly offer as an insult to his abilities as a salesman.

Willy refuses Charley's offer because he thinks that a man must be self-sufficient, as Ben was. He also sees accepting the offer as giving up on his dream. He can't bear to give up on the dream that is the only thing he has left, even if the dream itself is the cause of his problems.

Willy asks Charley what he thinks of the new ceiling Willy has put up. Charley shows interest, but Willy quickly turns on him, mocking Charley because he can't handle tools.

Like his flute-making father, Willy enjoys making things. But his salesman job involves creating nothing and selling only himself. His regret and insecurity at having given up on that aspect of himself are evident in his nasty treatment of Charley.

In a kind of daydream, Willy's rugged, dignified older brother Ben appears onstage. Willy tells Charley that Ben died only a few weeks ago, in Africa. In his grogginess, he talks to Charley and Ben at the same time. He becomes confused, and accuses Charley, who has just won a hand, of playing the game wrong. Charley leaves, angry at the insult from Willy and disturbed that Willy is talking to his dead brother as if he is in the room.

Ben is the ideal of everything that Willy wishes he was: wealthy, strong, and manly. Yet his appearance in Willy's dreams coupled with Willy's bullying treatment of Charley (and his disregard for Charley's skill at cards) suggests that Ben may not be that great an example to follow.

Now alone, Willy remembers a time when Ben visited the house. In the memory, the two of them discuss their family history with Linda. Ben left home when Willy was nearly four years old to look for their father, who had abandoned them and gone to Alaska. His sense of geography was so poor, however, that he ended up in Africa and made a fortune in the diamond mines. Willy and Linda are impressed.

Willy was abandoned by both his father and older brother, foreshadowing his own final act of the play.The ludicrous luck that led to Ben's success has warped Willy's sense of what's important. Now he sees luck and charisma as more important than such things as Charley's lifetime of work.

Willy calls Biff and Happy into the room and asks Ben to tell them about their grandfather. Ben describes "a very great and a very wild-hearted man," who traveled through America in a wagon with his family, selling the **flutes** that he made. He says that their father made more money in a week than Willy will make in a lifetime.

Willy sees the gap between himself and his father, a craftsman whose product—or so the flute music in the play's score suggests—has outlived him. Notice how Ben bullies and mocks Willy, just as Willy bullied and mocked Charlie.

Willy boasts that his sons are also rugged. To test his claim, Ben begins to mock-wrestle with Biff, and then trips the boy and threatens him by hovering the point of his umbrella over Biff's eye. He gives Biff this lesson: never fight fair with a stranger. Willy, still anxious to impress Ben even though by now Linda is afraid of Ben, tells him that the family hunts snakes and rabbits in Brooklyn.

Willy desperately needs the approval of Ben, who was a father figure to him. But Ben is here revealed as a cruel, nasty man, and so Willy's desire to emulate Ben makes Willy a bully too. Willy's mentions hunting in Brooklyn to display his "wild" side, but Brooklyn is no Alaska.

A younger Charley enters and warns Willy not to let his sons steal any more from the construction site nearby. Willy, still trying to impress Ben, brags that his sons are fearless characters. Charley counters that the jails are full of fearless characters. Ben laughs at Charley, and says that so is the stock exchange. Before leaving to catch his train, Ben praises Willy on how manly his boys are. Willy, pleased, asks Ben what he should teach his boys about life. Ben repeats his own success story. Willy is left with the idea that to succeed is to walk into a jungle and come out rich.

Willy's ideas about the traits necessary for success are directly traceable to Ben, even though to the audience Ben now comes across as a blowhard who doesn't recognize the role that dumb luck played in his own success. Willy then passes on these traits to his own sons: in the belief that they will make them successes. Instead of correcting Biff's recklessness and dishonesty, he praises it.

Willy wanders out into the back yard, still talking to the ghosts from his past. He tries to look up into the sky, but can't see anything because of the big buildings crowding in from all sides. He says: "Gotta break your neck to see a star in this yard."

In searching the sky, Willy yearns to reconnect with the natural world, but the constrained life he has chosen prevents this. His comment foreshadows that death is the only way he can escape the trap he has created for himself.

