

# **Death of a Salesman Book Notes**

## **Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller**

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## Author/Context

Arthur Miller was born in New York City in 1915, the son of a manufacturer and a teacher. Miller, much like Biff in his play *Death of a Salesman*, was not a scholar; sports captured his attention more than academics. He was so poor a student, in fact, that once his writing became well known, many of the teachers he'd had throughout school couldn't remember who he was. Miller worked at an automobile parts factory and saved money to pay for college after he was profoundly moved by *The Brothers Karamazov*, which he began reading under the assumption that it was a detective novel. After reading the story, he knew he was meant to be a writer, and so he went to the University of Michigan as a journalism major. Miller said, "I was perfectly innocent of any academic knowledge, although I did know a good deal about automobiles, ice skating, and what it was to work for a living."

He graduated in 1938 and completed his first play, *All My Sons*, in 1947. *Death of a Salesman* was finished in 1949 and earned Miller a Pulitzer Prize for Drama that year as well as a New York Drama Critics Circle Award. After 742 Broadway shows the play closed, but has remained one of Miller's enduring works.

Albert A. Shea considered *Death of a Salesman* to be a scathing social commentary on capitalist America. Shea wrote:

*Arthur Miller casts a score of darts -- at advertising, credit selling, the family automobile; at the petty larceny and the subversive attitude toward sex characteristic of our time. But his main attack is against the view that a man is a fool if he does not get something -- as much as possible -- for nothing more than a smile, being a good fellow and having good contacts.*

Miller, after divorcing his first wife, married Marilyn Monroe in 1956. That same year he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee because he was suspected of Communist sympathies. Although he answered forthrightly all questions concerning his own activities, he refused to give the names of people he saw at the Communist functions he attended. This earned him a \$500 fine and a suspended jail sentence of 30 days, which he never served. *The Crucible*, a play about the Salem Witch Trials, is a thinly veiled portrayal of the witch hunting of the McCarthy hearings. In 1960, Miller and Monroe parted ways after he wrote *The Misfits* (1960) for Monroe to star in. Soon after, Miller wrote his play *After the Fall* (1963), which is noticeably autobiographical. In 1962 Miller married his third wife, Ingeborg Morath, a photographer, and together they created *In Russia*, a book of Morath's photographs and a long essay by Miller. His other works include *A View from the Bridge* (1955), *The Incident at Vichy* (1964), *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), *Playing for Time* (1981), *Danger: Memory!* (1987), *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* (1991), *The Last Yankee* (1992), *Broken Glass* (1994), as well as *Focus* (a novel), *I Don't Need You Anymore* (a collection of short stories), and *Timebends* (an autobiography).



"About Miller we can be sure of at least this much: he is one of the five or six incontestably fine writers for theater that America has produced. His position in the drama of America and, indeed, in the drama of the Twentieth Century, is both secure and high."

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## Plot Summary

Willy Loman, a sixty-year-old traveling salesman, is having trouble lately because he can't seem to keep his mind on the present. He keeps drifting back and forth between reality and memory, looking for exactly where his life went wrong. Having been demoted to a strictly commissions salesman, as he was in the beginning of his career, Willy begins to wonder what missed opportunity or wrong turn led his life to this dismal existence. Willy always believed that being well liked was the key to success -- it's not what you know, it's who you know. But now, as he nears the end of his life, he realizes that the only things you can count on are the things you can touch. You can't touch appointments and half-hearted sentiments. This was something that his brother, Ben, a man independently wealthy by the age of twenty-one, tried to tell him years ago. Despite this, Willy insisted that his success would come from being well liked.

Throughout his life, Willy attempted to show his sons the keys to success and to prepare them, or at least Biff, his oldest son, for excellence in the business world. Willy pretended to be an important, respected, and successful salesman to win the love and respect of his family (and himself in some ways). He even started believing that he was as important as he convinced the boys he was; whenever he couldn't live up to that expectation, and reality contradicted the image he tried to put forth, his whole life began to crumble. He realizes that he is a failure and he has wasted his life. Not only that, but he has taught his sons the wrong things. Now Biff is a bum who can't hold a job anywhere but in the West as a farmhand, and Hap is a philandering assistant's assistant who is just as deluded about his importance as Willy. Willy taught his sons the wrong things, and now their lives are mediocre because of it.

Willy and Biff, although close when Biff was younger, are always at odds because Biff hasn't lived up to Willy's great expectations for him. Biff was never given the proper direction to fulfill these expectations. Willy encouraged him only to be well liked and popular; Biff learned he never had to work for anything or take orders from anyone, and as a result, he couldn't keep a job in the business world. Willy even encouraged his boys to steal: another reason Biff couldn't hold a job, because he kept getting in trouble for stealing. Integrity was never an emphasized characteristic in the Loman house. Now Biff has come home and he realizes that he's just an ordinary guy who was meant for a life outside the business world. He is happy only when he is honest with himself. This realization prompts an entire overhaul of the values taught to him by his father, and Biff wants to expose the lies Willy has been telling for years. Willy won't have it. After a series of long arguments, Biff decides it's best if he leaves for good; he will never fulfill his father's dreams, nor will he convince Willy to confront reality.

Willy, now unemployed and completely broken down, decides that he must do something magnificent to prove to Biff his life wasn't useless and completely wasted. Feeling he will be of greater value dead, he kills himself so that Biff can use the insurance money to start his own business. His son will consider his father a hero, and appreciate the sacrifice that he made for his son. He also wants to prove that his importance and success as a salesman was not fake, expecting a grand funeral



attended by many buyers in New England (similar to the funeral of Dave Singleman). It doesn't work out that way. The insurance doesn't cover suicide and only Willy's family and their two neighbors attend the funeral. In the end, Willy's legacy is one of a broken man, whose life had become a sad failure.



## Major Characters

**Willy Loman:** Main character of the play. Willy Loman is a traveling salesman who grew up inspired by the success of his craftsman/salesman father who left his family for Alaska. His older brother, Ben, who also left when Willy was young, and made a fortune in the diamond mines of Africa when he was only 21 years old, is another measuring stick for Willy. Willy believes that success comes from being well liked, and he instilled this belief in his sons, Biff and Happy, who were his brightest hopes in life. Although Willy encouraged their success, he neglected to instill any sense of integrity or morality in the boys, and it leads to their ultimate failure in his eyes. As Willy grows older and realizes that he has failed to meet his own expectations as a salesman, his life seems wasted. His sons are mediocre bums; he's no longer able to provide for his family; no one knows him anymore, and he feels like a failure. He decides that the best thing he can do for his family is to award them the money from his life insurance policy by killing himself.

**Linda Loman:** Willy's wife, mother of Biff, and Happy. Linda is Willy Loman's link to reality. She sees what her husband is going through, and she supports him and loves him despite his many failures and weakness. She realizes that Willy is just an ordinary man, but she doesn't fault him for it. If anything, she loves him more because of it. She protects him when Biff fights with him, defends him to her sons who think he's going crazy, and she respects him enough to pretend she doesn't know that he's trying to kill himself and that he's lost his salary. Linda tries to protect Willy from himself, but her efforts are in vain.

**Biff Loman:** Willy's oldest son. Biff is Willy's pride and joy. As the oldest son, Biff is the personification of all of Willy's dreams, and as a teenager, he worshipped his father. Biff was everything Willy wanted him to be -- star athlete, popular with the girls, well liked all around. Willy ignored his petty thefts because he was a hometown hero. Being well liked wasn't enough to help Biff graduate from high school; failing his math class was the beginning of his adult failures, and his inability to hold a job. When Biff went to Boston to tell his father that he wasn't graduating, and ask him to talk to his Math teacher, he found Willy with another woman. This crushed Biff's image of his father; Willy's successful life has been only been a lie. Their relationship falls apart. As an adult, Biff drifted from job to job, a failure in Willy's eyes; after Biff comes home and ruins another opportunity at success, he realizes that his life has been a lie; he no longer wants to try to become something he's not. Biff does not want to end up like his father.

**Happy Loman:** Willy's youngest son. Happy was often ignored by his parents while growing up. Growing up in Biff's shadow, Happy was always vying for Willy's attention, but never really got it. As an adult, Willy and Linda seem to brush him off in much the same way they did when he was younger. Although Hap grows up to become more financially successful than his older brother, his father still focuses his attention only on Biff. Hap is a salesman who seduces the fiancées of store executives and takes bribes from manufacturers. He has his own apartment, car, and plenty of women, and yet he is



still unhappy. He insists on fighting his way through the business world as a way to honor Willy, even though he may never go further than his current position as an assistant's assistant.

**Charley:** Willy's neighbor and long-time friend. Charley is a businessman who has lived next door to Willy for a long time. Although Willy is condescending to him, Charley is willing to help Willy through a rough spot. When Willy loses his salary, Charley loans him money every week so that Linda won't know what's happened. Charley offers Willy a job, but Willy is too proud to take it. Charley is an honest man who warns Willy about the consequences of his boys' behavior: stealing supplies from construction sites, etc. Willy thinks Charley is ignorant because he is not well liked. Charley turns out to be the only friend Willy has.

**Ben Loman:** Willy's older brother. Ben left the family to search for his father in Alaska when Willy was almost four. Ben ended up in Africa and got rich off of the diamond mines by the time he was twenty-one. He only visited Willy twice (briefly) on his way to and from Alaska. He encouraged Willy to keep teaching the boys to steal and to be fearless, but acts condescending towards Willy, because he is an unsuccessful salesman. Willy remembers Ben as a missed opportunity because Willy didn't go to Alaska with him. Ben is a symbol of all that Willy could have been but missed out on.

### Minor Characters

**Bernard:** Charley's son. Bernard is the nerdy neighbor who helped Biff study and gave him the answers on tests. Bernard kept warning Biff that he wouldn't graduate if he didn't study for his math test, but Biff and Willy both ignored him and made fun of him for being nerdy. Willy insisted that because Bernard was not well liked, he would not do well for himself when he grew up. But when Willy runs into Bernard as an adult, Bernard is a successful lawyer who is arguing a case before the Supreme Court, while Biff, who was well liked, is a bum.

