

What do the flashbacks sequences essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The word expressionist has been applied to Arthur Miller as a playwright.

This is relatively accurate as 'Death of a Salesman' features some of the early expressionist characteristics such as Miller dramatizing the sufferings of his characters. Willy is the character that suffers most and it is dramatized at different points in his life. For example when Willy is first made to work on commission and then is not even allowed to work on commission. Miller also likens his characters to mythic figures in history. An example of this is during the first flashback Willy compares Biff and Happy to the mythical Greek figures Adonis and Hercules.

He does this because Willy believes the boys are the pinnacle of 'personal attractiveness', to him they are the physical representation of the American Dream. Miller uses a range of theatrical devices in Death of a Salesman.

These devices are used to define the environment the characters live in and to convey the meaning of the play. The set of the play is designed to show little sense of place or time. This is because the play is about Willy's search for self-actualisation and a happy family life rather than the environment in which his search takes place.

Willy's failure is reflected in the humdrum environment in which he lives. The use of music in the play is very important. The flute is associated with nostalgia and is used during the flashbacks when Willy remembers his father who earned a living by making and selling flutes. Willy is also reminded of a happier life when he was younger. The play features references to the American Dream. Willy believes wholeheartedly in what he understands the American Dream to be—that a "well liked" and "personally attractive" man

in business will achieve success and the material comforts offered by modern American life whereas the American Dream identifies hard work without complaint as the key to success.

Willy's interpretation of "likeability" is superficial. He dislikes Bernard because he considers Bernard to be 'not liked'. Willy's faith in his version of the American Dream leads to his mental health problems when he is unable to accept the difference between the "Dream" and his own life. This is shown with the character 'Ben'. Willy seeks his advice even though he is dead and in Willy's mind.

Ben only appears in the flashbacks. Willy regards Ben as a symbol of the success that he so desperately craves for himself and his sons. Ben is the most important character in relation to the flashbacks and eventually encourages Willy to commit suicide. When Ben left for Alaska his original reason for going was to find his and Willy's father. This is heavily ironic as one of the main themes of the play is betrayal. Their father abandoned Ben and Willy when they were much younger so this contributes to Willy's bad parenting and also to Willy's betrayal of Linda because Willy never learnt the vital skills of parenting and morals from his father.

Ben's wealth was apparently gained by investing in diamond mines in the African Jungle. The symbols of the African jungle and Alaska represent Willy's failure and his father's and brother's success. When compared to Willy's mundane Brooklyn neighborhood, this portrays how Willy's obsession with the commercial world of the city has trapped him in an unpleasant reality.

The American West symbolizes Biff's potential. Biff realizes that he has been content only when working on farms, out in the open.

This shows Biff has a drive to create something whereas Willy lacks this drive and is content on creating nothing. Diamonds are important symbols in the play. To Willy they represent tangible wealth. The quote " a diamond is hard and rough to the touch " is explained at the end of the play, when Ben encourages Willy to enter the " jungle" finally and retrieve this elusive diamond—that is, to kill himself for insurance money in order to make his life meaningful. Other symbols used in the play are the rubber hose, seeds and the stockings given to the women Willy has an affair with. The rubber hose symbolizes Willy's desperate attempts at suicide.

He tries to kill himself by inhaling gas. This is ironic as gas is a necessity that Willy strives to provide his family with. Literal death by inhaling gas parallels the metaphorical death Willy feels to afford such a basic necessity. Willy's strange feelings towards the condition of Linda's stockings is due to Willy giving new stockings to The Women in the Boston hotel room and his wife having to mend old stockings. This is a symbol of Willy's false values. New stockings are important for both Willy's pride in being financial successful and that he can provide for his Wife and his family.

Providing new stockings for Linda also helps to ease Willy's guilt and helps him suppress the memory of his betrayal of Linda and Biff. When Willy plants the seeds to prove to himself and his family the worth of his labor. He realizes that he has nothing to leave to children when he is dead and this saddens him because he knows he will not be able to help his children any

more than his own abandoning father helped him. His attempt to grow vegetables signifies his shame about providing barely enough food for his family.

The seeds also symbolize Willy's failure as a parent. Although Willy believes the American dream will make Biff successful, Willy's parenting has changed Biff from a successful American football player to a "lazy bum. During the first flashback Willy remembers a time when the boys were young. At the time when the boys were washing the car it is evident Willy and his sons' had a great relationship. Both boys looked up to their father.

An example of this is "Terrific job, boys, Good work." Even in the first flashback it is shown Willy is in denial. This is shown when Biff tells his father he stole the American football from the locker room. This is stealing but Willy congratulates Biff for using his "initiative" so he can practise. As the play progresses we see Biff's relationship with his father shatter.

This is shown in the second flashback when the character of the 'Woman' is introduced I think Willy has an affair with the 'Woman' for a few reasons. The 'Woman' makes him feel wanted. He believes he is the successful salesman he longs to be when he is with her. Willy's ego is boosted when he is with the 'Women' and he can treat however he wants because he knows he does not love her and it is purely a business arrangement.

Willy truly loves his wife, Linda, but his ambition for success overcomes his loyalty to her and his family. When Biff catches Willy cheating on Linda he forgets his dreams of going to college. This incident is the moment when the relationship between father and son is destroyed. Biff never recovers from

this incident and from then on believes his father to be a lying fake. Willy still does not tell the truth even though it is obvious that his deception has been discovered.

He still attempts to worm his way out of accepting blame. Biff realises his fathers philosophy of how to succeed in the American Dream is fake and refuses to believe it anymore. This incident builds tension between the characters until Willy realises that the last thing he can do for his family is commit suicide, in order to pay off his debts. In conclusion Willy allows himself to be lured by consumerism and his false ideas of success. He wants to be loved by all and to leave his mark on the world.

The flashbacks show us the good lifestyle he apparently enjoyed when he was younger and he allows these memories to cloud his self evaluation. The audience can see Willy is a failure but he only realises this at the end of the play. He believes his suicide is an act of valour but it devastates the family, in particular Linda. The relationship with his sons deteriorates although Happy still aims to be like his father and is clouded by the same idea of success his father had. Willy looks up to Ben and idolises him. In his daydreams Ben convinces him suicide is the only act of honour he can do to support his family.

These reasons and the flashbacks make us more sympathetic to Willy but the audience can also see his ideas are wrong and he had the potential to be successful if he had made the right choices in life.