Linda, who has heard Willy talking to himself, comes to the door to the backyard and asks him to come to bed. He responds by asking what happened to the diamond watch fob Ben had given him. She reminds him that he pawned it thirteen years ago, for Biff's radio correspondence course.

Willy has sacrificed his connections to his brother and to the natural world in order to try to give everything to his sons. But unlike Charley, who gives his son love and a solid example, he only ever gives his sons money and dreams of easy success.

Willy leaves to go on a walk, though he is in his slippers. Biff and Happy join Linda downstairs and the three of them have a worried conversation about Willy's mental health. Linda asks Biff why he fights with his father all the time, and whether he has come home to stay. Biff avoids committing. Linda tells him that one day he will return home, having been away, and won't recognize her or Willy anymore. She demands that he respect Willy.

Linda, as the closest person in Willy's life, consistently acknowledges his humanity and worth. Biff sees only the discrepancy between the persona Willy projects and the actual realities of Willy's life, and looks at Willy more with pity than love. He also resents that Willy saddled him with lofty expectations that he could never fulfill.

Biff angrily responds that Willy never respected her. Linda counters that Willy may not be a great man, but he is a human being, and deserves to have attention paid to him. He has lost his salary, she reveals, and is working only on commission. Nobody will buy from him anymore, and he borrows fifty dollars a week from Charley and claims it is his salary. She tells her sons that Willy has worked all his life only for their benefit.

By advocating that "attention must be paid" to Willy, Linda is voicing one of the play's central ideas: that dramatic tragedy can befall not only a great man, but a small man. Though Willy is not regarded by the world as a hero, his dreams are large enough that their collapse is tragic.

Linda says that Biff and Happy have been ungrateful to their father. She says that Happy is a "philandering bum," and that Biff has been remiss as a son. Feeling guilty, Biff angrily offers to stay in his old room, in a city that he hates, to get a job and help her and Willy cover their expenses. Linda just asks him to stop fighting with Willy all the time, and reveals that Willy's car accidents weren't actually accidents: he has been trying to kill himself. She mentions a woman who witnessed the last accident. Biff mishears and thinks that she is talking about The Woman.

Linda is the only clear-eyed member of the Loman family. She cares about love and family, not the American Dream, and so she can see the other members of the family for what they really are. Biff's mishearing "The Woman" hints at a buried secret in Willy and Biff's past that explains why Biff's adult attitudes toward Willy have changed so much from the adulation he showed Willy as a child.

Finally, Linda tells the boys that she found a **rubber hose** behind the fuse box in the basement, and a new nipple on the gas pipe of the water heater, which she thinks means that Willy had tried to asphyxiate himself. Biff decides that though he hates the business world, it will be best for his family if he stays home and tries to make another go of it.

The stark reality that Willy is trying to bring about his own death is what finally moves Biff to take his father seriously. He realizes that the only way he can help his father is to fulfill his father's dreams for him, even if he doesn't share those dreams.

When Willy enters, having overheard his family arguing about him, Biff tries to joke, saying that Willy might whistle in an elevator. Willy takes offense, thinking that Biff is somehow calling him crazy, and declares that he is still a big shot among salesmen.

Willy's ego is too fragile to accept even the smallest jabs of humor. He responds to every slight by trying to make himself look big and powerful, instead of looking for support in his family.

To diffuse Willy's anger, Happy announces that Biff is going to ask his old boss Bill Oliver to ask for stake money to start a business. Willy is intrigued. On the spot, Happy comes up with the idea that he and Biff, both athletes, will start a sporting goods company and hold exhibition events in which the brothers will participate to promote it.

Willy and Happy are both younger and neglected sons, and each would do anything to make their distant (or absent) fathers proud. Though Happy's idea is absurd, it reawakens Willy's dreams, and, therefore, his confidence.

Excited by the sporting goods idea, which they call the "Florida idea," Willy gives advice to Biff regarding the interview. He tells Biff that he should walk into the office very seriously, then changes his mind and tells him he should walk in with a big laugh. He also tells Biff not to pick up anything that might fall off Oliver's desk, because that's a job for an office boy. But when Linda tries to offer advice, Willy keeps shushing her. Biff gets angry at his father, and the two of them once again start to argue, but they manage to reconcile slightly before Willy goes to sleep.

