

Biff Loman's role in Death of a Salesman

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



Biff Loman may not be the “ Salesman” in Arthur Miller’s masterpiece, *The Death of a Salesman*, but he is the main character of the play. The character known as Biff Loman is at the root of his immediate family’s internal dilemmas and inner conflicts. Biff’s essence is what motivates the men in his family to choose the path that they take in life. For this reason, even when Biff is not present in a particular scene, he is still omnipresent because of his invisible pull on the actions and feelings of his family members whom he had impacted throughout the years.

The play finds Biff Loman at age 34, while his younger brother Happy is 32. Growing up, Happy was influenced greatly by his older brother. This is common in most young boys, especially when they are this close in age. Happy was eyewitness to the arrogant and womanizing behaviors of his elder brother, Biff during their youth. Happy saw the way Biff behaved during high school and witnessed the positive feedback that he received from both his peers and his father as a result of his behavior, which was less than exemplary.

Happy saw Biff skate through his teenage years living in this manner. Biff got the attention from their father that Happy had yearned for. The stage was set for Happy to attempt to emulate Biff’s womanizing, unscrupulous actions during his own life. Happy became a womanizer on a level which even exceeded Biff’s promiscuous behavior during his youth. Happy often found himself sleeping with his boss’s wives, girlfriends and fiancés. He couldn’t even understand why he did it.

It was simply an instinct which was engrained in him after spending his impressionable years so close to Biff, even sharing a bedroom with him during this time. Willy Loman, himself, was obsessed with his eldest son. During Biff's prime of life, Willy found happiness by living vicariously through his son. Poor Happy was hardly noticed by his father who was so wrapped up in Biff. Willy believed that he would find all his dreams that were never realized finally seen through by Biff. He thought Biff would succeed in college and find the successful career that Willy himself was never fortunate enough to have.

All of Willy's hopes and dreams were wrapped up in this one boy and when Biff failed to live up to them, Willy felt that failure just as deeply as he felt the let-down of his own unfulfilled life. To make matters worse, even though Willy did not admit it, he knew that he, himself was to blame for Biff's downfall. Willy never pushed Biff to do the right thing in life. He chuckled when Biff stole from his football coach and was proud of his son when Biff made his friends clean the family's basement. Biff said to his father, " I think I'll have them sweep out the furnace room" to which Willy replied, " Good work, Biff. (Miller 1192) Willy's wife, Linda, had warned him about Biff being rough with the girls and this, too, was shrugged off . Linda said, " He's too rough with the girls, Willy. All the mothers are afraid of him. " Willy replied, " Shut up.....There's nothing the matter with him! He's got spirit, personality.... " (Miller 1195) Willy felt that Biff already possessed all the qualities needed in order to be successful in life, so there was no need to offer guidance to his son or punish his missteps along the way.

This was a parenting strategy that Willy would later live to regret. The paramount of Willy's guilt was the fact that Biff caught him in a hotel room with a woman with whom he was having an affair. Willy made up ridiculous excuses to cover the fact that this woman was in his hotel room naked. He tells his son, " Biff, she's a buyer. They're painting her room.... She lives down the hall - they're painting. " (Miller 1240) Biff saw through to the truth of the matter, though. He yells at his father, saying " Don't touch me, you - liar! (Miller 1241) Biff was so crushed by the realization that his father was not the family man whom he had idolized that he did not even bother to make up the math course that he had to complete that Summer in order to graduate. This one small action threw away his chances at attending college. The immense guilt that Willy felt as a result of his son discovering his infidelity is at the core of play's plot. This guilt and attempted absolution is what ultimately leads to the death of Willy Loman. Willy is attempting suicide in order to finally make things right with Biff.

He wants his first born son to collect twenty thousand dollars from a life insurance policy. Willy, who has his own identity so wrapped up in Biff, feels that Biff will become successful with this money and therefore Willy's legacy will be one of achievement and success in life. Willy is so convinced of this idea being a reality, that he is willing to throw his earthly life away for a chance at an afterlife view of his own dreams being carried through his son, Biff. This makes Biff the lead character in the play. Bibliography; Only the actual play is referenced in this report.