

ENG4U SEEP Essay Exemplar, Level 4

Essay Prompt #43: *Analyze how a character's internal AND external conflicts help to develop a central theme in a work studied in this course.*

In Arthur Miller's Death of Salesman, the main character Willy Loman relentlessly works towards his achievement of the American Dream, which he envisions as being a financially successful, "All American" family. Despite his hard work, Willy, at age sixty, shows that he does not feel as if he has achieved his goal through his internal conflicts about his past and present and his external conflicts. His hardships and disappointment in his life ultimately lead to his suicide. Thus, Willy's internal and external conflicts help develop the theme that the desperate pursuit of the American Dream will result in tragedy.

Clearly placed thesis refers directly to prompt while accurately identifying a theme.

As the play progresses, the audience learns about different aspects of Willy's past through hallucinations that Willy experiences. These hallucinations come from Willy's internal conflicts about his past. For example, during a conversation with his wife Linda in Act 1, Willy hallucinates about his affair in Boston. When he returns to his conversation with Linda, he sees her mending her stockings and gets angry with her for doing so. Because Willy gave Linda's stockings to the woman he cheated with, he associates stockings with his internal guilt about the affair. As well, his anger at the mended stockings also reveals his internal struggle with feeling as though he cannot provide for his family, since they cannot afford new stockings. Because of his need for success, which he sees as being a crucial part of the American Dream, Willy is insecure about his own life with Linda, which results in further tragic circumstances, such as him being disrespectful of Linda and making her cry. Also, Willy further demonstrates his desperate need for financial success through his hallucinations of his successful brother Ben. During a card game with Charley, Willy hallucinates about Ben, who travelled to Africa and became rich. Willy says that if he had done the same as Ben and travelled to pursue success, things would have turned

Consistently throughout the essay, the student makes a statement, supports it with well-chosen, specific examples from the text, and explains how the examples support the statement.

out differently for him. Willy's need to justify his financial failure and his idolization of his brother Ben demonstrate how Willy's pursuit of success results in his feelings of failure. Further, Willy hallucinates about his family's past during Act Two, mainly about Biff's big football game. Remembering about the days when Willy had what was considered an "All American" family, he sees this time as the peak of his success. By focusing on Biff's football game at Ebbets Field and not his reality, Willy attempts to hold on to his ideal family, a part of his American Dream he desperately pursues. Thus, through his internal conflicts about his own past, Willy builds up his own disappointments about his life and shows that his relentless pursuit of the American Dream will lead to tragedy, such as his suicide.

Moreover, Willy's internal conflicts about his present situation are demonstrated in Act Two, which add to the pressures and hardships of his life, pushing him towards his tragic death. For example, during his meeting with his employer Howard, Willy speaks highly of a salesman named Dave Singleton. Willy sees Dave as the epitome of a successful American. Willy comes to idolize Dave and uses Dave's life as a model for his own. When Willy is unable to achieve the same success as Dave, he believes his career is a failure, unable to see the differences between himself and Dave, such as having a family to support. His internal conflict about how his career is and how he believes it should be causes Willy to become depressed about his own life, as he does not believe he has achieved the American Dream as Dave has. Also, near the end of Act Two, Willy further shows his internal conflict about his own success through his action of planting seeds outside in the dark. Planting seeds represents Willy's internal feeling of having nothing to show for his hard work and he needs something to "grow" to prove his efforts. Because his pursuit of the American Dream has left him with nothing to show for all his efforts, it results in his internal need for evidence, which is shown through him planting seeds. Yet because nothing is able to grow in his garden, which he says himself in Act 1, Willy becomes more and more depressed, leading to the tragedy of his death. Further, after his funeral, Charley

says that Willy was a happier man working with his hands. Because of his dream of financial success as a salesman, Willy does not pursue a career he would have been better suited for, such as one where he works with his hands: "He was a happy man with a batch of cement." This leads him to be unhappy with his job, causing further unhappiness in his home life. Therefore, Willy's internal conflicts demonstrate how the pursuit of his American Dream results in tragedy, as he is unhappy with his current life.

Similarly, Willy's external conflicts in the play also show that his dream causes tragedy. For example, in Act Two, Willy has a meeting with Howard to talk about a promotion so Willy does not have to travel. As Howard dismisses Willy's attempts, Willy begins to argue with him and ultimately, Howard fires Willy. This external conflict is an example of how Willy's pursuit of his American Dream, in the career of a salesman, leaves him with nothing, as Howard does not take into account the years Willy worked for the company. Losing his job sends Willy into an even deeper depression about his career and life, which shows how his pursuit of success has resulted in tragedy. Further, Willy goes to see Charley after he is fired and Charley offers him a job. Yet Willy, who prides himself on making his own success, refuses to work for him. His dependency on others contributes to Willy's negative feelings about himself, as he can no longer provide for his family and sees his suicide as the only means to provide anything useful. Moreover, at the end of Act Two, Willy fights with Biff in front of their family. This is the final confrontation between Biff and Willy and it is demonstrated through this how Willy, not only pursuing the American Dream for himself, attempts to force this upon Biff as well. This causes Biff and Willy to have a large split in their relationship, which is tragically shown as Biff cries "Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?" This rift between father and son is caused by Willy's dreams and results in the tragedy of the Loman family's disintegration. Thus, Willy's external conflict contribute to show the tragic circumstances caused by Willy's pursuit of the American Dream.

In conclusion, in Willy Loman's pursuit of the American Dream he undergoes many tragic circumstances which ultimately lead to his suicide. Through his internal conflicts about his past, the internal conflicts about his present, and his external conflicts, the audience is shown how each contributes to his depression and tragic death. Thus, Willy's internal and external conflict help develop the theme that the desperate pursuit of the American Dream will ultimately result in tragedy.

Strengths:

- Demonstrates clear understanding of the text
- Develops an insightful thesis based on analysis
- Provides thorough support for arguments and connects evidence clearly to the overall argument
- Uses appropriate transitions and explanations to make the argument flow clearly both within and between paragraphs

Next Steps:

- Verify all textual details
- Enhance clarity of ideas by continuing to hone punctuation and sentence structure