Willy doesn't give advice about how to plan and run a sporting goods store. Instead he tells Biff how to "sell" himself to Oliver. Willy's job as a salesman has so consumed him that he believes that how you sell yourself, not skill or work ethic, is all important. Yet even in the Loman's excitement about the idea, the macho values Willy learned from Ben, this time regarding the knowledge of women, cause strife in the family.

In bed that night, Linda asks Willy what Biff has against him, and reminds him to ask Howard Wagner for a sales position in New York. He tells her he is too tired to talk. Biff, meanwhile, searches in the basement and is horrified to find the **rubber hose** behind the heater. He takes it and goes upstairs to bed.

Willy continues to refuse to face his past betrayal of his family, or the failure of his career. He prefers to dream than face reality. By taking the hose, Biff presents himself as the one person who can save his father.

ACT 2

When Willy wakes the next morning, Biff and Happy have already gone, and Linda tells Willy that Biff is on his way to see Bill Oliver. Excited by the prospects of the "Florida idea," Willy tells Linda that he wants to buy some **seeds** and plant a garden in the back yard. Linda is overjoyed at Willy's high spirits, but laughingly reminds him that their yard doesn't get enough sun to support a garden. Willy jokes that they'll just have to get a country house.

Willy's desire to plant seeds at this hopeful moment symbolizes a number of things. It shows his desire to reconnect with nature, his need to create something tangible, and his dream of raising thriving sons. Linda's laughing response hints that Willy's hopes will go unfulfilled, but Willy just responds with even more grandiose dreams.

Linda then reminds Willy to ask Howard Wagner for a salaried non-traveling position in New York. She also tells him to ask for an advance to cover their last payment on their twenty-five year home mortgage, as well as payments on their refrigerator and Willy's life insurance premium. He agrees.

Willy's dreams can never withstand his financial reality. Yet notice that he and Linda have almost succeeded in one aspect of the American Dream—home ownership. Yet Willy seems uninterested. He's already dreaming of more.

Before Willy leaves, Linda tells him that the boys want to take him to a fancy dinner at Frank's Chop House, a steak restaurant in Manhattan. Willy is elated, but just then notices a **stocking** in Linda's hand. He tells her not to mend stockings, at least not while he's around.

A fancy dinner with his sons is a dream come true for Willy—a sign that his sons, and therefore he, are successful. But the repetition of Willy and Linda's stocking conversation hints that Willy hasn't dealt with shame or consequences of his infidelity.

Right after Willy leaves, Linda answers a phone call from Biff. She tells him what she thinks is good news: that the **rubber hose** Willy attached to the gas heater is gone, implying that he took it away himself. She is disappointed to hear that Biff was the one who removed it the night before.

In the presence of Willy's infectious good mood, Linda had allowed herself a dream of her own: that Willy has given up suicide.

Willy arrives at Howard Wagner's office, and timidly enters. Howard is playing with a wire recorder he bought for dictation, but has been using to record his own family. He makes Willy listen to his daughter whistling, his son reciting state capitals, and his shy wife refusing to talk. Willy tries to praise the device, but Howard shushes him. Howard then tells Willy he should get one of the recorders, as they only cost a hundred and fifty dollars. Willy promises to do just that.

The wealthy Howard doesn't respect Willy—shushing Willy just as Willy shushed Linda. He is more interested in his toy than in Willy, and doesn't realize, or care, that what he paid for that toy would lift Willy and his family out of financial trouble. Willy, meanwhile, continues to sell himself as a successful man.

When Howard gets around to asking why Willy isn't in Boston, Willy explains that he doesn't want to travel anymore. He asks Howard for a salaried job at the New York office for $65 a week. Howard says no position is available, and looks for his lighter. Willy finds the lighter and hands it to Howard, and, growing desperate, reminds Howard that he helped name him. Willy lowers his salary requirement to fifty dollars a week, but Howard reiterates that there's no position.

Howard inherited his position from his father, who built his company in part on Willy's labor. But Howard sees as outdated the system of loyalty and personal connections in which Willy has put total faith. When Willy hands Howard the lighter, he breaks his own advice to Biff about never handing anything to Oliver.

