

Death of a Salesman
Arthur Miller

Main Characters

- Willy Loman (W)
- Linda (L)
- Biff (B)
- Happy (H)
- Bernard (Bd)
- The Woman (tW)
- Charley (C)
- Uncle Ben (uB)
- Bill Oliver (BO)

Willy Loman is a struggling salesman who clings to delusions of success and popularity despite his failures. Willy's idealism clashes with reality as he fails to recognize that his sons have not achieved what he imagined.

Willy becomes lost in past memories and hallucinations of his brother, Ben. After failing to secure a better job, Willy commits suicide, believing the insurance money will provide his family with a fresh start.

Timeline and Important Events

A1	W comes home exhausted from a sales trip	L is concerned for W's suicidal tendencies	B and H are not happy with their lives	W reminisces the past (of B)
	W reminisces the past (of uB)	W argues with L about finances and his career	C offers a job to W, W rejects it	B decides to get a loan from BO
A2	W is fired from his job	B's attempt with BO fails and B realises he's led to himself	W meets Bd who is now successful	W plans dinner with H & B but is abandoned
	B confronts W that their lives are lies	W thinks B's outburst was out of love and decides to commit suicide	W drives off and commits suicide	
Rq	Only the Lomans and Charley the funeral	L cannot understand why no one else is there	B believes W had the wrong dreams, but H vows to follow W's path	



Willy Loman

Willy is the tragic hero, an ageing salesman, who believes in the American Dream. He believes that success can be achieved by hard-work and being well-liked. This delusion and pursuit leads to his downfall, his suicide, as a final attempt to do good.

Key Moments

- W's delusions and struggles are introduced (A1)
- Flashbacks of the past haunts W (A1)
- W is fired from his job (A2)
- B confronts W about his delusions (A2)
- W commits suicide (A2)

Key Quotes

- "He's liked, but not—well liked" (A1)
- "With scholarships to three universities they're gonna flunk him?" (A1)
- "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away" (A2)
- "[Like] a diamond, shining in the dark" (A2)
- "You end up worth more dead than alive" (Rq)



Biff Loman

Biff is Willy's elder son, and arguably undergoes the greatest transformation in the play. As a child, he had great potential, but his downfall causes him to lose all of it. He has a passion in farming/ ranching and overcomes his unsurety at the end.

Key Moments

- Highschool life, seen as a football star with a good future (A1)
- Discovering W's affair (A1)
- Failed meeting with BO (A1)
- B confronts W about his delusions (A2)
- Rejecting the American Dream (Rq)

Key Quotes

- "Screw the business world!" (A1)
- "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!" (A2)
- "You fake! You phony little fake!" (A2)
- "I'm dime a dozen, and so are you!" (A2)
- "He had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong" (Rq)



Happy Loman

Happy leads an unfulfilled life, just like Willy. As a child, he was often overshadowed by Biff and Willy ignores him. Happy is now partially successful but is unsatisfied and serially womanises, cuckolding his superiors. He vows to follow in Willy's path.

Key Moments

- Always overshadowed by B and neglected by W (A1)
- Lives a shallow life of empty ambition and womanising (A1)
- Abandoning W at the restaurant (A2)
- Continued delusion at the Requiem (Rq)
- Repeating W's life and mistake (Rq)

Key Quotes

- "I'm losing weight, you notice, pop?" (A1)
- "I'm gonna retire you for life." (A1)
- "I hate myself for it. Because I don't want the girl, and still, I take it and - I love it!" (A1)
- "that's not my father. He's just a guy." (A2)
- "It's the only dream you can have - to come out number-one man." (Rq)



Linda Loman

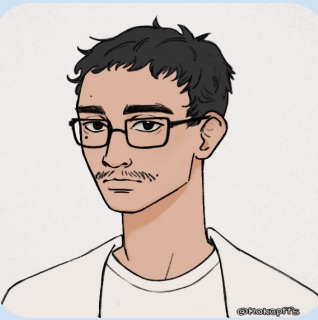
Linda is a loyal, devoted, and long-suffering wife. She supports and appeases Willy through his struggles. She is a constant reminder to Willy of his infidelity. She also protects Willy the most and remains the most heartbroken in the end.

Key Moments

- She is very protective of W and appeases him, even through lies (A1)
- Discusses W's Suicidal tendencies with B and H (A1)
- W is angry at L mending stockings (A2)
- L lashes out at B & H for leaving W (A2)
- L is confused and heartbroken (Rq)

Key Quotes

- "Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. [Willy]." (A1)
- "A small man be just as exhausted as a great man" (A1)
- "He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being." (A2)
- "Why didn't anybody come?" (Rq)



Charley

Charley is Willy's next-door neighbour and only true friend. He is supportive, caring, and understanding of Willy. Charley is Willy's foil: calm, compassionate, and reasonable. He even offers Willy a job and stability, and continues to give him money.

