

The Plight of an Ignorant Man – Outline

- I. The world actually cares about his welfare
 - A. Belief in his job security
 - 1. Didn't even know he was being fired
 - 2. Told the entire story of his relationship with his father
 - 3. Felt that they should give him a job because he helped name him Howard
 - 4. Doesn't realize that a business exists to make money, and that he was worthless
 - B. He admired the old salesman, the old way of work
 - C. Didn't realize the new generation of businessmen and salesmen
 - D. Linda's charm and caring attitude continues to fuel this belief
 - 1. Tried to tell the kids to be nice to their father, and that he needs something to look forward to
 - 2. Never reveals to him that he's simply a failure
 - E. As others were adjusted to a changing society, he did not, and paid the price
 - F. Eventually gets caught cheating on Linda, and commits suicide
- II. Belief that his charm and connections would bring him greatness
 - A. Thought he was failing because "he wasn't liked."
 - B. Always felt that he would do better next week, partly due to Linda
 - 1. He would go somewhere where he was liked and popular
 - 2. He would prosper as a salesman as long as people knew and liked him
 - C. Didn't want to believe that his health was failing
- III. Belief in his own sons
 - A. A stem of his misconception of how the world works
 - 1. Sons used to really admire him, so they also had his conception of the world
 - 2. His ideas and beliefs did not prepare Biff and Happy for the real world
 - 3. Played a part in Biff/Happy's objectifying of women
 - B. Thought Biff would achieve greatness because he was good at football
 - 1. Congratulated Biff for "taking the initiative" when he stole a football
 - 2. Asked Bernard to give Biff answers so that he could get through school
 - 3. Bernard became a successful lawyer, Biff became a failure
 - C. When Biff was still "finding his way" in his mid 30's, Willy was shocked
 - D. Played a role in Happy/Biff's attitude of objectifying women
 - E. Never spoke out against Happy's womanizing attitude

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During childhood, one can view the world on a very simple level. Many young children feel that the world is a kind, cheerful place with no worries or problems. However, as they grow older, they learn that the world can be cruel and unforgiving. Yet, even at the age of 63, William Loman, in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman, did not realize that the world is cruel. His simplistic and unrealistic view of the world ruined not only his own life, but also the lives of his two sons.

Perhaps Willy's greatest misconception was that the world cared for his welfare. He admired an old salesman, Dave Singleman, who, at the age of 84, could call his clients and sell merchandise without ever leaving his room. However, Singleman's success at such an old age gave him a false sense of job security. In fact, he did not even realize that he was being fired when Howard told him he "...can't go to Boston for us."(p.83) Moreover, he felt that Howard should offer him a job in New York simply because he had devoted the last 36 years of his life into his business and had nowhere else to turn. Howard, a modern businessman seeking a profit, replied "...it's a business, kid, and everybody's gotta pull his own weight."(p.80) Part of his belief that the world cared could be attributed to Linda's kind and caring attitude. She never opposed his views, and constantly told him that he would do better in the future. Hence, Willy did not realize that the world did not care for him until it was too late.

Aside from the world caring for his welfare, Willy falsely believed that one could succeed just by being well liked. He truly felt that "the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you'll never want. You take me... I never have to wait in line... "Willy Loman is here!" That's all they have to know, and I go right through."(p.33) In reality, however, Willy was not well liked. He no longer was a successful salesman, but did not

want to admit it. His unwillingness to admit to failure was shown when he rejected Charlie's job offer even after he was fired. He did not realize that his failures as a salesman were not due to his declining popularity, but to his waning health and his old fashioned and unrealistic ideas.

Willy's views of the world hurt not only himself, but his sons as well. Willy did not try to be a bad father, but since he was unaware that his views were false, his sons inevitably learned from him. However, his ideals did not prepare them for reality. As a result, Biff and Happy lived in the same unreal world as Willy. In fact, when Biff stole a football from the locker room in high school, Willy told him that the coach would "probably congratulate you on your initiative."(p.30) Furthermore, when Biff was having trouble in math class, instead of asking Bernard to help him, he asked him to give Biff the answers. He never believed that Biff needed any real abilities, for he was well liked and had girls following him between classes. Unfortunately, Biff and Happy paid the price for their father's folly. Happy had some degree of success, owning his own apartment, a car, and most importantly, plenty of women. However, he still felt lonely and empty. Biff, who did not believe in his father's materialistic view of success, had spent the last 15 years working odd jobs around the country, and was still trying to find his way. Before he met Willy in Frank's Chop House, Biff had went to see Bill Oliver to try to get support for a business selling sporting goods. However, he never saw Oliver, but took his fountain pen. Willy, who felt that Biff would achieve great success in a very short period of time, was shocked and disappointed. He did not realize that Biff and Happy's failures were largely due to the impractical views that he had taught them

Willy's views of the world, from one being successful if he/she was well liked to his materialistic view of success, caused his decline and destroyed the once potential filled lives of Happy and Biff. In addition, his inability to confess that he had failed prevented him from

compensating for some of the harm that he had caused. His folly shows that one cannot live his/her life in a fantasy world, for life is a fight for survival where only the strong survive.

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