**The Woman:** Willy's out-of-town mistress. The Woman was a secretary for a store that Willy sold to, and she would put him through to see the buyers. Willy bought her silk stockings when he saw her, and seeing Linda mending her own because it is too expensive to buy a new pair, racks Willy with the guilt of his infidelity. It was after Biff discovered Willy with the Woman, that Willy and his son grew apart. Willy's infidelity to his mother crushed Biff, and after realizing his dad was a fake, Biff gave up on summer school and the University of Virginia.

**Howard Wagner:** Willy's boss. Wagner was the son of Willy's original employer, and because he does not have a position for him in New York, Willy had to drive to New England. He later demotes Willy, who must work strictly on commission like a beginning salesman. Willy goes to Wagner to request a salaried position in New York, and Wagner fires him.

**Bill Oliver:** One of Biff's old employers. Biff believes he was a salesman for Oliver a long time ago, but he quit because Oliver suspected that he stole a carton of



basketballs. When he left, Biff claims that Oliver told him to come see him if he ever needed anything, and so years later, Biff expects that Oliver will loan him ten thousand dollars to start a sporting goods store. When Biff meets with him, Oliver doesn't even remember Biff because Biff was only a shipping clerk, and Biff, unable to control himself, steals Oliver's fountain pen and runs out of the office. It is this moment that makes him realize his whole life has been a fraud.

**Willy's Father:** Willy's father made and sold flutes across the country; he would take his family with him when he traveled by wagon to sell his flutes. One day he abandoned them and went to Alaska. Ben, Willy's older brother, went after him, but ended up in Africa. Willy feels as if he's missed out on a great deal because he never talked to his father. He makes his father into a myth of courage and success and measures himself against those imagined standards, but always seems to fall short.

**Dave Singleman:** Dave Singleman was an 84-year-old traveling salesman who made sales from his hotel room because he was so well known and well liked. When he died, buyers and salesman from all over New England attended his funeral. This is the life Willy wishes for. Singleman was his inspiration for being a salesman and this dream was the reason he went into sales and didn't leave for Alaska when his brother urged him to.

**The Girls:** The girls are two women (one a covergirl) Hap picked up at Frank's Chop House, where he and Biff took Willy for dinner. While Willy was in the restroom, Biff took off and Hap and the girls followed him, leaving Willy alone and abandoned in the restaurant. Linda considered the boys abandoning their father at the restaurant the final straw, and when they came home, she told them both to leave and not to come back.



## Objects/Places

**Studebaker:** The Studebaker is the car in which Willy kills himself. His first obvious lapse in reality is when he admits that he thought that he was driving the Chevy the whole day, when actually he was driving the Studebaker.

**Chevy:** The Chevy is the car Willy had when Biff was in high school. Willy remembers a day when the boys were waxing the car after he returned from a trip. His comments about the Chevy, first that it's the greatest car ever built, then that they shouldn't be allowed to manufacture such junk, show his tendency to contradict himself.

**Football:** Biff stole the football from the locker room because the coach told him to work on his passing. Willy tells him to return it, but then says that the coach would congratulate Biff on his initiative instead of being angry that he stole it.

**Fountain Pen:** Biff steals the fountain pen from Bill Oliver's desk when he goes to borrow money to start a business. He can't keep from taking it, and it ruins his chance to get the loan.

**Rubber Piping:** Linda tells Biff and Happy about the rubber piping she found in the basement with the attachment that fits around the nipple on the water heater's gas pipe. Willy's been trying to kill himself with it, and although she often takes it from the basement while he's gone, she always puts it back before he returns, because she doesn't want to insult him by confronting him about it. Biff takes it from the basement and later confronts Willy with the piping before Willy kills himself in the Studebaker.

**Building Supplies:** Biff and Happy stole building supplies from a construction site so that Willy could build a new stoop. He pretended to scold them when they stole lumber, but he really was proud of their theft, and his attitude encourages their deviant behavior.

**University of Virginia sneakers:** Biff printed 'University of Virginia' on a pair of sneakers he had because that's where he wanted to go play ball in college. The shoes show up in Willy's memory at the first mention of Biff having trouble with math. Later, Bernard tells Willy that he knew Biff had given up his life when he threw those shoes into the furnace after he got back from visiting Willy in Boston.

**Frank's Chop House :** Frank's Chop House is the restaurant where Willy met Biff and Hap for dinner. Biff told Willy about the incident with Bill Oliver while they were in the restaurant, and the disappointment sent Willy reeling back to the past. Biff and Hap left Willy babbling to himself in the bathroom of the restaurant, and that was the final straw for Linda. After that, she tells both the boys to leave and not to come back.



## Quotes

Quote 1: "They don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England." Act 1, Part 1, pg. 4

Quote 2: "I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism?" Act 1, Part 1, pg. 5

Quote 3: "I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and every time I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life." Act 1, Part 2, pg. 11

Quote 4: "probably congratulate [Biff] on [his] initiative" Act 1, Part 3, pg. 18

Quote 5: "the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates a personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want." Act 1, Part 3, pg. 21

Quote 6: "I'm very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me." Act 1, Part 3, pg. 23

Quote 7: "when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich." Act 1, Part 7, pg. 33

Quote 8: "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." Act 1, Part 7, pg. 34

Quote 9: "kind of temporary about [him]self." Act 1, Part 7, pg. 36

Quote 10: "I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. 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." Act 1, Part 8, pg. 40

Quote 11: "personality always wins the day." Act 1, Part 8, pg. 48

Quote 12: "[a] star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!" Act 1, Part 8, pg. 51

Quote 13: "didn't crack up again." Act 2, Part 2, pg. 59

Quote 14: "[i]n those days there was personality in it . . . There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear -- or personality . . . They don't know [him] any more." Act 2, Part 2, pg. 61



Quote 15: "[y]ou can't eat the orange and throw the peel away -- a man is not a piece of fruit!" Act 2, Part 2, pg. 61-2

Quote 16: "his life ended after that Ebbets Field game. . . [f]rom the age of seventeen nothing good ever happened to him." Act 2, Part 4, pg. 71

Quote 17: "I've often thought of how strange it was that I knew he'd given up his life." Act 2, Part 4, pg. 72

Quote 18: "Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything. You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. 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." Act 2, Part 4, pg. 75

Quote 19: "After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive." Act 2, Part 4, pg. 76

Quote 20: "We've been talking in a dream for fifteen years." Act 2, Part 5, pg. 81

Quote 21: "practically" Act 2, Part 5, pg. 83

Quote 22: "You've just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hard-working, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys." Act 2, Part 5, pg. 90

Quote 23: "Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates -- that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized -- I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey -- I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all." Act 2, Part 7, pg. 100

Quote 24: "Spite, spite, is the word of your undoing!" Act 2, Part 7, pg. 103

Quote 25: "[w]e never told the truth for ten minutes in this house." Act 2, Part 7, pg. 104

Quote 26: "Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be? What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am!" Act 2, Part 7, pg. 105

Quote 27: "there's more of [Willy] in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made." Requiem, pg. 110



# Topic Tracking: Dishonesty

## Act 1, Part 1

Dishonesty 1: Dishonesty is common throughout *Death of a Salesman*. Whether the lies are intentional or delusional, Willy, Biff, and Happy seem to be spewing out untruths all the time, and Biff finally realizes that they've been lying to each other and themselves so much, that they don't even know who they really are. The dishonesty begins with Willy telling Linda that he came home because he couldn't drive anymore. The reason, he later admits, is that he almost ran over a kid in Yonkers, and it spooked him. But he doesn't lie only about the reason for his return, he also lies about his importance to the company in New England, and how he'd already be running New York if his original employer were still alive. There's no guarantee that Willy and his former boss were good friends, and Willy hasn't been important in New England for a long time (if indeed, he ever really was). He creates a false image of a skilled salesman in demand, when in reality, he's really washed up.

Dishonesty 2: Willy is on a tirade about Biff because he thinks that Biff is wasting his life; he has become a shiftless bum, when Willy had such high expectations for him. As Willy is talking to Linda about Biff, he says that he's lazy and that's why he's a failure. But in the next breath, Willy says that he doesn't understand why someone as hard-working as Biff isn't more successful. Willy's speech is constantly riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. These contradictions make his convictions completely unreliable.

## Act 1, Part 2

Dishonesty 3: Happy admits that he seduces the fiancées of top executives at the store, and he also takes bribes. He laughs about it like it's a game, and Biff pays it no attention. Their disregard for ethics and morality is evident; accepting bribes seems everyday and normal. It doesn't occur to either of the boys that there's something wrong with this, and the audience is left to wonder how they developed such an attitude.

Dishonesty 4: Biff quit working for Bill Oliver because he was accused of stealing a carton of basketballs (which he did), but despite that, Biff believes that Oliver will loan him \$10,000 to start a ranch. Biff is creating a dishonest vision of the past (like his dad). He stole from and lied to Oliver when he worked for him, and now he's lying to himself by asserting how much Oliver liked him. His lies are convinced enough to become the truth, and he can't remember which version of the story is right.

## Act 1, Part 3

Dishonesty 5: Biff stole a football from the locker room when he was in high school, and he claimed that he took it because the coach told him to work on his passing. Willy acts for a moment as if Biff should return it, but when Hap implies that Biff was wrong for taking the ball, Willy defends Biff and declares that the coach, rather than being angry with Biff for stealing, would have been proud and impressed with Biff's initiative. Willy



tells Biff that it's OK that he took the ball because the coach likes him. Willy tells his son it's perfectly fine to steal from people, as long as you are well liked; they'll let you get away with it.

Dishonesty 6: Willy lies to the boys about meeting and having coffee with the mayor of Providence. He likes to make his sons believe that he's an important and great man, when in reality, he is just an average guy, like everyone else. Willy gets trapped in the false image he has created, believing the lies he has been telling himself for years. He is unable to confront reality and has the expectation that people are going to react to him as a successful and important salesman. He cannot understand why people treat him like an unknown, washed up pity-case (which he is). He's just a common, everyday guy who talks as if he's so much more (he has built up an image with his kids that he cannot fill), and when he realizes that he's a failure, and everyone knows his "success" is a fake, life is no longer worth living. Willy feels worth more dead, than alive.