Key Moments

- Playing cards with W (A1)
- Repeatedly offering W a job (A2)
- Giving W money weekly (A2)
- Visiting W's funeral (Rq)

Key Quotes

- "You named him [...], but you can't sell that." (A2)
- "When a deposit bottle is broken, you don't get your nickel back." (A1)
- "You been jealous of me all your life, you damn fool!" (A2)
- "Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy." (Rq)



Bernard

Bernard is Charley's son, and Biff's only true friend. He often tried to study with Biff as a child and help with his studies. Bernard goes onto succeed as a Supreme Court Attorney. He is a foil to Biff: successful, and humble

Key Moments

- Young Bd tries to help B in studies. (A1)
- Adult Bd is successful and W is astonished by it (A2)
- Bd seems to be aware of W's mental struggles as well (A2)
- C praises Bd with W without arrogance (A1)

Key Quotes

- "He's gotta study, Uncle Willy" (A1)
- "Just because he printed University of Virginia on his sneakers doesn't mean they've got to graduate him" (A1)
- "What happened in Boston, Willy?" (A2)
- "I've often thought of how strange it was that I knew he'd given up his life." (A2)



The Woman

The Woman is Willy's extra-marital affair. She is a secretary at a customer Willy sells to. She has the relationship, presumably, in exchange for giving Willy better access to the customer. Discovering of her leads Biff to give up on his dreams.

Key Moments

- B finds out about the affair (A1)
- W remembers giving tW stockings (A1)

Key Quotes

- "You didn't make me, Willy. I picked you." (A1)
- "And keep your pores open!" (A1)
- The Woman's laugh is heard
- "You know you ruined me, Willy?" (A2)
- "You are the saddest, self-centeredest soul I ever did see-saw" (A2)



Ben Loman

Ben is Willy's brother who left for Alaska, ended up in Africa and became rich from the Diamond mines. He is Willy's definition of success. Ben's image almost haunts Willy even after Ben's death. Willy regrets not going to Alaska with Ben.

Key Moments

- W remembers uB reaching success in African Diamond mines (A1)
- uB encourages B to fight dirty (A1)
- uB almost encourages W to commit suicide as a way to "succeed" (A1)

Key Quotes

- "When I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out [...] by God I was rich!" (A1)
- "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy." (A1)
- "The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy" (A2)
- "Time, William, time!" (A2)
- Ben's music is heard. Ben appears..

Willy's idol, Ben, is a benefactor of *Deus ex Machina* subverting even the prescribed method of the already flawed American Dream: 'I discovered after a few days that I was heading due south, so instead of Alaska, I ended up in Africa.'

Charley has built a stable life out himself, but without giving into the American Dream

Bernard has followed his path and now is a successful Supreme Court attorney

Dave Singleman is another of Willy's idols. DS was rich and led an 'easy' life. He dies in a train while he is on a sales trip. Many attended his funeral. Willy Spends his entire life trying to achieve this

Howard's father, Frank, wasn't a horrible person like Howard. He built this company with the people he worked with

Howard was born into the wealth he now (disproportionately) prides himself in

Happy deludes himself and repeats Willy's mistakes

Biff has chased the idea of it too, however, ultimately abandons it for his own dream

Willy's father left Willy and Ben in search of Gold in Alaska

American Dream

Linda is the "ideal" American wife, caring and loving, does the house work, and almost slaves away for Willy

Willy's intrusive question of 'still honest?' to Jenny implies that virginity is common knowledge and that Willy has a right to know (?). It also adds to Willy's sexual forwardness, which probably led to his affair with the Woman

Happy's 'philandering' with his superiors' partners commodifies women and almost views sex as a trophy to champion

The Woman is representative of promiscuity, almost portrayed as a seductress. 'Oh Willy!' 'You ruined me' Perhaps, some may blame her for Willy's and Biff's failure

Biff is often 'too rough' with girls as a child and 'all the mothers are afraid of him!'. However, Happy views this as a downgrade.

Biff and Happy speak very crudely of the first girl Happy slept with: 'that big Betsy something - what the hell was her name'. Happy calls her a 'pig'

Women

Bernard and Biff were a friendship. Biff still made fun of him with Willy: 'What an anemic'. Bernard even helped Biff cheat in exams.

