

Death of a salesman: american society and values

Literature



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Ben, Willy's brother who is a success story in the diamond mining industry, also comes in the story along with Charles, a family friend, and Bernard, a relative. In the story, we see Willy as a desperate man in terms of financial and family relationship success. He is constantly in an argument with Biff and is always troubled by his inability to earn more money as compared to his brother Ben. Biff and Happy, in their thirties, are still unable to achieve financial success and are characterized by adolescent behavior. This is in contrast with their cousin, Bernard, who became a well-respected lawyer. Linda is depicted as a sympathetic wife who suppresses her disappointment with their family's financial and relationship status. The story culminated in Willy's suicide.

The story illustrates how deep-seated is the dream of financial success in American society. The pervading aspiration is to achieve financial success. Willy dreams of making more money like his brother. He still retains his belief that his sons are capable of such success too. However, the story also illustrates how failure to achieve such success can affect the psyche of a person. This is shown by Willy's suicide. His act is the mark of a failed man, but, more importantly, it shows the disparity between his aspirations and his actual achievements.

From the story, one can see the implications of the concept of the American dream. One should never get satisfied with what he has until he is the talk of the town or a person who gives away diamond items (Uncle Ben to Biff). One can also see the pressure to succeed that society exerts on a person. This is exemplified by Willy's constant urging of Biff to find a job because he still believes in Biff's potential. Drawing from experience, this pressure to succeed academically and financially is really intense.

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Another aspect of American society that is highlighted in the story is that of the status of women in society. In this regard, we see Linda as a typical example of how women are placed in the societal structure. They are considered merely as sympathizers and caregivers, helpless and incapable of achieving greater things. As we look into the roles of women in the contemporary scene, we may find women of great status yet they are quite a few. The majority of them are still relegated to household duties. That is women are still disenfranchised. Another depiction of the woman is the "toys for the big boys" depiction. This is displayed in Happy's regard towards women. He treats as if, in his own words, they are just for "knocking down" (having sex with). Willy's affair with the Boston woman also typifies the regards of men to women- that they are there to satisfy, to be used. At the end of the day, we see the "Death of a Salesman" as a literary tool to depict the pervading notion of the American dream and the gender relations in American society. Miller decisively captures the struggle to reach that dream and the consequences of failure it brings to a person. It effectively captures the effects that a society can have on an individual.