

Arthur miller's play,  
death of a salesman:  
how willy loman was  
killed by change



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## **How Change Kills Willy in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman**

Within the 1949 play, *Death of a Salesman*, written by the infamous author, Arthur Miller, there is a clear element of tragedy. The idea of death is even seen in the title, so it is no surprise that within the play named *Death of a Salesman*, there would be a death of a salesman. The main character, Willy Loman is a simple man who lives in New York with his wife, and his two adult children. Willy's life has been idle for a prolonged amount of time, and there is a clear lack of change within the play. Throughout the complex and entertaining play, Willy and his family treat change as a toxic entity, with the concept of change going as far as killing Willy. It is clear from the beginning of the play that change is not a large aspect of the Loman household, where one can see two adults are living with their parents, and even sleeping in the same room with each other.

Although one could compare some traits of Biff and Happy's to be customary to the time, the fact that the two grown men live with their parents is not customary and a very significant fact to the play. Biff, Willy Loman's son, could well be the main character in this play, considering all the information he gives the reader and his immense significance within the plot and storyline. Biff's lack of change is seen throughout the play and is the force that eventually kills Willy. Biff's lack of change stems from his failure in math class, where his father, Willy, could not change his grade. This can be seen in act 2 where a conversation between Willy and Biff reads:

BIFF: I'm not going there.

WILLY: Heh? If I can't get him to change that mark you'll make it up in summer school. You've got all summer to —

BIFF (his weeping breaking from him): Dad...

WILLY (infected by it): Oh, my boy...

BIFF: Dad...

Within this very emotional and climactic portion of the play, Biff tells his father that he has failed math class, and asks him to talk to his teacher to change his grade. Willy, unable to change anything about himself and the world around him, fails to change Biff's grade, and in doing so, ruins Biff's life. With tears everywhere, and an extremely crucial moment in the play, there is an enormous significance, not only to the climax of the play and the storyline, but also to the theme of change. With this scene being an example of Willy's lacking ability to change, it is clear that anything related to Willy is doomed by his unchanging ways.

Willy and his family live, as stated before, in New York. What is significant about this, when analyzing the play though, is the type of living area the Lomans occupy. Being within New York, the Loman house is surrounded by buildings and high-rises, as stated many times in the play and within other sources like that of Terry W. Thompson when he states “ once situated on the green fringes of suburbia and blessed with shade trees, a backyard garden, and plenty of open space for two rambunctious sons—has become palisaded by ruthless urban sprawl, so much so that the aging couple now live in the sterilizing shadows of high-rise apartment buildings, trapped,

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cornered, and enveloped.”(Thompson 3). By reading the play and the passage, it is clear that Willy, Linda, and the children do not live in a typical apartment or high-rise, but rather they live inside a house. Here, Thompson is explaining the Loman household was one a part of an equally suburban area, with the city, and even the world around it changing. Explaining that a green garden was present, where two young boys could play is clearly a reference to Happy and Biff, who are now adults in their thirties. It is evident that Willy, and even his house and family are incapable of change, as the world around the family’s physical space can evolve, with the Loman family remaining stagnant. Thompson goes on to explain that there is a shadow on top of Willy, and that his lack of change makes him trapped, cornered, and enveloped, just like the symbol that represents him; his home.

Next, I will quote from an outside source

After that, I’m going to quote the play with the cheese in the beginning

Then I’m going to quote Izzy on her lens paper

Finally, I’m going to conclude by stating that Willy killed himself as a result of his lack of change that ruined his life.

## **Quotes:**

### **From play:**

LINDA (trying to bring him out of it): Willy, dear, I got a new kind of American-type cheese today. It’s whipped.

WILLY: Why do you get American when I like Swiss?

LINDA: I just thought you'd like a change...

WILLY: I don't want a change! I want Swiss cheese. Why am I always being contradicted?

LINDA (with a covering laugh): I thought it would be a surprise.

WILLY: Why don't you open a window in here, for God's sake?

From Izzy;

Throughout the play we see several examples of flashbacks of Willy's past. Willy is living out his last days in these flashbacks and lies in order to create a better present for himself and his family in his mind. Willy's logic is strictly emotional rather than rational.

From source:

“ Loman articulates his need in appealing to his employer with an image of the past, a Golden Age: “ In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and a comradeship, and gratitude in it...””