Willy tells a story of a salesman who inspired him, Dave Singleman. Dave sold until he was eighty-four, going into hotel rooms and contacting buyers by phone. He died "the death of a salesman," alone in a train compartment, but was mourned by hundreds of salesmen and buyers. As a young man, Willy had wanted to go to Alaska and try to strike it rich like his father and brother, but Dave's success and respected position convinced Willy that selling was honorable, full of potential, and "the greatest career a man could want." He complains to Howard that there is no friendship or respect in the business anymore.

Willy's choice of role model shows that he has absorbed the wrong values from the American Dream. Rather than having family and friends at his funeral, Singleman, whose name hints at how alone he was, died at work and was mourned only by business contacts. Singleman is the epitome of Willy's desire to be "well liked," which is more superficial than either being loved or doing something you love.

Willy continues to mention Howard's father and lowers his salary requirement, but Howard is uninterested. He leaves his office to speak with some other employees, telling Willy him to pull himself together in the meantime. Willy, alone, begins to speak to the late Frank Wagner, the former owner of the company and Howard's father, but accidentally turns on the tape recorder, filling the room with the voice of Howard's son. He anxiously shouts for Howard to come back and turn it off.

In Willy's time of need, Howard abandons him. Willy's inability to use the recorder symbolizes how the world has past him by. When he accidentally turns on the recorder while he's speaking with his memory of Frank in Howard's office, Willy is surrounded by three generations of Wagners, all of whom have been or will be more successful than he and his children.

Howard comes back in and unplugs the tape recorder. He tells Willy that he is no longer welcome to represent the company in Boston. Referring to Willy, his elder, by the term "kid," Howard tells Willy to take a long rest and let his sons support him. Willy refuses out of pride, but as Howard continues to insist it eventually dawns on Willy that he is being fired.

Willy's exaggerations have caught up with him, as Howard believes that Biff and Happy are far more successful than they actually are. Howard's disrespectful use of the word "kid" implies that he, like Willy, equates wealth with personal worth.

Howard leaves, and Willy slips into a memory in which Ben is offering him an opportunity to come to Alaska to manage a tract of timberland. Before Willy can accept, Linda appears and tells Ben that Willy is on track to become a member of the firm, so he can't take the offered job. Ben asks Willy whether he can reach out and touch his success. Willy responds by pointing to his son, Biff, who plays football and is about to go to college. He tells Ben that what's important isn't what you do, but being liked by people, and that this quality is as tangible as timber.

Willy and Ben are arguing from different belief systems. Ben, like the old time barons of industry who built their wealth through coal, steel, or railroads, believes that wealth is a physical thing that you can build and touch. Willy, in contrast, has invested his effort in his sons and in his own personality and business relationships.

Now in a new memory, Bernard enters as the Loman family is preparing to go to Biff's football game. He asks to carry Biff's helmet, but Happy insists on carrying that. Biff allows Bernard to carry his shoulder pads. Charley enters and jokes with Willy about the game, trying to deflate Willy's excessive expectations about the game. Willy becomes angry and accuses Charley of thinking he's better than everyone else.

Willy's sense of success as a combination of personality, luck and glory is evident in the emphasis he places on Biff's success on the football field rather than in the classroom. Charley's view is more realistic. Willy's anger at Charley indicates that he senses that Charley is right.

Bernard, now grown, is waiting in the reception room outside Charley's office. Charley's secretary, Jenny, comes in to ask Bernard to deal with Willy, who has come to see Charley but is still lost in his memory, arguing with Charley about the football game. Bernard, a lawyer, speaks with Willy, and in the course of conversation mentions that he has a case in Washington, D.C. Willy replies that Biff is also working on a big deal. Willy suddenly becomes upset, and asks Bernard why Biff never accomplished anything after the big football game when he was 17.

Bernard and Willy are at opposite points in their lives. Yet, in spite of all the memories Willy has already relived, he is unable to see why Bernard, the careful student, has become a success while Biff has not lived up to the potential Willy saw in him. Willy can't see that Biff's failure resulted from the values that Willy instilled in him.