Dishonesty 7: When Linda asked Willy how well he did on his trip, Willy lied about how much he sold. He admitted the truth only a few sentences later, and Linda ignores the whopper he told her, but the fact remains that Willy is a liar. He contradicts himself continuously -- one minute the Chevy is the greatest car ever built, the next minute it's a hunk of scrap metal. One minute he's making \$1200 sales, and the next instant, it was only a \$200 sale. That's a \$1,000 lie, and no one calls him on it or makes him accountable for it, so he just goes right on lying to himself and everyone else.

#### **Act 1, Part 4**

Dishonesty 8: Willy's mistress is another example of his immorality and dishonesty. He cheats on Linda, his adoring and supportive wife, with some secretary, so that he has a contact with the buyers in Boston.

#### **Act 1, Part 7**

Dishonesty 9: Willy sent the boys to steal sand from a construction site so they could rebuild the stoop of their house. Although Charley warns that the watchman is keeping an eye out for the boys because they stole lumber earlier, Willy doesn't care. He is convinced that stealing those supplies isn't wrong, and is proud of the boys being so fearless, but he never explains why it's OK for them to steal. Even when the watchman is chasing Biff, Willy refuses to admit that they're wrong. Linda, however, seems to know that what they're doing is dishonest, and she worries about the boys getting into trouble for it.

#### **Act 1, Part 8**

Dishonesty 10: Hap tells Biff that part of the reason people in the business world think he's crazy, is because he didn't lie to cover himself when he wanted to take a day off. Hap, however, brags about his excellent ability to cover himself; he can leave if he wants and the boss will never be able to pin him down for playing hooky.



Dishonesty 11: Willy tells Biff to pretend his work out West was business related instead of farm work to impress Oliver.

### **Act 2, Part 1**

Dishonesty 12: Willy, feeling guilty about betraying Linda with adultery, gets anxious and upset any time he sees her mending her silk stockings; stockings were the gift he always gave the Woman when they met. While Linda had to mend her stockings because they were so expensive, Willy's mistress got two pair every time she and Willy had their little fling in Boston.

### **Act 2, Part 4**

Dishonesty 13: Willy lies to Bernard about how Bill Oliver called Biff in to work for him. He is intimidated by Bernard's success and embarrassed by how little Biff has done with his own life. Willy lies to make Biff seem important and successful (much like he does with himself).

### **Act 2, Part 5**

Dishonesty 14: Hap lies to the girl he's hitting on so that he can get her attention. He's a natural at dishonesty, and he doesn't feel bad about it at all. Biff, however, realized in his meeting with Oliver, that he'd never been a salesman, just a shipping clerk. He realizes at that moment, his entire life has been a lie. His father and his brother are liars, too, because they all pretend to be what they aren't. Biff is tired of lying, and he plans to tell Willy the truth about his meeting with Oliver, but Hap encourages him to just lie and tell Willy what he wants to hear.

### **Act 2, Part 6**

Dishonesty 15: Biff is destroyed by the realization that his father is a fraud. Finding out about Willy's affair made Biff realize his father's life was a charade. This is when Biff gives up on his own future.

### **Act 2, Part 7**

Dishonesty 16: Biff finally confronts Willy about the lies they've all been living. He tells Willy that stealing has cost him every good job he's had since he was in high school, and that they all have been lying to each other about who and what they really are. He's tired of the lies and feels he must leave because he can't keep trying to be what he isn't. His father won't hear any of it.



# Topic Tracking: Failure

## Act 1, Part 1

Failure 1: Willy's entire life is a succession of missed opportunities and misinformation, and he considers himself a failure because of it. He has failed to make the drive to his business appointment, so he's going to miss out on making a sale because of it. His failure, and the failure of either of his sons to make something extraordinary of themselves, baffles him because he believes that the keys to success are contacts and popularity. Unfortunately, in the business of sales, Willy has outlived his contacts and his popularity (if he ever had it) and is now unable to make any money. If a man's role is to earn money to support his family, then Willy is a total failure.

Failure 2: Willy considers Biff's life a failure because he's not making enough money or working in the business world. He thinks that he is slacking off working as a farmhand; he had high expectations for Biff: he'd make it big in business (based on Biff's popularity in high school), and now that he hasn't, Willy is disappointed in him and dissatisfied with everything he does.

## Act 1, Part 2

Failure 3: Biff can't seem to find a job that suits him, and although things were going well for him in Texas, he panicked because the job he had as a farmhand wasn't the kind of job Willy expected him to have. Biff was supposed to be in business; the fact that he was well liked and popular in high school would ensure his success. Biff failed to fulfill Willy's expectations, and that makes him a complete failure in his father's eyes.

## Act 1, Part 3

Failure 4: Willy is beginning to feel like a failure because business is slowing down and he's not providing for his family the way he used to. He's losing popularity (if he ever had it), and his whole idea of what it takes to be successful is betraying him. He feels as if he has worked hard to become well liked, but now he is ignored and laughed at. People don't take him seriously. Who wouldn't feel like a failure in that situation?

## Act 1, Part 6

Failure 5: Willy laments the missed opportunity of going to Alaska with his brother, Ben (who struck it rich, but in Africa, not Alaska). When Hap tries to comfort Willy with the promise of retiring him for life, Willy criticizes him because he doesn't make enough money to do that. Willy, a traveling salesman, can't even drive himself to the sales appointments he is able to make. Hap is a failure because he can't keep his word, and Willy is a failure because he can't do his job.

## Act 1, Part 7



Failure 6: Willy is a failure when compared to his father. Ben asserts that he could sell more in a week than Willy could in a lifetime. Willy, when measured against Ben, doesn't fare much better, because Ben was rich by the time he was twenty-one.

### **Act 1, Part 8**

Failure 7: Linda tells the boys that Willy has been demoted to merely earning commission on what he sells (like a beginning salesman), and he can't make sales anymore because all his contacts are dead or retired. He has to borrow \$50 a week from Charley to pretend that it's his salary so Linda won't find out he's a failure at his job. She is angry because he's tried so hard to support the boys, and now that he's failing at his job, he needs their support, and the boys are choosing to look the other way.

### **Act 2, Part 2**

Failure 8: Willy, after getting in an argument with his boss, gets fired, which means he has no way to pay his insurance or his last payment on the house. He's a complete failure now. His final contact and claim to fame was his friendship with Wagner's late father, but even Wagner doesn't give that much consideration because it probably wasn't true. But whether Wagner's father and Willy were great friends, the fact remains that Willy hasn't been able to do his job, so he loses it. Willy has no contacts, nor is he well liked.

### **Act 2, Part 5**

Failure 9: Willy keeps thinking about how Biff failed math, and he believes that's when Biff's life was ruined. If he hadn't failed math, he would be successful by now.

### **Act 2, Part 7**

Failure 10: Biff tells Willy that they're both ordinary men, common, just like everyone else; this is not such a terrible thing in Biff's eyes, but for Willy, being ordinary is equivalent to failure. He wanted to be the best of salesmen, and he pretended that he was. Willy realizes that his own son knows that he's a fake, and that Biff's wish is only to confront the truth and be an ordinary man. This is the summit of his failures. Willy can think of only one way to prove that he's not a failure: suicide.

### **Requiem**

Failure 11: Willy expected the funeral to be packed because he was so well known and well liked. His funeral would prove to Biff that his father's life was worth something, but it doesn't turn out this way. The only people at Willy's funeral were his family, Charley, and Bernard. Although Willy aspired to be like Dave Singleman (a revered salesman), it didn't work out that way, and Willy Loman died a failure by his own standards. Biff considers Willy's life a failure because he had the wrong dreams. He spent too much time convincing himself he could be a successful salesman, when what he was clear he was skilled at working with his hands. If he'd followed the right dreams, and confronted

his abilities in a realistic and honest way, he may not have been a failure, and his life might not have ended this way. Even in death, Willy Loman's plans fail; no one shows at his funeral, and his life insurance policy doesn't cover suicide.



# Topic Tracking: Image

## Act 1, Part 1

Image 1: Willy finds it impossible to understand how someone who was as popular and well liked (the two keys to success in life) as Biff was in high school, could have grown up to be such a failure. Willy always believed that Biff's popularity would naturally lead to great success in the business world. He would have a grand life. But that's not the way things have worked out for Biff, and Willy is baffled by it.

## Act 1, Part 3

Image 2: Willy tells the boys that he met the mayor of Providence and had coffee with him. He brags about how well known and well liked he is throughout New England. He makes himself seem important to impress his sons, which many fathers probably do, but Willy seems to puff himself up so much and so often, that he starts to believe these things about himself. When he finally realizes that no one really knows or cares who he is, he is crushed - he is not the great man he painted himself to be.

Image 3: Willy believed that Bernard would never be successful, despite his good grades, because Bernard was not well liked. Willy taught his boys that if people liked them, they'd always be successful. The key to success was not hard work, but popularity. It's all about the image you create. Willy was clearly wrong about Bernard; he grew up to become a successful lawyer, arguing a case before the Supreme Court, while Willy's sons grew up to become unsuccessful bums.

Image 4: Willy's confidence begins to fail because he's not selling as well as he used to. He thinks people ignore him and laugh at him because he's fat. He claims that he's well liked in Hartford, but in the next instant, he doesn't believe that people take to him very well. He can't make up his mind who he is, because the image of himself he has created is now crumbling. He's no longer Willy the Well Liked Salesman, he's just become Willy the Walrus.

## Act 1, Part 8

Image 5: Biff wasn't good at business because he didn't fit the business image -- he whistled in the elevator and didn't cover himself when he played hooky from work. Biff believes that he and Willy are the type of guys who should be working with their hands somewhere where it doesn't matter if they whistle or take a day off. Instead, Willy insists that both he and Biff will be successful as businessmen.

Image 6: Willy first assures Biff that he is still a great man in New England (which he's not) and that people don't think he's crazy (which they do). Then he gives Biff instructions on how to impress Bill Oliver. He tells him how to dress, not to talk too much, but to tell good stories. Be serious, but laugh. He hands out all these



contradicting bits of advice, and then he emphasizes personality because he believes that's the key to success.

