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Death of a Salesman Reader Response

In Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman", readers explore many different themes and ideas as we take a look at the struggles within the Loman family, especially those of our protagonist, Willy Loman. Being successful is an idea that stood out to me the most when reading this the play. Willy and his son Biff have two very different ideas on what being a successful person is. Throughout the story, Willy equates success to not just being liked, but being well liked. "Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want" (Miller 21). Biff on the other hand, thinks being successful is doing what you actually love and not what makes you the most money. "To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for a two week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors with your shirt off" (Miller 12). Here Biff is exclaiming how stressful it is for people that have to work desk jobs and etc. when all he wants to do is be outside in the sun taking care of his farm. I feel as though Biff has the most accurate description of what success is. Being liked can get you to a lot of places and at the same time it can get you nowhere. Biff of all people knows this and that's why he doesn't care about being liked. Doing what you love and realizing your self worth is what makes you a successful person.

Another theme that was probably the most discussed, was the American Dream. While Willy's American Dream consists of looking good and being liked, it strays away from the actual understanding of the American Dream which states that through hard work and determination, even the lowest of the low can be successful people. Willy's brother Ben also led him astray with his personification of the American Dream. "I discovered after a few days that I was heading due south, so instead of Alaska, I ended up in Africa... Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich." (Miller 33). With Willy having all these wild perceptions on what the dream actually was, it drove a wedge between the kind of person he wanted to be and who he actually turned out to be leading to his own demise.

I used to think similar to Willy Loman. I thought that when people liked you, opportunities would be more available and life would overall be better. After reading the play, hearing Willy's delusions and connecting with Biff, I realized that you don't need everyone's approval. From my own personal experience, I can say that it's hard to live up to someone's expectations. My mother wants me to go to medical school and be some type of doctor that makes six-figures. She never took the time to ask me what I wanted to do or what type of career I was interested in. This is why I connect so deeply with Biff because I know how hard it is to have this pressure from your parents. If my dreams don't fit her expectations, I can't just give up what I wanna do like Biff almost did. We wanna make our parents proud, but ultimately we have to do what it is that makes us happy. The play helped me realize this and I'm glad we were assigned this to read. Who knows maybe I'll end up working on a farm somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

Something that sat in the back of mind the whole time I was reading was what was actually wrong with Willy Loman? I don't think we discussed this in class and I'm very intrigued. He was suicidal, he had hallucinations, and his memory became more and more distorted as the play progressed. Well I typed all the symptoms that Willy had into Web M.D. and the result I got was Alzheimer's Disease. At the end of the day I really like Willy' character. He loved his family and he just wanted to do what was best for them. I also wish we could've dived a little deeper into Linda's character. I wonder how she dealt with Willy's behavior for so long.