The two of them agree that Biff's life derailed after he failed math. Bernard recalls that Biff had been determined to go to summer school and make up the class. But then Biff took a trip to Boston to see Willy, and when he returned he didn't go to summer school, burned his University of Virginia sneakers, and fought with Bernard, ending their friendship. Bernard asks Willy what happened in Boston. Willy becomes defensive, claims that nothing happened, and says he isn't to blame for Biff's failure.

Biff failed math because Willy helped instill in him the sense that football and popularity was important, while school was not. But after failing math, Biff was determined to atone for his failure, to rededicate himself and actually work for success. Then he visited Willy in Boston, and gave up. So whatever happened in Boston, which Willy refuses to discuss, must be crucial.

Just then, Charley comes out of his office and hands Bernard a goodbye gift, a bottle of bourbon. He tells Willy that Bernard is going to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court. Willy, impressed and jealous, can't believe that Bernard hadn't told him.

Bernard's reticence about a major accomplishment directly contrasts Willy's constant bragging about superfluous or illusory successes.

Bernard leaves, and Willy follows Charley into his office. Charley starts to count out the usual fifty dollars, but Willy sheepishly asks for a hundred and ten because of all his payments due. Charley wonders why Willy won't just take his job offer, which would allow Willy to make fifty dollars a week. Willy is still too proud to take it, and says he already has a job. Then he breaks down and tells Charley that Howard has just fired him, and repeats his philosophy that to be successful, a man must be impressive and well-liked. Charley asks, rhetorically, if anyone would have liked J.P. Morgan if he wasn't rich.

Charley is much more attuned than Willy to the demands of the modern business world, which is a capitalistic rather than a chivalrous system, more interested in profits than heroes. Though he reiterates his offer of help, Willy can't bring himself to give up his identity as a salesman or independent provider. Willy insists on being a hero, even if only in his own mind, by refusing all help.

Charley gives Willy the money to pay his life insurance premium. Willy muses that he has ended up worth more dead than alive, but Charley angrily refutes this. Willy tells Charley, "you're my only friend," and leaves Charley's office on the verge of tears.

Willy sees success as measured in money and material things. This logic leads him to measure his own life purely in financial terms. It's also important that even though Willy has always seen Charley as inferior or a competitor, Charley is still there to support Willy in his time of need (despite Charley not liking him much personally), and this is the only time Willy acknowledges that.

At Frank's Chop House, Happy banters with Stanley, a waiter he knows. When Biff arrives, Happy is flirting with an attractive girl, Miss Forsythe. She claims to be a cover model, while Happy says that he is a champagne salesman. Happy introduces Biff as a quarterback for the New York Giants. He asks Miss Forsythe, who it seems likely is a call girl, if she can continue to chat, and possibly call a friend. She agrees and goes off to make a call.

Happy has always idolized Willy, in part because Willy always paid more attention to Biff. Happy has so internalized Willy's lessons about being liked that he thinks nothing of lying to seem more important than he is. He also seems to think little of women, a reflection of Willy's lack of respect for Linda.

Once she is gone, Biff tells Happy that he waited in Bill Oliver's waiting room for six hours. When Oliver finally came out, he gave Biff one look and walked away. Apparently, Oliver didn't remember Biff at all. Biff wonders how he had ever come to think that he had been a salesman for Oliver. In fact, he had just been a shipping clerk, but somehow Willy's exaggerations had convinced him and everyone else in the family that he was actually a salesman. Humiliated after Oliver failed to recognize him, Biff snuck into Oliver's office, stole his fountain pen and fled the building.

Willy literally warps his children's view of the world, with the result that they are ultimately humiliated when they come face to face with reality. Years earlier, Biff stole a crate of basketballs from Oliver. Now he steals a pen. This repetition indicates that Biff is stuck in the same self-destructive cycle that led him to fail math and then decide not to try to pass the class.

Biff tells Happy that he wants to confess all this to Willy, so that their father will know that Biff is not the man that Willy takes him for. Happy advises Biff that it would be better to lie, and to tell Willy that Oliver is thinking the offer over then wait until Willy eventually forgets about it. This way, Happy says, Willy will have something to look forward to.

Biff wants to break this cycle by forcing Willy to see the truth about him. Biff wants to break free by ceasing to "sell" himself as something he isn't. Happy, in contrast, continues to believe that "selling" hope, even if it means lying, is the best policy.

