

# Death of a salesmansample argumentative



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Willy Loman's character can be perceived as a 'worthless commodity in a capitalist society' or as 'an ordinary man'.

Making close reference to the play, evaluate these two interpretations and assess what you think Miller was trying to show through his character. The 1949 Arthur Miller play, 'Death of a Salesman' gave birth to Willy Loman, a man obsessed with living life to achieve the American Dream unfortunately Willy did not achieve the Dream however he could never accept that. As his life went on Willy developed mental health issues which continued to deteriorate, he kept having flashbacks of times when his life was working and he was a healthy and happy man. Willy and his wife Linda had two sons; Biff and Happy, they couldn't be more different, Happy followed his fathers failed ambitions and succeeded however Biff rebelled against his father choosing to go his own way. The playwright Arthur Miller was born in 1915 and grew up during the American Depression which lead to many once successful businesses becoming bankrupt and America saw an economic crisis. Death of a Salesman, Miller's most famous work, has many similarities to his own life and it can be seen that Arthur Miller used his life experiences as a building block for the play.

The Miller family lead quite a poor life during Arthur's childhood, his father provided the whole income through his women's clothes shop which was one of the businesses that became bankrupt due to the Wall Street Crash. In 1938 Miller was offered his dream job, a scriptwriter for 21st Century Fox, however Miller turned down the offer. This is very similar to the scene where Charley offers Willy a job however Willy turns it down. For a short time in his life Miller worked as a Salesman which of course is the main stem of the

play. On August 5, 1940 he married Mary Slattery, the daughter of a Salesman, they then had two children, Jane and Robert. Robert grew up to become a director, producer and writer, it's unknown what profession Jane was in.

This again links back to the play as only one of Willy's son's was in the spotlight and allowed to follow his dreams. During his marriage to Mary, Miller had an affair with Marilyn Monroe. This is yet another strong reference to the play as Willy had an affair with the woman. Arthur Miller has won many awards for his works, such as the Pulitzer Prize and the Critics Award both for Death of a Salesman.

He has been a prominent and iconic figure in American Literature and cinema for over 60 years. It is clear to see that many of Millers ideas for Death of a Salesman have come from his own life experiences, such as his affair with Marilyn Monroe, he married the daughter of a Salesman and he had two children Miller uses the American Dream often in Death of a Salesman this is especially clear with Willy who is adamant that all should believe in the American Dream and tries to push his own beliefs onto his children. The American Dream is, the belief that anyone living in America can achieve and fulfill their dreams through hard work and dedication. Death of a Salesman is set in late 1940's America.

At that time, America was dominated by World War II. The war pulled America out of the Great Depression finding thousands of jobs for the millions of unemployed people in America. Women gained 'some'

independence, as the men were at war, Women were left with the men's jobs. After World War II, American ideals changed.

The family farm was no longer an ideal. Blacks no longer accepted a lesser status (shortly after the war, black people of America were given the right to vote) and more men had a full college education. By 1949, 8, 120, 000 million Americans were left completely unemployed. America was in National Debt by approximately \$43 billion. In the 1940s America was very centered around the idea of wealth and status and that the American Dream was the only way to achieve such wealth and status.

Throughout the play, Willy can be seen in two ways, one of which is that he is a 'worthless commodity in a capitalist society' we notice this when Willy sees that he is worth more dead than he would be worth alive. The other way we see Willy is that he is just an 'ordinary man', Willy is trying to achieve something just like most people, and also he isn't perfect, like everybody else. In this essay I will be evaluating these two interpretations of Willy Loman and also assessing which interpretation I think Miller was trying to show through the character. One way that Willy is portrayed as an ordinary man is the fact that he has a family who loves and cares for him, "What, darling?" and "Just try to relax, dear." This shows that Linda will always be there for Willy no matter what happens, throughout the play some terrible things happen to Willy such as; losing his job, crashing his car, mental illness problems however Linda has stuck by him and guided him through it.

Willy is often seen as the core provider for the Loman family, his job as a salesman produces the whole family income, Linda is the hard working

housewife organizing the children and Biff and Happy are the needy children struggling to provide for themselves. The Loman household can be seen as a stereotypical family, using stereotypical family values and roles. Another way we can see Willy as an ordinary man is that he needs money to pay for household bills and petrol for his car, “ A hundred and eight, sixty-eight. Because were a little short again. This shows that Willy is in the position of most people in the world, needing to do extra jobs to gain the amount of money required. Yet another way Willy can be seen as an ordinary man is that he is very hard- working, in his job as a salesman, “ I’m tired to the death.