### **Act 2, Part 2**

Image 7: While Willy is in Wagner's office, his image as the well liked, well known, successful salesman crumbles completely. In reality, he is a wilted, aging man who can't cut it anymore. He relies heavily on the relationship he had with Wagner's father, which may or may not have been as important as he claims, but Wagner can't find another job for Willy just out of sympathy. Willy cracks up right there in the office -- first yelling at Wagner, and then being scared by the recording machine. He is finally confronted with reality: whether or not he is well liked is of no consequence, because now he is out of a job.

### **Act 2, Part 3**

Image 8: While Ben tries to tell Willy the secret of how to make a fortune, Willy ignores him and insists that personality and contacts are all you need to get rich. He staked his entire future on his belief that being well liked leads to success, and that's why his entire future was a flop. He looked at Dave Singleman as the role model to a profitable career in sales. He was no Dave Singleman, and as a result, he ended up a sad failure of a man.

Image 9: Bernard explains that Biff is unsuccessful because he never trained himself for anything. He was too busy being a big shot athlete in high school, and when he had the chance to graduate, he threw it away for some unknown reason. In saying all this, Bernard disputes Willy's belief that being well liked is enough to achieve success. Bernard, who was a good student in high school, is now more successful than Biff, the big shot in high school. Bernard's success proves that popularity doesn't last; something needs to be behind it.

### **Act 2, Part 4**

Image 10: Charley tells Willy that many successful men aren't well liked, and yet still achieved success. He points out that all the connections with people, real or imagined, don't do any good unless you have a product to sell. Connections must be used for something, and are useless by themselves. This blows away Willy's belief that one needs only to be well liked to achieve success; it's too late for Willy to change his whole philosophy, and either way, he's still a failure by his own standards because no one seems to like him much anyway.



## Act 1, Part 1

A flute plays softly as the light rises on a house surrounded by tall, angular buildings. The sparsely decorated kitchen is visible with a dark drape at the back leading into the living room. To the left and up a little is a second story bedroom with only a brass bed and a straight chair. Above the unseen living room is another bedroom with two beds; a stairway at the left curves up to the room from the kitchen. The empty stage between the house and the audience is the back yard, the scene of Willy's imaginings, as well as the city scenes. Whenever the action of the play is in the present, the characters act as if the imaginary walls are real and they enter and exit rooms only through doors. But when the action is in a memory, the characters step through the walls and onto the forestage.

Willy Loman, a sixty-year-old traveling salesman, enters his home late at night with two large sample cases. His wife, Linda, hears him coming up the stairs to their bedroom. She seems worried that something has happened, that he has wrecked the car again, or that he's ill, but Willy assures her that he is fine, just tired. Sitting on the bed with her, he explains that he came home because he was having trouble staying on the road while he drove, and he is unsure of what caused his distraction. It could've been the coffee he had at a roadside diner or the way he opened the windshield of the car and the scenery and sunshine just washed over him. Whatever it was, it kept taking his mind of the road, and he'd veer onto the shoulder before he knew what was happening. He was so spooked that he drove ten miles an hour all the way home, and now he's tired and grumpy because he's going to miss his morning meeting in Portland, Rhode Island. Linda urges him to talk to his boss about working in the New York area so that he doesn't have to travel anymore, but he says to her, "They don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England." Act 1, Part 1, pg. 4 After more discussion of all the reasons why he should be working in New York, Linda suggests again that he go speak with his boss, Howard Wagner. Willy finally agrees to do it, emphasizing that if Wagner's father were still in charge of the company, Willy would have already had a New York job. Wagner doesn't appreciate Willy the way his father did.

Topic Tracking: Failure 1

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 1

Linda offers to make Willy a sandwich to calm him down, but he changes the subject to their sons, Biff and Happy, who are asleep in their shared room. Willy mentions the fight he and Biff had that morning, and Linda gently chides him for criticizing Biff just when he got home. Willy says, "I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism?" Act 1, Part 1, pg. 5 They argue over Biff, Linda saying that he just has to find himself and Willy claiming that at thirty-four, he'll never find himself if he keeps working as a farmhand. Willy says he's lazy, but then he says he can't understand how such an attractive and hard-working man as Biff could be lost in America, the greatest country in the world. He gets caught up in remembering how Biff was so popular in high school, but Linda brings him back to the present.



Topic Tracking: Failure 2

Topic Tracking: Image 1

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 2

Willy starts to complain about the way their house is surrounded by apartment buildings now. He goes on a tirade about the increase in the population that has caused so many people to move in around them, and his voice wakes Biff and Happy in their room. Linda hushes Willy and sends him downstairs, but before he goes, his confrontational mood subsides and he assures Linda that if Biff wants to return to Texas, he won't stop him. He says that he believes Biff will get it together soon enough. As he's walking out the bedroom door to go downstairs to the kitchen, Linda suggests that over the weekend they all go for a picnic; they can open the car's windshield like Willy did earlier. The flute music plays again, and Willy hears it as he corrects Linda about opening the windshield. He remembers that the Studebaker's windshield doesn't open. He'd spent the entire day thinking that he was driving the Chevy he owned when his sons were in high school. The flute music that only Willy can hear startles him, and Linda plays off the discrepancy. Willy goes downstairs to make a sandwich, mumbling to himself about the old days with the Chevy. The boys are awake in their room over the invisible living room, and they overhear the end of their parents' conversation and Willy's muttering.



## Act 1, Part 2

Light rises in the boys' upstairs bedroom, and Biff gets out of bed and walks downstage as if standing near the door of their room and listening down the stairs to Willy's mumbling. Hap tells Biff how Willy has been acting strangely lately, mumbling to himself as if he's talking to Biff, and how he's been having trouble driving. Biff plays it off as nothing, and they reminisce about their younger days in that house and then talk about where their lives are now. Biff, walking around restlessly, admits that he has gone through job after job, but he hasn't been able to find one that sticks, one that seems worthwhile to him. He was happy ranching in Texas until spring came and he felt compelled to head home. He tells Happy, "I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and every time I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life." Act 1, Part 2, pg. 11

Topic Tracking: Failure 3

Hap talks about the frustration of working for executives he can physically outmatch, and about having to work his way up. He explains that even though he has his own apartment, car, and plenty of women, he's still dissatisfied. Biff suggests that he and Happy buy a ranch and work it together. Hap thinks it's a great idea, but then his interest shifts back to showing the executives for whom he works that he can beat them at their own game. He wants the kind of respect that his merchandise manager, who makes \$52,000 a year, gets when he walks in the store. Hap's already on his way, he swears, because he gets any woman he wants, including the fiancées of the top executives of the company for which he works. But even this is losing its charm for him. Hap also tells Biff that in much the same way that he can't help dallying with women engaged to his superiors, he also can't seem to refuse bribes at work. Biff admits that he doesn't run around chasing women anymore because he's looking for someone steady, like his mother, but he takes very little notice of Hap's confession of taking bribes. It doesn't even make a dent with Biff.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 3

While Hap talks, Biff decides to meet with Bill Oliver, a former employer who once told Biff to come to him for help if he ever needed it. Biff believes that Oliver will loan him enough money to buy a ranch, and Hap encourages Biff to ask for it because Oliver liked Biff; Willy had taught them that being well liked is the key to success in business. Biff worries that Oliver might still believe that he stole a carton of basketballs, which is why he quit working for Oliver. He had to leave before Oliver could fire him for stealing.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 4

As Biff and Hap are discussing Oliver, Willy starts talking downstairs like he's having a conversation. Biff gets mad at his father because he knows that Linda can hear him talking like a lunatic downstairs, and Hap asks Biff not to leave again because he

doesn't know how to handle Willy anymore. The boys, disturbed by their father's behavior, get back in bed and try to go back to sleep. The light on their room fades.



## Act 1, Part 3

As Willy roots around in the kitchen, he is dimly lit while the apartments in the background fade away and the whole house is covered with leaves. Flute music plays softly and sweetly. Sitting at the kitchen table with a glass of milk, Willy's mumbling grows louder until it's directed at a specific point off-stage and he's looking through the invisible kitchen wall. He's no longer mumbling. His voice is loud like he's conversing with someone. He warns Biff about making promises to girls because he is too young to be serious about girls; he seems impressed that Biff is so popular that the girls pay for the dates. Willy tells Biff and Hap that they did a good job polishing the Chevy. Young Biff and Hap walk onstage from the direction Willy was looking, and they ask for the surprise Willy had promised, which turns out to be a punching bag so they could improve their timing. Happy keeps asking if Willy has noticed that he's lost weight. Willy dismisses him with an inattentive comment and continues talking to Biff. Biff shows Willy the new football he "borrowed" from the locker room to work on passing, and Willy laughingly tells him to return it. But when Hap suggests that Willy should be unhappy that Biff stole the ball, Willy justifies Biff's action by saying that the coach would "probably congratulate [Biff] on [his] initiative" Act 1, Part 3, pg. 18 instead of being angry about the theft because the coach likes Biff.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 5

They talk about Willy's trip and Willy tells them that he will have his own business someday that will be bigger than Charley's, their neighbor, because Willy is well liked whereas Charley is not. Willy tells the boys that he met the mayor of Providence while he was away on his last trip. He promises to take the boys along with him in the summer so they can see New England, the place where Willy is well known and well liked.