Willy arrives. Biff begins, hesitantly, to tell him what happened. But before he can say much, Willy reveals that he's been fired, and needs some good news for their mother. Happy begins to go along with Willy's assumptions about the Oliver meeting, but Biff continues to try to tell his father what really happened when he tried to meet with Oliver.

Biff now realizes that the inflated dreams all the Lomans have shared are destructive, and wants to share this epiphany with his father. Willy, however, prefers his illusions to the hard look at himself that Biff offers.

Willy remembers a young Bernard knocking on Linda's door, telling her that Biff has flunked math. Distracted by this memory, Willy ignores Biff's confession and instead tells Biff, out of the blue, that he shouldn't blame Willy for his failures, since it was Biff who failed math. Not knowing what to make of this, Biff shows Willy the stolen pen as proof of what he did. He and Happy are frightened by Willy's delusional behavior.

Willy tries to hide from the truth that Biff is telling him. Willy focuses on Biff's failing math as the source of his troubles because Willy himself refuses to take any responsibility for Biff's failure.

Trying to calm Willy down, Biff falls back on Happy's strategy and lies: he tells Willy that Oliver is going to lend them the money. Willy tells Biff to go back to see Oliver tomorrow, but Biff now says that he's ashamed to go back, having stolen the pen and also, long ago, having stolen some basketballs. Willy accuses him of not wanting to be anything, and Biff retorts that he has already swallowed his pride and gone back to Oliver on behalf of Willy.

In spite of the revelation Biff has had—that he will never be a rising star in the business world and doesn't want to be, that he is instead a "low man" like his father—his love and pity for Willy manifests itself here as complicity in the fantasy Willy wants them to share.

Miss Forsythe returns, now with a friend, Letta. Willy, in a daze, wanders off to the restroom. Biff berates Happy for not caring enough about Willy. He pulls the **rubber hose** that he found in the cellar from his pocket and puts it on the table, saying in no uncertain terms that Willy is going to kill himself. He rushes out of the restaurant, upset. Happy hurriedly pays their bill and, embarrassed, tells the girls that Willy isn't really his father, "just a guy." Happy ushers the girls out of the restaurant and after Biff, with Willy still alone in the restroom.

By putting a rubber hose on the dinner table, Biff is bringing an ugly truth to light that they can no longer afford to ignore. By denying his relation to Willy, Happy reveals himself as a person capable of rejecting any truth that does not suit his convenience—the ultimate salesman. Willy, whose delusions caused him to abandon his sons, is now abandoned by his sons.

Alone in the restroom, Willy relives the memory of being surprised by Biff while he was with The Woman in a hotel room in Boston. The memory begins as Willy and The Woman hear a knock on the door. Willy makes The Woman hide in the bathroom while he opens the door. Biff enters, ashamed, and tells his father that he has just flunked math. He begs Willy to persuade his math teacher to let him pass.

Finally what happened in Boston is revealed. When Willy blames Biff for failing math, he is trying to duck the responsibility for Biff finding him with The Woman. The young Biff in this scene still doesn't believe in hard work. He wants Willy to step in and save him, rather than having to do any actual work in math.

Trying to get Biff out of the room, Willy pushes him toward the door and agrees to drive back immediately and speak to the teacher. When Biff imitates the teacher's lisp, The Woman laughs from the bathroom. She then emerges from the bathroom, wearing only a black slip negligee. Willy pushes her out into the hall, telling Biff that she is an acquaintance of his, a buyer, and that her room was being painted so she had to take a shower in his. The Woman demands a box of **stockings** before she leaves. Biff begins to cry. Willy makes a host of excuses before admitting that he was lonely. He promises to talk to the math teacher, but Biff shouts that no one would listen to a "phony little fake" and announces that, anyway, he's decided not to retake math or go to college. He condemns Willy for giving Linda's stockings to his mistress, then runs from the room as Willy cries out after him, ordering him to come back.