Willy and Charley are a friendship too. Willy says that 'you're the only friend I got' to Charley

Willy's and Linda's relationship is held more closely by Linda's efforts. Willy is unfaithful to her with The Woman

Willy and Biff's relationship breaks down after the Boston incident, 'you used to be such pals', showing consequences of his fault

Howard and Willy showcase the cold nature of relationships in the capitalist world. Willy named Howard ('I named him'), but ultimately, he is forgotten and fired by Howard ('I don't want you to represent us')

Relationships

Willy's persona and self deception is fragile at any challenge. He thinks he is well liked and respected, but a salesman calls him a 'walrus' and not even his own children respect him.

Willy's hallucinations often blur the line between reality and illusion, and the present and the past.

The Loman family home is one filled with lies, deceit, and pretence: 'we never said the truth for ten minutes in this house'

Willy's tales and even monetary details to the family are fabricated. He doesn't even tell Linda that he borrows money from Charley

Happy is a 'philandering bum' who says he is an assistant buyer, but he is only 'one of the two assistants to the assistant'

Willy acts as if he is faithful and full loving to Linda, but he cheats on her with The Woman

Appearances vs. Reality

Willy is betrayed by the American Dream, the very system he had his faith in, and has worked for. This reflects a broader betrayal of the working population which is relatable to the audience who is part of a capitalist society

There is a sense of self-betrayal in Willy, Biff, and Happy. Which is seen in their own inaccurate self-image showing the disillusionment of American society

In a sense, Ben's ghost and character betrays Willy by both imposing unrealistic goals, but also pushing for questionable paths to achieve it. Ben is the person Willy wants to be, Ben knows he can't, and yet, he pushes it

Even though Linda is not aware of Willy's infidelity, the audience can see his betrayal. Linda's faithfulness only intensifies the audience's pathos

Biff disconnects with Willy following his discovery of Willy's affair. This collapses his ideals and trust in Willy

Happy betrays his professional by cuckolding because he seeks a twisted sense authority by sleeping with their partners. But this is also highlights a moral decline by sexual promiscuity which inflicts an anxiety in a modern audience

Betrayal

The suffocation of the city is apparent when Willy complains 'Gotta break your neck to see a star in this yard'

The play begins by setting out the suffocating nature of the city almost encroaching towards the Loman residence: 'towering apartment buildings'

Biff contrasts the typical youth in his passion for the rural. He seems to feel the most at ease with these settings, herding cattle in Nebraska, and spring colts in Texas

Willy can be seen to be reminiscing the past of 'the trees' and 'lilacs[] and wisteria'. He misses being able to grow something

Willy is seen to be partly enjoying the drives as he drives away from the city and through the natural world. The beauty he sees ('the trees are so thick, and the sun is warm') and his experience shows a rare moment of joy in Willy's life

The city is seen to embody the capitalist pressures with the suffocating infrastructure, that arguably kills Dave Singleman, and by extension, even Willy

Nature vs. City

Stockings are seen as a token of love and sex, with Willy's link via them to both Linda and The Woman

The audience would see the romantic greed in Willy's and the Woman's relationship, showing a transactional aspect ('Where's my stockings? You promised me stockings, Willy!')

Linda mending her old stockings shows Linda's desperate acts to mend the broken family. This may be more apparent to the audience who identifies the motif and its meaning

Giving The Woman Linda's stockings suggests a sense of replacement with Linda (you gave her Mama's stockings) Almost a materialisation of romantic love

This also shows how women are treated in this world, reflecting on both the materialism of infidelity and sacrifices of loyalty

Willy lashing out at Linda for mending stockings reflect on his guilt, improper personal priorities, and moral decline ('Will you stop mending stockings? At least while I'm in the house. It gets me nervous. I can't tell you. Please.'

Stockings (Motif)

To Willy, Ben's success in the diamond mines, however accidental it was, serves as the ultimate goal of his life. He repeatedly refers to it and attempts to replicate it via his salesman career

The watch Bob Ben gives Willy serves as a memory, a prized possession. But it also shows a softer side of Willy, one that makes sacrifices for his children (You pawned it, dear [...] For Biff's radio correspondence course)

Willy sees his goals as a diamond, even the insurance money he aims to gain through his suicide is described to be 'like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough'

Willy's sense of wealth is directly linked to Diamonds ('a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked')

Willy's hallucination of Ben often pushes him to 'fetch a diamond out' from the 'dark' jungle that is 'full of diamonds'. This is possibly a reference to opportunity in the harsh world of capitalism

Diamonds (Motif)