

Stolen pen as a symbol in death of a salesman

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



In Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman", one major symbol that strongly contributes to the work as a whole would be the pen that Biff had stolen from Bill Oliver's office, due to its significant turning point in the story and the representation of materialism, as well as the idea of the "American Dream" in the modern world. In the play it is very evident that the main character Willy is a struggling salesman refusing to retire, and his son Biff refuses to conform to his father's demands in pursuing an office job. As it turns out, Biff is finally able to come to the conclusion that Willy's hope of reaching the "American dream" is what caused him to be stuck in his currently unhappy position in life, and this very moment of truth is all unfolded only after Biff took it upon himself to steal the pen that sat atop the desk of his former employer.

Promptly after snatching the pen and frantically escaping out of Bill Oliver's office, Miller depicts a scene of realization as Biff looks up into the sky while holding the pen in his hands, and it all becomes clear to him. This scene in particular becomes a major turning point, and a moment in which he reflects on his father's hopes and dreams for him, versus his own aspirations in life. Biff believes he does not belong in the business world, sitting behind a desk working in a corporate office, but instead insists that he belongs in the outdoors among nature. Contrary to Willy's belief that being "well-liked" is what leads to success, Biff believes otherwise after being a witness his whole life to Willy's tragic story, and recognizing how that belief is what led his father to his current misery. As Biff finally comes to the conclusion that he must confront Willy he states, "I looked at the pen and I thought, what the hell am I grabbing this for? Why am I trying to become what I don't want to

be...when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am.” For fear of falling down the same dark path as his father, Biff begins to acknowledge the fact that although his dreams do not match his father’s wishes, he must overcome his internal guilt and come to accept himself as who he truly is.

As well as setting the scene for a turning point in the story, Miller also presents the idea that Biff not only stole the pen due to a sudden impulse, but because he realizes that it is something he will never be able to possess himself. The pen itself is presented as a metaphor for the “ American dream”- a hopeless dream that was tirelessly chased by Willy his entire life, and ultimately led to pure emptiness and frustration. Although, the “ American dream” was at one point attained by Biff’s father, it was never fully fulfilled, meaning that he was not satisfied with what they had, just as well as most people in the modern world. An example of this overwhelming sense of materialism is when Willy had once valued being able to purchase commercialized products, such as the name brand refrigerator, rather than teaching his sons the basic morality of stealing. Years later his dissatisfaction is what has doomed Willy to continue his travels for little pay, leading him to attempt to request more money from his employer, only to be fired shortly in the end.

In conclusion, the pen that was stolen by Biff represents a moment of clarity for the character as well as symbolizing the “ American Dream” and the greedy materialistic views that come with it. The play makes it very evident that Willy continuously struggles in the life-draining society that is the

modern world, leading Biff to reflect on his father's misery as something he does not wish to have himself.