Topic Tracking: Image 2

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 6

As Biff practices passing the football, he and Willy talk about how important Biff is socially since he was made captain of the football team. Willy is proud that his son is well liked. Biff, taking Willy's hand, promises to make a touchdown for Willy at the next game. As they are talking about it, Bernard, Charley's nerdy son, enters the front of the stage and comes over to remind Biff that they are supposed to study together that day; Biff is close to flunking math. Willy makes fun of Bernard when he suggests that Biff might not graduate because of his grades. Willy doesn't believe that anyone would fail a kid who has scholarships to three universities. When Bernard leaves, Willy tells the boys that because Bernard is not well liked, he will never make it in the business world despite his good grades. He says, "the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates a personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want." Act 1, Part 3, pg. 21

Topic Tracking: Image 3



He brags more about how well known he is until a youthful Linda appears. She asks Willy if the Chevy drives well and he claims it is the greatest car ever built. The boys take the laundry from their mother to hang it up for her, and then Biff walks through the wall-line of the kitchen to the doorway at the back, and orders the friends he has waiting in the basement to sweep out the furnace room. Willy and Linda are both impressed by the way Biff's friends obey him. Linda asks Willy how much he sold on his trip and he tells her first that he sold \$1200; she figures out that his commission from the sale would be \$212. He hesitates at the figure, and then says that he sold \$200, making his commission only \$70. While Linda adds up the total of their monthly payments, they move through the wall-line and into the kitchen. She realizes that they owe \$120 in payments on their appliances and for the Chevy's new carburetor. Willy insists that he shouldn't have to pay for the carburetor because Chevy automobiles are such pieces of junk, that manufacturing them should be prohibited. Pressured by how much money he owes, Willy worries that business won't pick up. While Linda is in the kitchen darning stockings, he moves to the edge of the stage. He tells her that he'll go to Hartford the next week because, he says, "I'm very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me." Act 1, Part 3, pg. 23 Willy feels like people are either laughing at him or ignoring him. He thinks that maybe it's because he's fat -- he'd overheard some man call him a walrus and smacked him in the face for it. Linda assures him that he is a handsome man, the handsomest man in the world to her. Through her words of reassurance, Willy hears the sound of another woman's laughter, but he keeps talking to Linda. Music plays softly and seemingly far away as he tells Linda that he worries about not providing a life for her and the boys. As he talks, the other woman is dimly seen to the left of the house and she is dressing.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 7

Topic Tracking: Image 4

Topic Tracking: Failure 4

## Act 1, Part 4

The area to the left of the house gets brighter and Willy walks into it. The woman redresses while she talks to Willy. She tells him that she enjoys their times together because Willy has a great sense of humor. She promises they will get together when he comes back to town in a few weeks and she'll put him right through to the buyers at the company where she's a secretary. She thanks him for the silk stockings he bought her and leaves. She's laughing as she goes, and her laughter blends into Linda's as the light on the woman goes dark and the kitchen table brightens around Linda, who is darning a pair of silk stockings.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 8



## Act 1, Part 5

As the light brightens over the kitchen table, Willy moves to the kitchen and notices Linda darning her silk stockings. He tells her to throw them away. His guilt at giving the secretary silk stockings while his wife had to mend her own makes him angry. Then Bernard runs onto the stage looking for Biff, so that they can study for the state exam. Willy moves to the forestage in agitation and tells Bernard to give Biff the answers, but Bernard refuses because it is a state exam and he doesn't want to get in trouble. Willy, still angry, threatens to whip Bernard. Linda says that Biff needs to return the football to the locker room and that he is so rough with the girls that all the mothers are afraid of him. Bernard says that Biff is driving the car without a license. Willy, overwhelmed by Linda and Bernard as well as the sound of the woman's laughter, yells at them to shut up. Bernard leaves the stage, but warns on his way out that Biff will flunk math if he doesn't study. As Linda agrees that Biff needs to shape up, Willy explodes at her and says that Biff is doing nothing wrong, that he's just spirited and has personality, unlike Bernard. As Linda goes into the living room almost in tears, Willy is alone again in the kitchen and the apartment buildings are visible behind the house. In the darkness of night, Willy wonders aloud what he ever told Biff that made him steal things.

## Act 1, Part 6

Happy comes downstairs and Willy snaps back into the present. Hap tries to calm his dad and take him upstairs to bed, but Willy rambles on about how Linda shouldn't have waxed the floor because it might hurt her back. Hap asks him why he came back from his trip, and Willy says that he almost ran over someone in Yonkers, and it scared him. He wonders aloud why he didn't go to Alaska with his brother, Ben, when he had the chance. Ben was rich by the age of twenty-one because he had a diamond mine. Hap tells Willy that he's going to retire him for life, and Willy ridicules him because he only makes \$70 a week, and that won't retire him, and now Willy can't even drive past Yonkers anymore.

Topic Tracking: Failure 5

Amid Willy's frantic tirade, Charley comes in the kitchen to find out what the noise is all about because he can hear through the thin walls. Hap goes up to bed while Willy sits down at the kitchen table with Charley to play cards. Willy insults Charley with his condescension, but Charley ignores it. Charley offers him a job so that he won't have to travel; Willy is offended, but Charley only means well. Willy tells him that Biff is going back to Texas to be a farmhand, and Charley tells him not to worry about it, to forget Biff. Willy says if he does that, he'll have nothing to remember. He then changes the subject to the ceiling he put up. Charley tries to go along with the conversation, to seem interested, but Willy insults him more. As the men talk, Ben enters the forestage from the right corner of the house and his music plays. Willy calls Charley by Ben's name while Ben stands on the forestage looking around and then glances at his watch insisting that he only has a few minutes. Charley and Willy continue their card game as Willy explains that a couple of weeks ago, they got a letter from Ben's wife telling them he was dead. That was the only time they'd heard of him since he came to their home briefly on his way back to Africa. Ben asks Willy questions, and as Willy answers, Charley tries to follow the conversation that Willy seems to be having with himself. In the confusion of past and present colliding in Willy's head, he accuses Charley of cheating at their card game and Charley storms out. Willy walks through the wall-line of the kitchen to where Ben stands.



## Act 1, Part 7

Ben and Willy meet for the first time since Willy was almost four years old. Willy wants him to divulge the secret of his success, to tell him what happened after he left to follow their father to Alaska. Ben tells him that instead of going to Alaska, he ended up in Africa. Ben says, "when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich." Act 1, Part 7, pg. 33 After Ben tells his story, he tries to leave, but Willy calls young Biff and Hap onstage and asks Ben to tell them about their grandfather - anything else to make him stay longer. Ben seems to be in a hurry to leave. Ben tells the boys about how their grandfather made and sold flutes. He would load his family into their wagon and travel westward from Boston to sell the flutes he made. Ben points out that their grandfather was such a great inventor and salesman, that he could make more in a week than a man like Willy could make in a lifetime.

Topic Tracking: Failure 6

Willy insists that he's bringing his boys up to be well rounded and well liked, and he makes Biff box with his uncle to prove it. As they spar, Ben trips Biff and stands over him with the point of his umbrella near Biff's eye. He tells Biff, "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." Act 1, Part 7, pg. 34 Youthful Linda, spooked by the whole display, repeatedly asks why Biff has to fight with his uncle, but Willy doesn't see anything bizarre in it, because he is too busy trying to impress Ben. In an attempt to prove that he has the pioneer spirit and the ingenuity of his father, Willy sends the boys to a nearby construction site to steal sand so they can rebuild their stoop immediately. Charley walks over and warns Willy that the cops are watching out for the boys because they've already stolen lumber. Willy bragged about their theft, although he gave the boys a mock lecture for stealing. Ben seems as proud as Willy that the boys are fearless. When Bernard reports that the watchman is chasing Biff, Willy insists that Biff wasn't stealing anything -- he was doing nothing wrong. Linda, worried, leaves to look for Biff.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 9

Charley complains about business in New England and Willy insists that he has no problems selling in New England because he has the right contacts. Charley sarcastically congratulates Willy and then leaves. Ben begins to leave again, but Willy asks him to stay and talk about their father because Willy was a baby when he left; not having a chance to talk with his dad left him feeling "kind of temporary about [him]self." Act 1, Part 7, pg. 36 Ben promises to visit on his way back to Africa, and he assures Willy that he's teaching his sons the right things. Ben caps it all off with his words of wisdom about how he went into the jungle at twenty-one and came out rich, and then Ben walks around the right corner of the house and disappears.



## Act 1, Part 8

Linda comes downstairs in her nightgown and robe and sees Willy out in the yard talking to himself through the door, so she goes out to check on him. In his mumbling, he asks her what happened to the diamond watch Ben gave him, and she reminds him that he pawned it almost thirteen years before to pay for Biff's radio correspondence course. Despite Linda's urging him to come inside, Willy wants to go for a walk, so he disappears around the left corner of the house in his slippers, muttering the whole way. Biff comes downstairs into the kitchen and asks Linda how long Willy's been this way. Happy comes down the stairs not far behind him, and Linda gives them both a verbal lashing about the way they treat their father -- they don't write or visit often enough, and they don't care enough about him to ask how things are going with him. Biff, touching her hair, notices that it's gray, that she's looking older, and she tells him that he can't keep coming home just to see her. Every time he comes home, he and Willy fight, and she doesn't know what's come between them, but she doesn't want Biff around if he's going to treat his father poorly. She tells him that she won't allow him to make Willy feel bad anymore. He's either got to pay him the respect a father deserves or not come back again. Biff can't understand why she's so quick to protect Willy when he's always wiped the floor with her, and Hap pipes up to defend his father. Biff insists that Willy has no character, that he's weak, and Linda again defends her husband.

*"I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. 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."* Act 1, Part 8, pg. 40

She tells the boys that Willy is no longer a salaried salesman, but has been demoted to earning only commission, just like a beginner. He drives seven hundred miles to Boston and back, and he makes no money on the trips because all the contacts he once had are retired or dead. No one knows him any more, and he has to borrow \$50 a week from Charley to pretend it's his salary so that Linda won't know he's been demoted. He's spent his entire life working for the benefit of his children, and now they are both immoral failures.

Topic Tracking: Failure 7

Biff, out of a sense of obligation to his father, agrees to live at home and find a job in the city, but Linda insists that he can't stay if he's going to be hateful to Willy. She wants to know what turned him against his father; he used to admire him so much and do anything to make him proud. Biff says that Willy threw him out because Biff knew he was a fake, but Biff won't explain any further. He agrees to stay and pitch in half of his paycheck, but before he can go upstairs to bed, Linda has one more confession to make to the boys. She tells them that Willy's been trying to kill himself. She says that the insurance inspector has evidence that all the times that he's smashed up the car over the last year haven't been accidents. Linda reveals that there's some woman (this



gets Biff's attention but he won't explain why) who saw Willy deliberately smash the car into the railing of a bridge. He wasn't driving fast, and he didn't skid before he crashed. The only thing that saved him was that the water was shallow. Biff tries to chalk it up to falling asleep behind the wheel, but Linda tells them that she found a short length of rubber piping in the basement with an attachment that fixes on to the rubber nipple on the gas valve of the water heater. She accidentally came across it and every day she takes it out of the basement, but puts it back before he comes home because she can't bear to insult him by confronting him about it. She blames his suicide attempts on the fact that he's put his whole life into the boys, and now they've turned their backs on him. They ignore him the way everyone else does now that his contacts are gone. Sobbing, she tells Biff that Willy's life is in his hands.

