

3.2 STUDENT EXEMPLAR

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

1. Interpretation of the Text

Brief Plot Overview

Willy Loman, a salesman, is going senile. When the present disappoints him, he hallucinates and goes back into the past, until he runs out of past to go back to, and then he finally kills himself.

He has a wife, Linda, who he cheated on. Biff, his kleptomaniac son who spent time in jail, saw this affair happen. Willy had had such high hopes for Biff when he proved to be good at football. His other son, Happy, ironically isn't really happy but enjoys baiting women with tales of riches.

Willy Loman wanted to die "the death of a salesman," surrounded by hundreds of friends and acquaintances, but he ended up dying virtually alone.

Willy valued having many friends and being popular and successful more than skills or a real personality. He taught this to his sons, and his sons are now wrecks.

The scene/ monologue I am doing

I am performing two scenes from the play. The first being the bedroom scene in which Biff is talking to Happy about his dreams and future. The second scene is towards the end of the play where Biff is finally confronting his father about his life.

The drama takes place in the house. In the first scene Happy and I are contemplating our lives and talking about our father's habit of talking to himself. My father has expressed his dislike about my current line of work. Earlier that morning my father and I had an argument about my future.

In the kitchen scene Happy and I have just returned home after abandoning my incoherent father at a restaurant after a heated argument. The argument originated from my realisation in which I admitted to myself that I had no place or interest in the business world. I am tired of the pointless lies and arrogance that have been holding our family together for so many years and I am tired of lying to myself. I am now eager to confront my father for the last time and tell him I am leaving for good. Willy needs to understand that.

2. Character Profile

Biff Loman

Facts of the Play

Biff Loman is 34. He has worked on farms in Texas, Arizona, Dakota and Nebraska in the past few years. He finds it hard to settle down. Before he moved out to the West he lived with his mother and father in a small house in New York. He is also a kleptomaniac.

Relationships

Biff and his father, Willy, have a cold relationship due to their mutual dislike for each other. After Biff walked in on Willy with another woman 17 years ago his judgement of his father changed completely. He regards Willy as a fake. Willy expects Biff to be a successful businessman and Biff wants to break free from the pressures of that world. They constantly disagree and argue. They share a common dislike but underneath we wish for each other's acceptance.

Biff and his mother, Linda have a fairly distant relationship. Biff's absence in the household frustrates and saddens her. His dislike for Willy saddens her as she just wants the family to get along like they used to. When Biff expresses his dislike for Willy, Linda gets angry and defends him.

Biff's objective(s)

Overall, Biff wants to live the life he wants to, to follow his dreams and remove his father's blind faith in Biff.

The objective in this scene is to confront him for the last time and set things straight.

The main obstacle for Biff is his father, Willy. Willy has always talked highly of Biff. He has always told Biff he is going to be amazing in life, usually either a famous football player or a rich businessman. After seeing his father as a fake, Biff became lost in a way, not sure what to do with his life. This was a pivotal point in which the character lost his confidence and his way in life. This disgusted and greatly disappointed Willy. Up until the final confrontation in the play Biff's main obstacle is the constant expectation and disappointment Willy has towards him. Because of this pressure Biff's mind has become cloudy, even lying to himself about his future. This is another obstacle for Biff.

3. How I have integrated the Techniques of Drama

The Laban movement that is best associated with Biff is a 'Wringer.' Biff is constantly suppressing emotion, often poorly. He is always trying to express himself calmly, always with some deep emotion underneath. This deeper emotion always manages to break through.

(see annotated script for specific examples)

Biff is not confident so I stutter often and stand slightly hunched due to nervousness and insecurity. This changes at the end of the play where I speak clearly and confidently and straighten my posture. When I portray Biff as a teenager I stand firmly, upright and powerful as Biff was an overconfident and arrogant teenager. I use pause a lot in Biff's dialogue as it helps me to portray the emotion. When I am angry, pause adds to my inner tension. When I am angry and frustrated I also breathe between words.

(see annotated script for specific examples)