Desperate to keep The Woman a secret, to continue to sell himself as a hero, Willy agrees to try to help Biff slide by without working. This leads Biff to mock the teacher, which causes The Woman to reveal herself—just as reality will always ultimately reveal itself in the face of lies. When The Woman does appear, Biff realizes that the man he'd admired and believed in was a lie, "a phony." How could Willy be a hero when he cheats on his wife because of loneliness and steals from his own family to give gifts to his mistress. For Willy, the stockings come to represent his failure. For Biff, they represent the falseness of his father's American Dream.

Willy emerges from his memory, still in the restroom, as Stanley shakes him. He tells Willy that his sons have gone. Willy tries to give Stanley a tip of a dollar, but Stanley slips the bill back into Willy's pocket without Willy noticing.

Stanley is like a surrogate son in this scene. When Willy attempts to tip him, Willy is preserving the last vestiges of his old role as provider to his sons, who have just abandoned him.

Willy asks Stanley if he knows where he can find a store that sells carrot and pea **seeds**. Stanley tells him where to go, and Willy hurries off, frantically explaining that he has to move quickly because he doesn't "have a thing in the ground."

Willy's urge to plant vegetables represents his desire, as a man nearing the end of his life, to leave something behind. His sons haven't grown the way he wanted them to, and so he must replant, bringing out his dormant relationship with nature in the process.

Biff and Happy return home later that night. Happy has brought a bouquet of roses for Linda, but she angrily throws them to the floor. She asks Biff if he cares whether Willy lives or dies, and accuses Happy of spending all his time with "lousy rotten whores." She accuses them of abandoning Willy at the restaurant and demands that both of them pack immediately and get out of the house. Happy denies having abandoned Willy at all, but Biff admits that it is true and describes himself as "scum." Overcome by guilt, Biff searches the house for Willy, who, Linda finally tells Biff, is outside obsessively trying to plant **seeds** despite the darkness.

Linda reveals that she sees the truth about her sons, even if Willy can't. Perhaps she also knows the truth about Willy, but her love for Willy is more important to her than that knowledge. It is therefore ironic that Willy values money and material things more than Linda's love for him. Happy continues to try to lie to make his life easier. Biff, in contrast, has begun to confront the ugly aspects of his personality.

In the garden, Willy is talking with Ben, and mentions the $20,000 dollar life insurance policy his family will be entitled to when he is dead. Ben argues that the company may not honor the policy, but Willy scoffs at this idea, saying that the company must honor the policy because he has paid all the premiums. He adds that Biff will see how important he is from the number of people at his funeral. Ben counters that his family will think of him as a coward.

One of the tragedies of the play is that, despite the fact that the capitalist American system has betrayed Willy, he continues to believe in it. He continues to think that if he is well-liked and honors his commitments that he and his family will be taken care of. Ben knows better, but Willy as usual avoids facing the truth.

Biff enters and takes the hoe out of Willy's hand. He tells Willy that he is leaving and won't be around to fight with Willy any more. They go inside. Willy is still clinging to the notion that Biff has an appointment scheduled with Oliver. Biff says he is going to leave and not keep in touch, so Willy won't have to worry about him anymore. Willy responds fiercely that Biff is throwing his life away out of spite.

Biff is willing to drop out of Willy's life, and remain a failure in Willy's eyes, in order to spare both of them from being dragged down by the impossible expectations that Willy has always placed on him. Biff sees this as an act of love, but Willy sees it as abandonment.

Biff puts the **rubber hose** in front of Willy, demanding that he answer to it. He tells Willy that he won't be a hero if he commits suicide, and accuses everyone in the house, including himself, of maintaining delusions. He charges Happy with making his job title sound more important than it is, and admits that he has gotten fired from every job he has held since high school for stealing. He reveals that for three months he was out of touch he was actually in jail in Kansas City for stealing a suit. He says that all his life he has been too inflated with the self-importance Willy instilled in him to be honest or take orders from anyone.

Biff is saying that Willy's unrealistic ambitions for him were what made it impossible to be a functioning member of the world. The values of personal magnetism and blind ambition that Willy instilled in him proved insufficient to catapult Biff to the top, but because he was unable to settle for anything but the top he always felt resentful against the world, which fueled his thievery. Like Ben, he tells Willy that suicide is a cowardly escape, not the act of a hero.

