Act I (Loman Home, Present Day):

The salesman, [Willy Loman](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#willy-loman), enters his home. He appears very tired and confused. [Linda Loman](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#linda-loman), his wife, puts on a robe and slippers and goes downstairs. She has been asleep. Linda is mostly jovial, but represses objections to her husband. Her struggle is to support him while still trying to guide him. She worries that he smashed the car, but he says that nothing happened. He claims that he's tired to death and couldn't make it through the rest of his trip. He got only as far as Yonkers, and doesn't remember the details of the trip. He tells Linda that he kept swerving onto the shoulder of the road, but Linda thinks that it must be faulty steering in the car.

Linda says that there's no reason why he can't work in New York, but Willy says he's not needed there. Willy claims that if Frank Wagner were alive he would be in charge of New York by now, but that his son, Howard, doesn't appreciate him. Linda tells him that Happy took Biff on a double date, and that it was nice to see them shaving together. Linda reminds him not to lose his temper with Biff, but Willy claims that he simply had asked him if he was making any money. Willy says that there is an undercurrent of resentment in Biff, but Linda says that Biff admires his father. Willy calls Biff a lazy bum and says that he is lost. Willy longs for the days when their neighborhood was less developed and less crowded. He wakes up his sons Biff and Happy, both of whom are in the double bunk in the boys' bedroom.

At thirty-four, Biff is well-built but somewhat worn and not very self-assured. Happy, two years younger than his brother, is tall and powerfully made. He is a visibly sexual person. Both boys are somewhat lost, Happy because he has never risked defeat. The two brothers discuss their father. Happy thinks that Willy's license will be taken away, and Biff suggests that his father's eyes are going.

Happy thinks that it's funny that they are sleeping at home again, and they discuss Happy's "first time" with a girl named Betsy. Happy says that he was once very bashful with women, but as he became more confident Biff became less so. Biff wonders why his father mocks him so much, but Happy says that he wants Biff to make good. Biff tells Happy that he has had twenty or thirty different types of jobs since he left home before the war, and everything turns out the same. He reminisces about herding cattle in Nebraska and the Dakotas. But he criticizes himself for playing around with horses for twenty-eight dollars a week at his advanced age. Happy says that Biff is a poet and an idealist, but Biff says that he's mixed up and should get married.

When Biff asks Happy if he is content, Happy defiantly says that he is not. He says that he has his own apartment, a car, and plenty of woman, but is still lonely. Biff suggests that Happy come out west with him to buy a ranch. Happy claims that he dreams about ripping off his clothes in the store and boxing with his manager, for he can "outbox, outrun, and outlift anybody in that store," yet he has to take orders from them.

Happy says that the women they went on a date with that night were gorgeous, but he gets disgusted with women: he keeps "knockin' them over" but it doesn't mean anything. Happy says that he wants someone with character, like his mother. Biff says that he thinks he may work for Bill Oliver, whom he worked for earlier in life. Biff worries that Bill will remember that he stole a carton of basketballs, and remembers that he quit because Bill was going to fire him.

Act I (Loman Home, Past):

This segment of the act takes place in the kitchen years before. Willy reminds Biff not to make promises to a girl, because girls will always believe what you tell them and Biff is too young to be talking seriously to girls. Willy surprises the boys with a new punching bag, and as Happy exercises he brags about how he is losing weight. Biff shows Willy a football he took from the locker room, but Willy tells him to return it. Biff tells Willy that he missed him when he was away on business. Willy says that someday he'll have his own business like Uncle [Charley](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#charley). Willy says that he'll be bigger than Charley, because Charley is liked, but not well-liked. Willy promises to take his boys on business and show them all of the towns in New England and introduce them to the finest people.

As Happy and Biff toss the football around, [Bernard](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#bernard) enters. Bernard is worried because Biff has a state exam (Regents) the following week and has yet to study for them. Bernard heard that Mr. Birnbaum will fail Biff in his math class if he does not study, and reminds Biff that just because he has been accepted to UVA the high school does not have to graduate him. Willy tells Bernard not to be a pest, and Bernard leaves. Biff says that Bernard is "liked, but not well liked." Willy says that Bernard may get the best grades in school, but when he gets out in the business world people like Biff and Happy will be five times ahead of him.

Linda enters, and after the boys leave she and Willy discuss the troubles that Willy has been having in his business. Willy worries that others laugh at him, but Linda reassures him, saying that he is successful because he is making seventy to a hundred dollars per week. Willy also worries that people respect Uncle Charley, who is a man of few words. Linda tells him that few men are as idolized by their children as Willy is.

Act I (Hotel Room, Past):

Willy crosses from one part of the stage to another, where a woman is standing, putting on her scarf. Willy says that he gets so lonely, and gets the feeling that he'll never make a living for her or a business for the boys. The woman claims that she picked Willy for his sense of humor. Willy tells her that he will be back in about two weeks and that he will see her the next time he is in Boston.