” From this quote it’s seen that Willy has been working practically non-stop however this also shows how Willy’s mental health issues arose, through lack of sleep. However in Millers’ Death of a Salesman play we can see that Willy is also portrayed as a ‘ worthless commodity in a capitalist society’. Willy’s affair with ‘ The Woman’ is a very significant argument for him being a worthless commodity in a capitalist society. It is obvious that ‘ The Woman’ is a cold and unemotional person, it’s clear that she is only in the relationship for herself and that she is stringing Willy along. Willy buys ‘ The Woman’ stockings which she doesn’t even need when Linda has to sew her own stockings together because they cannot afford to buy any. “ Just mending my stockings.

They’re so expensive. ” Throughout this scene, ‘ The Woman’s’ laughter can be heard faintly. This shows that ‘ The Woman’ is completely heartless and doesn’t care about anyone but herself. ‘ The Woman’ also appears selfish, refusing to leave the Boston hotel and then requesting more stockings,

despite the fact she has lots already. The fact that Willy continually buys 'The Woman' everything she wants, and is scared to say no to her shows his ignorance to the obvious, and shows he is a feeble and heartless man.

Another way that we can see Willy as a worthless commodity is when we compare him to his older brother Ben or to his next door neighbor Charley. In comparison to these two characters Willy has achieved practically nothing. In Willy's eyes Ben is the epitome of success, he is Willy's idol and is everything he is not, rich, adventurous, self-confident. " When I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out.

And by God I was rich. " This quote however shows that Ben hasn't actually worked to become rich and successful. The word jungle is quite significant in the quote, I think he is referring to the fact the world is like a jungle and you must be prepared to fight to overcome the beasts that are out there. Ben has also proved the American Dream wrong; he hasn't worked hard yet has achieved a lot more than Willy who actually works himself too hard sometimes. Charley, in some ways can be seen as a living example of the wealth and success Ben had, this is seen when Willy accidentally calls Charley, Ben.

Charley respects Willy and likes him, he therefore wants to help by offering him a job, " You want a job? " However this makes Willy annoyed and he throws it back in Charley's face. I think he does this because he can't face the reality that he will never be as popular and wealthy as Charley. Also, Willy's mental health issues contribute to his portrayal as a worthless commodity, throughout Death of a Salesman Willy continues to have

flashbacks, and the most significant of these was when he envisaged his dead brother Ben, “ This is your Uncle Ben, a great man! Tell my boys, Ben! ” This shows that Willy has serious mental health issues but also shows that Willy misses his brother and that Willy idolized Ben. The way in which Willy keeps thinking about the past shows that he doesn’t want to grow up and mature. At the end of the play one of the reasons that Willy kills himself is to be with his brother. This is because one of Willy’s biggest regrets in his life was not going to Alaska with Ben to make his fortune, therefore he thinks killing himself will give him some better opportunity.

Lastly, my most important point of Willy being portrayed as ‘ a worthless commodity in a capitalist society is him being worth a lot more dead than alive (Act 2, Pages 96-97). This is my biggest argument for the above, during this section of the play Willy considers committing suicide so his sons can have twenty thousand dollars. This shows that America was centered entirely around capitalism, giving every man their price. If this were, the capitalist societies such as America have made human beings worthless commodities. The fact that Willy would actually kill himself to provide wealth makes him a worthless commodity.

Arthur Miller’s, Death of a Salesman portrays the character of Willy Loman as both an ‘ ordinary man’ and a ‘ worthless commodity’. During different scenes in the play we see a soft, kind family man in Willy, trying to everything to support his family, we see him struggling to succeed yet he keeps trying. Isn’t this how life occurs? Man has to find his feet, and that’s what Willy was just trying to do. Yet at other parts of the play, he is seen as a ‘ worthless commodity’, when compared to most men he can easily be seen

as an underachieving failure especially to the characters that surround him, Ben and Charley, have succeeded in life yet never appeared to work excessively. The fact that he centers his whole life around the American Dream, and follows it word for word despite the fact its been proved to be completely incorrect, Ben didn't work hard at all, yet achieved more riches than anyone, this shows how dim witted Willy is, and the audience find some sympathy with that.

His affair with 'The Woman' was a key depiction of a worthless commodity, it shows he has no true love for Linda, and really illustrates his ignorance. Although my argument for Willy Loman being a 'worthless commodity' may look stronger, I don't think Miller was trying to present him as this or 'an ordinary man'. I think he was trying to portray him as someone who is neither, someone who is in the middle of both of these interpretations. Although he may kill himself just to provide money, he does it because he sees it to be an aid for his family. What is 'an ordinary man'? Doesn't everyone have their own opinion of what is ordinary, if so how can we class anyone as ordinary?