Biff continues, saying that what he really loves in this world is to be outdoors, and "the work and the food and the time to sit and smoke." He tells Willy that he just wants to know himself, and for Willy to know *himself*. He says that they are both unimportant men, and should stop deluding themselves that they are destined for leadership or greatness. He tells Willy to throw his false, dangerous dreams away. Sobbing, Biff goes upstairs to bed.

Biff's revelations through the course of the play have led him to value the things he loves rather than some external, artificial expectation of success. He sees that the American Dream doesn't have to be about success, it can be about valuing what you have, and he desperately tries to make Willy see the same thing.

Willy, suddenly in better spirits, comments that Biff must really like him to cry over him as he did. Linda and Happy assure Willy that Biff has always loved him.

Willy, avoiding the significance of Biff's words, latches onto Biff's tears to convince himself of how well-liked he is. Happy and Linda enable him.

Happy goes upstairs. Linda follows soon after. Willy promises to also come upstairs soon. Alone, now, Ben appears to him, and Willy assures Ben that Biff will be magnificent one day, once he has twenty thousand dollars in his pocket. The phantom of Ben urges Willy to come into the jungle, and disappears. Willy says goodbye to the house, and gives Biff advice about life in the terms of a football game. Linda calls down to Willy, telling him to come to bed. In response, the car growl to life and drive away, as Linda, Biff, and Happy rush downstairs,.

Alone onstage with the ghost of the brother who abandoned Willy in search of wealth, Willy chooses to abandon his family in search of wealth: the payout of his life insurance policy. Willy's warped sense of the American Dream, his focus on money as the only measure of success, makes him value himself not as a loving father or husband but rather in purely monetary terms.

REQUIEM

The only people at Willy's funeral are his family, Charley and Bernard. Linda is bewildered by the absence of all Willy's business associates, and wonders if everyone else Willy knew blamed him for having committed suicide. Charley comforts her, saying that everyone knows "it's a rough world."

Willy's funeral stands in contrast to that of his hero, Dave Singleman. His imagined legion of business contacts has disappeared. Though he valued success more than love, only the people that love him are left.

Happy, upset, says that Willy's death was unnecessary. Linda wonders why Willy would kill himself now, when they had nearly paid off all their debts. Biff brings up the memory of Willy doing craftsman's work around the house, and maintains that more of him went into that work than into his life's work of sales. "He had the wrong dreams," Biff says, and adds that his father didn't know who he was in the way that Biff now knows himself.

Happy and Linda view Willy's death here on the terms that Willy himself saw it: a business investment, one they believe didn't need to be made. Biff sees him as a tragic figure whose happiness was literally at his fingertips, but who had been so warped by his dreams of success that he couldn't see it.

Charley delivers an eulogy in Willy's defense. He says that a salesman doesn't do anything concrete like bolting a nut or prescribing medicine, but that all a salesman has is his smile and the trust that people will smile back. When a salesman loses his dreams, Charley says, he is finished.

Charley sees Willy as an exemplar of his profession, and by extension just one among many who have been misled by the American Dream, which reduces people to products.

Biff again says that that their father didn't know who he was, angering Happy. When Biff invites Happy to come out west with him, Happy responds that he refuses to be beaten that easily, and promises to stay in the city and fulfill his father's dream by becoming a top businessman. Biff gives him a hopeless look.

Happy continues to buy into Willy's "wrong dreams." He sees Biff's repudiation of Willy's dreams not as a triumph, but as a cowardly failure.

Linda asks for some privacy to say goodbye to Willy, and she is left alone at the grave. She can't cry yet, she confesses, because it seems to her as if Willy is just gone on another sales trip. Emotionally, she keeps expecting him to come back. She tells him that she made the last payment on the house that day, and now there will be nobody home. "We're free," she tells him, and begins to cry.

Since Willy's job was to abandon his family for short periods of time, Linda isn't yet able to accept the notion that he has abandoned them for good. The material gain from his death is superfluous next to his family's overwhelming love for him, which he failed to see.

Biff enters, and supporting Linda, leads her away. All the characters exit the stage as **flute** music plays, and the final image is of the apartment buildings that surround the Loman house.

Willy's humanity and family, symbolized by his home, has been overwhelmed by the city, with its insistence on success.

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