This accusation makes Biff feel bad for fighting with his dad, and he promises her that he'll behave better. Although he hates the business world, he'll go and be successful at it. Happy tells him that his problem in business was that he never tried to please people, that he did crazy things like whistling in the elevator. Biff and Hap begin arguing about whistling in the elevator and taking a day off in the summer to be outside. Hap insists that if you're going to play hooky, you've got to cover yourself so that your boss can't pin you for lying. Hap says that some people in the business world think Biff's crazy, and Biff says that he doesn't care. He says that the business world has laughed at Willy for years, too, because they don't belong in the city; they should be out in the country working with their hands and whistling when they want to.

Topic Tracking: Image 5

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 10

Willy walks into the house in time to hear the end of the argument. He says that Biff never grew up, and that Bernard doesn't whistle in the elevator. The argument flares again as Willy disputes Biff's claim that people in the business world consider Willy Loman crazy. He insists that his name still carries great weight in New England stores. As he's heading up the stairs to bed, Hap tells him that Biff is going to see Bill Oliver the next day to convince him to stake Biff's business. Willy suggests selling sporting goods, and Biff, still tentative about the plan, tries to explain that he hasn't met with Oliver yet. Willy is sarcastic and Biff gets angry; he walks toward the stairs to go to bed and Willy keeps jabbing at him. Hap tries to end the argument by telling Biff his idea for going into the sporting goods business together as the Loman Brothers; they would sell their products by traveling and having sporting exhibitions where they could form teams and play against each other using the products they're selling. That way they'd be able to play ball, be the executives, work together, and make money. The American Dream -- doing what they love, being their own boss, and getting rich off of it. Willy thinks it's a great idea and he gives Biff instructions on how to approach Oliver about the money -- wear a suit, don't make jokes, don't talk too much, but tell his good stories and laugh because "personality always wins the day." Act 1, Part 8, pg. 48

Topic Tracking: Image 6



As he's talking, Linda keeps chiming in and Willy keeps snapping at her about interrupting. Biff tells him not to yell at her, and he and Willy start arguing again just when everything seemed peaceful. In the middle of the yelling, Willy just stops arguing and walks away from them and into the living room, but he doesn't leave in a rage. He seems to be giving in for now, feeling guilty and beaten. Linda asks Biff why he picked another fight with Willy just when he was being nice and things were sounding hopeful. She asks the boys to tell him goodnight so that he doesn't go to bed angry, and they agree before she leaves the kitchen to go upstairs. On their way upstairs, planning for the next morning's meeting with Oliver, Biff begins to talk confidently to Hap, and things start looking up. Meanwhile, Willy is in the bathroom upstairs putting on his pajamas and telling Linda how bumming around was the best thing for Biff because it's given him caliber for success. Biff overhears him as he and Hap come into Willy and Linda's room to say goodnight. Willy keeps giving him more advice for the meeting, like how he shouldn't pick up anything that might fall off the desk because that's a job for an office boy, not Biff. Willy tells him to lie about his work out West -- say it was business, not farm work. Throughout all this advice, he interrupts Linda and snaps at her some more, and Biff nears his breaking point again. He leaves the room before he picks another fight, and Willy tells him that he'll do well tomorrow because he's destined for greatness. Hap sticks his head in his parents' room to tell his mom that he's going to get married. She just dismisses him like Willy does, and he leaves.

#### Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 11

As they're drifting off to sleep, Willy reminds Linda of the championship football game when Biff waved to him from the field in front of everyone while the fans were chanting Biff's name. He knows Biff will be great because, "[a] star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!" Act 1, Part 8, pg. 51 He ignores Linda when she asks what Biff has against him, but promises to talk to Howard, his boss, in the morning about working in New York. The light on Willy fades to darkness.

Biff goes back downstairs and onto the forestage to smoke a cigarette. Through the kitchen wall, the water heater's gas flame begins to glow while Willy talks to Linda upstairs. Biff walks in the kitchen and goes down into the basement to find the piping Linda told them about. He takes it upstairs with him and the curtain falls.



## Act 2, Part 1

Happy music plays and then fades as the curtain rises. Willy sits at the kitchen table with his coffee. He is cheerful and optimistic as Linda tells him that Biff and Hap were bright and hopeful as well before they left. Things are looking up for the Loman family. Willy builds his bright dreams of how life is going to change after today -- they're going to go into business together and Willy and Linda will move out to the country and build two guest houses so the boys can bring their families for the weekend. While Willy is dreaming out loud, Linda reminds him to ask Wagner, his boss, for an advance to pay Willy's insurance premium. While she ticks off the list of expenses they've had recently that have put them a little behind financially, Willy gripes about the quality of appliances and automobiles, and how everything breaks just when it's paid for. He goes on a tirade about the refrigerator. He says that they should've bought one that was well advertised because Charley bought a General Electric refrigerator and has never had a problem with it. He interrupts Linda before she can remind him that the Hastings refrigerator they bought had the biggest ads in the paper. Linda reminds him that they've got one more payment to make before their house is paid for, and Willy points out the irony that when it's paid for, there will be only the two of them to live in it. He's gathering his coat and getting ready to go meet Wagner about a New York job and an advance, when Linda tells him that Biff and Hap want him to meet them for dinner at Frank's Chop House. He's so excited that his sons want to treat him to dinner that his enthusiasm for the day is boosted and life looks full of promise. He can't help but be successful today, so he goes to meet Wagner. He comes back in one last time because he forgot a handkerchief and he notices Linda mending her silk stockings. He tells her to quit mending those while he's in the house because it makes him nervous, so she hides them as he leaves.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 12

As Willy disappears offstage, Biff calls to make sure his mother told Willy about their dinner plans. She is excited to tell him that Willy must have moved the rubber piping, but Biff tells her that he took it the night before. She seems disappointed because she thought that if Willy had moved it himself, that meant that the danger had passed. Because Biff moved it, she's still a little uneasy about Willy's state of mind. Yet Willy was in such good spirits that morning, she thinks things are changing and that life is getting better for all of them. Biff tells her he's waiting to see Bill Oliver, and before they get off the phone, she tells him to be good to his father at dinner because it will save his life. In the middle of Linda's speech, Wagner rolls a small typewriter table with a wire-recording machine on it onto the left forefront of the stage and plugs it in. Light fades from Linda and rises on Wagner as he threads the machine.



## Act 2, Part 2

Willy comes into Wagner's office in an almost timid way while Wagner is threading a wire-recording machine. Willy keeps trying to talk to Wagner, but Wagner interrupts him time after time to show him the miracles of the recording machine and play back the voices of his son and daughter as they whistle songs and recite state capitals into the machine. When Willy finally finds a way to lead the conversation about the recording machine into a discussion of how he no longer wants to be on the road, Wagner realizes that Willy is supposed to be in Boston that day. He asks if Willy "didn't crack up again" Act 2, Part 2, pg. 59 because that's happened several times before. Willy, ignoring the question, asks for a New York job, reminding Wagner that he told Willy at Christmas that he'd look for a local space for him. Wagner can't help him. Willy pushes harder, bringing up Wagner's father at every opportunity, as if claiming some great friendship with the man will guilt Wagner into finding a place for him. Willy gets angry as Wagner keeps refusing him, and Willy tries to explain to Wagner why he chose to be a salesman. Wagner hardly listens as Willy tells a story about Dave Singleman, the 84-year-old salesman who traveled from city to city making his sales from his hotel room because so many people knew and liked him. Buyers and salesman from all over New England attended his funeral, and that was Willy's aspiration when he went into sales. That's why he didn't go to Alaska with his brother, Ben. He stuck with sales because,

*"[i]n those days there was personality in it . . . There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear -- or personality . . . They don't know [Willy] any more."* Act 2, Part 2, pg. 61

He asks Wagner again to find him a salaried position in New York, but Wagner can't do it. Willy explodes, yelling at Wagner that he's put thirty-four years into the company and now he can't even pay his insurance. Willy insists that "[y]ou can't eat the orange and throw the peel away -- a man is not a piece of fruit!" Act 2, Part 2, pg. 61-2 After the outburst and a final refusal, Wagner leaves Willy in the office to pull himself together, and Willy realizes that he has just snapped. In his efforts to recover from the emotional tumult, he bumps the recorder machine and it comes on spouting the recorded voice of Wagner's son listing the state capitals. The noise scares Willy and he calls out to Wagner who comes in and unplugs the machine. Willy, wilted in defeat, tells Wagner that he'll go to Boston tomorrow. Wagner, however, tells him that he doesn't want Willy representing the company anymore. He fires Willy and tells him to let his sons, his fine boys, take care of him for a while so he can get some rest. Wagner leaves the office again pushing the recording machine off stage left. Willy stares into space and Ben's music begins playing again as Ben enters from the right.

Topic Tracking: Image 7

Topic Tracking: Failure 8

## Act 2, Part 3

Ben, as he keeps looking at his watch, urges Willy to leave the city and go to Alaska where a fortune is waiting to be made, and Willy's delighted at the prospect for a moment. Linda says she doesn't understand why everybody has to conquer the world. She says that Willy's life is good enough -- he's well liked and his boys loved him, and he is building a relationship with his boss and the firm he works for. Ben responds by saying that if he can't lay his hand on what he's building, then he's not building anything. But Willy, remembering Dave Singleman, believes that he can match Ben's success with his own on the basis of just being liked. He believes that contacts and personality and popularity will make him rich, and the same things will make Biff a success as well. Young Biff and Hap walk in, with Happy carrying Biff's football uniform. Ben leaves that day telling Willy that Alaska could make him rich, and Willy assures Ben that he'll make it rich from Brooklyn.

