The story begins in the home of the Loman family, where he, his wife Linda and his two sons Biff and Happy live. Biff and Happy are both adults. As Willy Loman returns from a business trip, Linda enquires why he looks so worried. Later it turns out that he almost had a crashed his car on the way home because he fell in trance. Thereupon Linda demands that Willy should talk with his boss Howard to get a job near their home in Brooklyn.

Willy is disappointed in Biff: Biff failed in school and is frequently switching his jobs. His brother Happy though has a stable job, he works as an assistant of an assistant buyer at a department store.

Happy is confused that Willy speaks to himself about his disappointment in Biff. That night Happy, Biff and Linda discuss the state of Willy and discuss the fact that he is talking to himself about his disappointment in Biff. Later on Happy and Biff also discuss that the want to get a loan to buy a farm in the west.

Willy often has daydreams, in which he visions memories and often regrets the actions that led him to his current state. In one daydream he sees Biff and Happy as they were children and realises that they are well liked (in his opinion that’s the requirement for a successful businessman), in another he complains to Linda that his sales are not going well and blames the fact that he himself is not well liked and expresses his intensive jealousy of his neighbur Charley. Another memory is about Biff not behaving well: He remembers Biff stealing a football. Also, Willy often regrets that he didn’t join his now dead brother Ben who found a diamond mine in Africa and made a fortune. As well he looks back to the adultery he once committed.

As Willy and his more successful neighbor Charley later play cards together, Willy visions his brother Ben appearing and starts to talk to him. Eventually Willy gets angry because Charley wins a round, Charley heads back home. He is concerned that Willy is so confused. Willy continues his daydream and reveals that his father left the family when he was very young. Later Linda reveals to Biff and Happy that Willy tried to commit suicide multiple times, but has always failed thus far. She claims that Willy doesn’t even get regular wage, he only earns if he gets a commission; sometimes he get practically nothing because he doens’t get an assignment. Luckily his neighbour Charley offers Willy to help him every week by lending him fifty dollars.

Biff and Happy tell Willy about an idea they have: they want to get a loan and open up a business that sells sporting goods. Willy supports this idea and finds new hope in his sons. The next morning Linda tells Willy that Biff and Happy asked him to join them for dinner in a restaurant. Willy, still excited about Biff and Happy’s idea, agrees.

As Willy confronts Howard with his demand for a job in New York, Howard refuses. Even when Willy asks for a lower wage, Howard does not want to give him the job. Willy tries to impress Howard by quoting David Singleman, and tells that he inspired him to be a salesman. David Singleman was a successful salesman who set up all his deals from a hotel room and got rich and successful. But this didn’t impress Howard and he suggests Willy take “a break” from work, which means that he is practically fired.

While being in front of Charley’s office, Willy again has one of his visions, in which he visions Ben paying a visit. His brother about doing business with Willy in Alaska, namely buying timberland. Willy refuses explaining he already has a job.

As the daydream ends, Willy comes across Charley’s son, Bernard. The secretary Jenny wanted Bernard to deal with Willy since he is talking to himself. Bernard is now a successful lawyer. Bernard talks about a case he is about to make in the supreme court. He talks with Willy about Biff and why he is a failure, because Willy just daydreamed the football game Biff was playing at and was enjoying it and now asks himself why Biff isn’t that successful anymore, because he is impressed how Bernard has had a lot of success. In the past Willy always believed that Biff was going to be more successful than Bernard. Eventually, Willy gets angry at Bernard, because Bernard asks sensitive questions: Why Biff broke down after he visited Willy in Boston (he committed adultery there with another woman, it is described later in the summary). Because Biff learned that his father had committed adultery, he apparently lost faith in him, burned his sneakers with the university logo on it which he used to impress Willy. As Bernard, not knowing that the adultery happened in Boston, asks why Biff lost faith and motivation after this trip, Willy gets angry.

Later Charley offers Willy fifty dollars, but Willy asks for more. Their following discussion leads to Willy stating again that it is important to be well liked to be successful in business, which Charley denies.

While at the restaurant, Happy is flirting with a waiter called Miss Forsythe. Later it turns out that Forsythe is actually a prostitute. In addition, Biff can’t get the loan to fund his idea from his previous employer because the employer who can’t even remember Biff. What’s more, Biff always claimed that he was a salesman and his previous boss was Oliver. But it turns out that this is not true, Biff only had been an employee of low rank, and that’s also a reason why Biff didn’t get the loan. Biff and Happy decide not to tell this to Willy.

As Biff, Happy and Willy meet in the restaurant, Willy reveals that he got fired. Despite this Biff nevertheless decides to tell Willy that he didn’t get the loan from Oliver for their business. Willy blames Biff for being rude to offending Oliver and subsequently has another vision, in which he visions Biff finding out about his adultery which he committed while in Boston: Biff went to visit Willy there and informed him that he hadn’t passed math. Willy advises him to convince his math teacher to let him pass. This event severely affected Biff. As mentioned before, Biff went home and burned his sneakers with the university logo because he was very disappointed in Willy. Before that he has always seen him as a example, which wasn’t the case after he found out about this adultery.

Biff and Happy leave while Willy is still in the restaurant. As they return home, Linda is mad because they left Willy alone in the restaurant.

Back home, Willy plans to kill himself so that the family receives his life insurance money.

Biff tells Willy that he will leave, Willy accuses Biff of wasting his life and says that Biff is blaming his failure on Willy. Biff then admits that he was actually once in jail for stealing. He also blames Willy that the constant meddling of Willy led him to not be able to do jobs. In the end, Biff wants Willy to accept that they both are not “special” people who should run big businesses or be successful salesman.

In the end, Willy kills himself. At the funeral Biff, Happy and Linda are grieving. There aren’t many attendants.

Q1: How does the American Dream manifest itself in the play?

Q2: What meaning do the daydreams have in the play?