Topic Tracking: Image 9

Ben and his music fade into the happy music of Young Biff and Hap as Bernard rushes on stage looking for Biff and afraid that the Lomans had left for the game without him. Willy and Linda are getting ready to go to the game, and Willy walks through the wall-line of the kitchen and to the door at the back that leads into the living room, while Bernard and Happy argue over who gets to carry Biff's helmet and shoulder pads. The happy music fades away. Biff is standing in the yard when Willy walks back out through the wall-line of the kitchen to talk to him. Willy is so proud of Biff, and Biff reminds him to watch for the moment when he takes his helmet off so Willy will know the touchdown is for him. Charley comes onto the stage. He jokes about the game and Willy gets mad at him because he isn't taking the biggest day of Biff's life seriously. Willy's temper flares and he wants to fight Charley, but Charley only tells him to grow up and walks away around the left corner of the stage. The music swells to a frenzied pitch, as Willy follows him around the house yelling after him.



## Act 2, Part 4

Light rises on the right forefront of the stage where Bernard, all grown up, sits whistling to himself in the waiting room of Charley's office. Willy's voice precedes him as he comes into the office still yelling. Charley's secretary asks Bernard to handle Willy because it always upsets his father whenever Willy comes into the office. So when Willy walks in, still talking football, Bernard makes small talk with him. Bernard tells Willy he's got a case in Washington and he has stopped by his dad's office to say goodbye before he leaves. Willy notices the tennis racquets by Bernard's bag, and Bernard tells him that the friend he's staying with has his own courts. Bernard's wife just had their second son. Willy is impressed and feels compelled to lie about Biff's success. He tells Bernard that Biff was working out West when Bill Oliver called him in because he wanted Biff to work for him very badly. Bernard just changes the subject and asks Willy if he's still working for the same firm and Willy gets choked up. Then he asks Bernard to explain the secret of success. He wants Bernard to tell him why Biff is a failure, why it worked out that "his life ended after that Ebbets Field game" because "[f]rom the age of seventeen nothing good ever happened to him." Act 2, Part 4, pg. 71 Bernard answers that he never trained himself for anything. He points out that although Biff flunked math and didn't graduate, he could've taken summer school, but for some reason he just gave up. Bernard remembers that Biff went to see Willy in Boston after he found out he flunked math. He was going to take summer school, but after he came back from visiting Willy in Boston, he threw his University of Virginia sneakers into the furnace because he didn't want to go anymore. Bernard says, "I've often thought of how strange it was that I knew he'd given up his life." Act 2, Part 4, pg. 72 He asks Willy what happened in Boston, but Willy is defensive and argumentative. Charley comes out of his office before things get out of hand and tells Willy that Bernard is off to Washington to try a case before the Supreme Court. Willy is shocked, but happy for him. Bernard leaves the stage.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 13

Topic Tracking: Image 9

When Bernard leaves, Charley gives Willy \$50, but Willy tells him that he needs more to make his insurance payment. Charley has offered him a job before, but Willy won't take it, and now Charley is offended that Willy will take his money, but he won't work for him. The men argue and Willy admits that he was fired today and is outraged that Wagner could fire him after Willy was so close to Wagner's father when he had been in charge. Willy claims he had even named Wagner; he'd named him Howard, and the man still fired him. Charley says:

*"Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything. You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. 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."* Act 2, Part 4, pg. 75

Charley tells him that being well liked doesn't mean anything; it doesn't make you rich. A lot of successful people weren't well liked, but they were successful. Again he offers



Willy a job, but Willy won't take it; Charley gives him the money for the insurance payment, and Willy says, "After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive." Act 2, Part 4, pg. 76 Charley gets a little worried, and then Willy apologizes for arguing with Bernard, assuring himself that one day he, Biff, and Hap will all be successful. Near tears, Willy says that Charley's the only friend he's got, and then he leaves. All the light blacks out before rowdy music plays and a red glow comes up behind the screen at right.

Topic Tracking: Image 10



## Act 2, Part 5

Happy and a waiter set up a table in the private part of Frank's Chop House, where he, Biff, and Willy are planning to meet for dinner. Hap tells the waiter that his brother, a big cattleman from out West, is in town, so bring out lobster and champagne. While Hap waits for Biff and Willy to arrive, a pretty woman walks in and Hap hits on her until Biff gets there. To get the girl interested in Biff, Hap tells her that Biff's the quarterback for the Giants and lies that he (Hap) went to West Point. Once he has her attention, he tells her to cancel her plans and find a friend so the four of them can go out together, and she goes to make some phone calls.

While she's gone, Biff explains that he waited six hours to see Oliver and then the man didn't even remember him. Biff realized while he waited for him that he'd never been a salesman for Oliver -- he'd been a shipping clerk. Meeting with Oliver made him realize that his whole life has been a lie; he, Willy, and Hap had made themselves seem more important than they ever really were. He tells Hap, "We've been talking in a dream for fifteen years." Act 2, Part 5, pg. 81 Biff was so mad at Oliver's dismissal and so upset about his realization that, without meaning to, he stole Oliver's gold fountain pen and ran away. He asks Hap to help him tell Willy what happened. Biff wants to explain that he's not a failure, just to spite Willy. It's not intentional -- he just can't help being a flop. Hap tells Biff to just lie and pretend that he's got a lunch meeting with Oliver tomorrow. After tomorrow, just pretend that Oliver is thinking it over for a few weeks, and then just let it fade away. Before they can discuss it further, Willy comes in.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 14

Biff, feeling guilty and nervous, grabs Willy's hand and begins to tell him what he's figured out today. His breathing is interrupting his speech and he's running on the fumes of several drinks as he tells Willy that he was never a salesman for Oliver, but only a shipping clerk. Willy tries to insist that Biff was "practically" Act 2, Part 5, pg. 83 a salesman, but Biff interrupts and insists that they look at the facts. Willy gets mad at Biff for lecturing him and tells the boys that he was fired today, so he's looking for some good news to give Linda. As the rapid-fire conversation continues, Biff tries to find out why Willy was fired, and Willy tries to find out what happened with Oliver, and Hap just tells Willy exactly what he wants to hear. In answer to Willy's questions, Biff tries to tell the truth, but Willy keeps interrupting. Biff gets frustrated and Willy gets angry because he thinks Biff didn't see Oliver, but he won't let Biff get more than a few words out before he interrupts him again. As Biff tries to explain what honestly happened at Oliver's office, Willy hears a single trumpet note and apart from the stage where Willy, Biff, and Hap sit, the house is painted with a green, leafy light. As Biff's voice fades, Young Bernard enters and knocks at the door of the Loman house where youthful Linda appears. Bernard tells her that Biff failed math and left for Boston to find his dad. The light on the house goes dark, and Biff's voice is audible again as Willy mentions math over and over. Biff and Hap are trying to figure out what he's talking about, when he explodes at Biff and tells him that he'd be set by now if he hadn't flunked math. Willy sees the gold pen in Biff's hand and realizes that he stole it from Oliver. He's missed the



entire explanation of what happened with Oliver, and as Biff tries to explain the pen, Willy can hear the sound of an operator's voice ringing his hotel room. Willy keeps yelling at the operator that he's not in his room.

#### Topic Tracking: Failure 9

Biff and Hap have no idea what Willy's talking about, and Biff gets down on his knees in front of Willy promising that he'll make good, he'll be successful. Willy tells him that he's good for nothing and then Willy tries to stand up, but Biff holds him down in his chair. Biff and Hap don't know what's happening because Willy is talking crazy. Biff tries to soothe him by lying and telling him that Oliver will give him the money, but he's supposed to meet Oliver and his partner for lunch tomorrow to discuss it. Biff continues with the lie, telling Willy that he can't meet them at lunch tomorrow, though, because he stole the pen. Willy insists that Biff just tell Oliver the pen was an oversight, but Biff tells him that stealing the pen in combination with stealing the carton of basketballs when he worked for Oliver before would just be too much. He tells Willy he'll find the money somewhere else. As Willy yells at Biff for being a failure, he can hear the hotel's page calling to him and his mistress laughing. He tells Biff that he's a failure and orders Biff to go to the lunch appointment. Biff, trying to find some way out of it, opts for the truth a second time and tells Willy that he doesn't have an appointment. Willy hits him, and the girls come into the room as Hap is separating Willy and Biff. Willy's mistress says that there's someone at the door and then laughs again offstage left.

The girls sit down with them and Biff urges Willy to sit down, too. While the girls talk to Hap and Biff, Willy is about to sit down, when his mistress tells him to get up and answer the door, so he starts walking to stage right. When Biff asks where he's going, Willy says he's going to the washroom and exits stage left. While Willy's gone, the girls admit that they don't believe that Willy is Biff and Hap's dad, but Biff says, "You've just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hard-working, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys." Act 2, Part 5, pg. 90 Hap just ignores the situation with Willy, and starts planning where they're going to go after the restaurant. Biff gets mad at Hap for not helping Willy. Biff puts the rubber piping, Willy's suicide plan, on the table and tells Hap that if he cared at all for Willy, he wouldn't let something like that go on. Biff, almost in tears, runs out of the restaurant and Hap and the girls follow him, leaving Willy alone in the restroom. When one of the girls asks Hap if they're going to just leave their father, he says that Willy's not his dad, he's just some guy. They all leave the stage.



## Act 2, Part 6

Knocking is heard off stage left and the Woman, who is still laughing, enters with Willy behind her. Sensuous music accompanies their entrance. Willy talks to his mistress as they dress and someone knocks on the door. Willy won't answer the door, and he starts worrying because the person at the door won't go away. He sends the Woman into the bathroom to hide while he gets rid of whoever it is at the door. He takes a few steps away from her and she disappears into the wing while he opens the door. The music stops as young Biff stands there, distraught over failing math. Biff suggests that Willy can go talk to his math teacher and convince him to give Biff the four points he needs to graduate. Biff is sure that if his teacher sees what kind of man Willy is, he'll give Biff the points to graduate. Biff explains that the teacher didn't like him because one day Biff was making fun of him before class and the teacher caught him. Willy is proud of Biff because the other kids thought his imitation was funny, and Biff shows Willy the impression he did, talking with a lisp, and the Woman offstage laughs loud enough for Biff to hear her. Willy tries to play it off like it came from next door, but the Woman enters, still laughing. Willy makes up a story about her room being painted so she had to shower in his room, and he tries to push her offstage, but she won't leave until Willy gives her the stockings he promised her. After she leaves, Willy tries to convince Biff that the story about her room being painted is true, but Biff doesn't buy it. He cries because Willy gave her the stockings that Linda was supposed to have. Willy keeps trying to downplay it and to change the subject. He promises to see Biff's teacher the next day, but Biff has changed his mind. Biff says that he won't go to the University of Virginia and his teacher wouldn't listen to Willy anyway because Willy is a fake. Biff leaves crying and Willy is left alone.

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 15



## Act 2, Part 7

Willy was yelling when the waiter came in and told him that the boys left with the girls they found. Willy, sad and dejected, offers the waiter some money, but the waiter puts it back in Willy's jacket pocket. Willy heads to a hardware store to get seeds for planting a garden. The light fades.

After a long pause, the sound of a flute plays softly as the light rises on the empty kitchen. Biff and Hap appear at the door of the house. Hap has roses for his mom, and he goes into the kitchen to find her, and then looks into the living room where she's sitting with Willy's jacket in her lap. Hap freezes in the doorway and as she walks toward him; he backs into the kitchen and seems afraid. He keeps backing to the right as she silently appears in the living room doorway and asks where they were. He says they met some girls and they got her some flowers, but she's so mad at the boys for deserting their father that she throws the roses at Biff's feet as he stands inside the kitchen doorway. Hap tries to play off her anger, but both she and Biff tell him to shut up. Linda orders the boys to leave and not come back. Biff, looking into the living room and his parents' bedroom, insists on talking to Willy before he goes. Hap, after being yelled at again, goes upstairs, and Biff and Linda are left in the kitchen. Linda won't tell Biff where his father is, but when Biff hears hammering outside, she tells him that Willy's making a garden, even though it's the middle of the night. Biff goes outside, and Linda follows him as the light fades on them and comes up on Willy in the center of the front of the stage. Willy has a flashlight, hoe, and some seed packets and is measuring off the distance with his foot as he reads the planting directions on the packets. Willy stops his measuring when Ben appears at right, moving towards him. He tells his brother that Linda has suffered so much and that a man's life has to add up to something, so he's come up with a plan to make his life worth a guaranteed \$20,000. Ben warns Willy that the insurance company might not honor the policy and that what's he's thinking of is a cowardly thing to do. But Willy insists that being nothing the rest of his life would be worse than what he has in mind. Ben agrees. Willy thinks that his plan is perfect because Biff will realize that he was wrong about his dad.

*"Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates -- that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized -- I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey -- I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all."* Act 2, Part 7, pg. 100

Ben warns that Biff might consider Willy a coward and a fool for what he's going to do, and that bothers Willy because he just wants to give Biff something without having Biff hate him.

While Willy is talking about his plan, Ben goes off upstage and disappears. Biff comes down from the left and Willy looks up at him in confusion. Biff reminds Willy that people can see him out in the yard rooting around in the dark to make a garden, but Willy doesn't care. He tells Biff to go away and leave him alone and Biff tells him that he's



leaving for good and that it doesn't matter whose fault it is that he's a failure. Willy goes inside and Biff follows him to tell Linda that he's leaving. Biff says he won't write so that they don't have to think about him and they can start being happy again. Biff is ready to go, but Willy won't shake his hand. They start arguing again, Willy yells at him and Biff tries to explain what's happened and why he has to go. Biff wants to leave peaceably, but Willy won't let him. When Biff asks what Willy wants from him, Willy tells him that he wants Biff to know that he wasted his life because of spite. "Spite, spite, is the word of your undoing!" Act 2, Part 7, pg. 103 Willy tells Biff that he can't blame his failure on him, and Biff argues that he's not trying to. Willy keeps going on about it and Biff finally gets angry and the arguing is loud enough to bring Hap downstairs. Biff gets so mad that he pulls the rubber piping from his pocket and puts it in front of Willy, telling him that suicide won't make him a hero or win him any sympathy in Biff's eyes. Happy and Linda are shocked that Biff would do such a thing, but Biff won't let them take it off the table. Willy denies knowing what the rubber piping is for. Willy keeps insisting repeatedly that Biff is spiteful, and Biff, sick of lying and pretending to be who he isn't, wants to tell Willy who they really are because Biff thinks Willy doesn't know the truth. He says, "[w]e never told the truth for ten minutes in this house." Act 2, Part 7, pg. 104 Happy tries to argue with him, but Biff points out the lie that Happy is living, pretending that he's the assistant buyer when he's really only one of two assistants to the assistant buyer. Biff tells Willy that he didn't have an address for three months because he was in jail for stealing a suit. He tells Willy that stealing has cost him every decent job he's had since he got out of high school. Willy asks Biff if he's blaming him for that, and Biff says that Willy made him think he was such a big shot that he couldn't stand taking orders from anyone, so he couldn't hold down a job. But Biff figured everything out when he was running from Oliver's office. He thought:

*"Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be? What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am!"* Act 2, Part 7, pg. 105

Topic Tracking: Dishonesty 16

Willy refuses Biff's assertion that they are simply common men. Biff starts toward Willy, furious and ready to fight, but Hap holds him off. Biff says that Willy was a guy who tried hard but failed like so many other guys have done, and that Biff himself is just an ordinary guy and that Willy has to realize that he's not special anymore. Willy calls him vengeful and spiteful again, and Biff breaks away from Happy. Willy starts up the stairs away from Biff, but Biff grabs him and yells that it's not anyone's fault that Biff is nothing, that's just the way it is. Then, exhausted from trying to explain and furious that Willy won't listen, Biff breaks down into sobs. He holds onto Willy and Willy fumbles for Biff's face. Crying but breaking away from Willy, Biff tells Linda that he'll leave in the morning and he goes upstairs to bed.

When Biff leaves the stage, Willy is suddenly happy because Biff cried and that means that he loves his dad. Willy says that Biff is going to be magnificent, and he hears Ben's voice say that Biff will be more magnificent when he has \$20,000 to back him. Ben's music plays hauntingly in the background. Linda senses that Willy's mind has moved on



to something dangerous and urges him to go to bed. Happy, still vying for attention, tells his parents that he's going to get married, but Linda dismisses him up to bed. Willy is listening to Ben as he urges Willy to go into the jungle and get a diamond. She tries to get Willy upstairs to bed, too, but he tells her that he wants to sit by himself for a few minutes to calm down, so she fearfully goes upstairs without him. Ben's voice keeps telling him to go into the jungle and get something that can be touched and held, something substantial. Linda, on her way up the stairs, tells Willy that this is the only way to do it, and although she's talking about Biff leaving, Willy agrees with her, but he's thinking about his plan for giving Biff something to make him magnificent.

Topic Tracking: Failure 10

Willy talks to Ben about how happy he is that Biff loves him. He believes Biff will worship him for what he's going to do for him. Ben keeps prompting Willy to act, while Linda calls to him from their bedroom. In the middle of Willy's excited babbling, Ben looks at his watch and urges Willy to hurry so they don't miss the boat and then disappears. Willy is talking football again as he looks toward the house, but when he turns around, he realizes that Ben is gone. Willy starts to panic as Linda calls to him from upstairs. He shushes her and moves his arms as if he's fighting off faces and voices that are swarming him. Faint, high music crescendos into a great intensity that stops him. Suddenly he rushes out of the house and around the corner. Linda calls out to him and hears no answer. Biff, still in his clothes, gets up off of his bed and Hap sits up. They're listening. Linda calls out again, very afraid. They hear the sound of a car starting and moving away at full speed. Biff runs to the top of the stairs and calls to Willy. The music crashes loudly and then trickles down to the sound of a single cello string. Biff returns to his room where he and Hap put on their jackets. Linda walks slowly out of her room. The music is a march now and the lighting suggests day. Charley and Bernard wait at the kitchen door, while Linda walks through the draped doorway to the living room in her funeral clothes. She takes Charley's arm and they all walk through the wall-line of the kitchen toward the audience. At the edge, Linda lays the flowers down, kneeling beside the grave.



# Requiem

Charley and Biff urge Linda to leave the graveside because it's almost night, but she won't go. She wonders aloud why no one came to the funeral, and she asks if maybe it's because people blame him for how he died. Charley assures her that no one would blame him for it because the world is rough. Linda can't understand why Willy killed himself when they were so close to having everything paid off and all they would have needed was a small salary to keep them going. Charley said that no man only needs a small salary. Biff, remembering better times, tells Charley that, "there's more of [Willy] in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made." Requiem, pg. 110 Biff believes that Willy had the wrong dreams, and Happy gets mad at him for saying that, for implying that Willy's life was wasted. Charley tells Biff that they can't blame Willy for what happened or for having the wrong dreams. He was a salesman, and a salesman has to dream because the life they lead is so precarious -- their fate hinges on contacts and popularity, and when that goes, their life is over. So Willy had to dream because that's what salesmen do. Biff says again that Willy never knew who he was, and Hap is infuriated. Biff asks Hap to come with him out West, but Hap insists that he'll stay in the city and win the fight that Willy started, but lost. He'll stay there and become the best just for Willy. Biff, shaking his head, just lets it go and tries to get Linda to leave. She wants to have a minute alone to say goodbye before she goes, so the men all step away.

Topic Tracking: Failure 11

The flute begins to play as she talks to Willy. Linda tells him that she can't cry because she feels like he's just gone on another trip and she expects him to come back at any second. She can't understand why he did this now, when they were so close to being free from debt, free from worry. She tells him that she made the last payment on the house today, but now there's no one but her to live in it. She begins to sob and Biff helps her up. Biff and Linda, followed by Bernard and Charley, then Hap behind them, all leave the cemetery. As the stage darkens, only the flute music remains as the apartment buildings rise into sharp focus behind the house.