Act I (Loman Home, Past):

Willy is back in the kitchen with Linda, who reassures him that he is a handsome man. Linda mends her stocking, but Willy tells her that he does not want her to do such menial tasks. Willy returns to the porch, where he tells [Bernard](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#bernard) to give Biff the answers to the Regents exam. Bernard says that he normally gives Biff the answers, but Regents is a State exam and he could be arrested. Bernard says that Biff is driving the car without a license and will flunk math. Willy also hears the woman's voice (from the hotel room), and screams for it to shut up. Willy explodes at Linda, saying that there's nothing the matter with Biff. He asks her if she wants Biff to be a worm like Bernard. Linda, almost in tears, exits into the living room.

Act I (Loman Home, Present Day):

Willy tells Happy that he nearly hit a kid in Yonkers. Willy wonders why he didn't go to Alaska with his brother [Ben](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#ben), because the man was a genius: success incarnate. Ben ended up with diamond mines: he walked into a jungle and came out rich at the age of twenty-one. Happy tells Willy that he should retire. [Charley](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#charley) enters. As Willy and Charley play cards, Charley offers Willy a job, which insults him. Willy asks Charley why Biff is going back to Texas, but Charley tells him to let Biff go. Willy talks about the ceiling he put up in the living room, but refuses to give any details. When Charley wonders how he could put up a ceiling, Willy shouts at him that a man who can't handle tools is not a man, and calls Charley disgusting.

Uncle Ben enters, a stolid man in his sixties with a mustache and an authoritative air. Willy tells Ben that he is getting awfully tired, but since Charley cannot see Ben, Willy tells him that for a second Charley reminded him of his brother Ben, who died several weeks ago in Africa. Ben asks Willy if their mother is living with him, but Willy said that she died a long time ago. Charley, who cannot see Ben, wonders what Willy is talking about. Finally Charley becomes unnerved and leaves.

Act I (Loman Home, Past):

While Willy talks with [Ben](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#ben), Linda (as a younger woman) enters. Willy asks Ben where his father is, but Ben says that he didn't find his father in Alaska, for he never made it there. Ben claims he had a very faulty view of geography and ended up in Africa instead of Alaska. Willy was only three years, eleven months old when Ben left. Young Biff and Happy enter, and Willy introduces them to Uncle Ben, a "great man." Ben boasts that their father was a very great man, an inventor who could make more money in a week than another man could make in a lifetime. Willy shows Biff to Ben, and says that he's bringing up Biff to be like their father. Biff and Ben start to spar; Ben trips Biff, then tells him never to fight fair with a stranger, because he will never get out of the jungle that way. Ben leaves, wishing Willy good luck on whatever he does.

[Charley](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#charley) returns, and reprimands Willy for letting his kids steal lumber from the nearby building that is being refurbished. Willy says that he reprimanded them, but that he has a "couple of fearless characters" as his children. Charley tells him that the jails are full of fearless characters, but Ben says that so is the stock exchange. [Bernard](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#bernard) enters and says that the watchman is chasing Biff, but Willy says that he is not stealing anything. Willy says that he will stop by on his way back to Africa, but Willy begs him to stay and talk. Willy worries that he's not teaching his sons the right kind of knowledge. Ben repeats that when he walked into the jungle he was seventeen, and when he walked out he was twenty-one and fantastically rich.

Act I (Loman Home, Present Day):

[Ben](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#ben) leaves, but Willy still speaks to him as Linda enters. Willy wonders what happened to the diamond watch fob that Ben gave to him when he came from Africa. Linda reminds him that he pawned it to pay for Biff's radio correspondence course. Biff and Happy come downstairs in their pajamas, and ask Linda how long Willy has been talking to himself. Linda says that this has been going on for years. Linda says that she would have told Biff, if he had an address where he could be reached. She also says that Willy is at his worst when Biff comes home, and asks Biff why they are so hateful to one another. Biff claims that he is trying to change.

Linda asks if he thinks about Willy. She says that if Biff has no feelings for his father, then he has no feeling for her either. Linda says that Willy is the dearest man in the world to her, and she won't have anyone making him feel unwanted. Biff tells her to stop making excuses for Willy because he never had an ounce of respect for her. Happy tells Biff not to call their father crazy. Biff says that Willy has no character. She tells him that Willy never made a lot of money, and that he is not the finest character, but he is a human being and "attention must be paid" to him.

Linda recounts the indignities that Willy has suffered, such as having to borrow money from [Charley](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#charley), and she calls Happy a philanderer. Biff wants to stay with his parents and promises not to fight with Willy. Biff says that Willy threw him out before because his father is a fake who does not like anybody who knows the truth about him. Linda says that Willy is dying and that he's been trying to kill himself. When Willy had his car accident in February, a woman saw that he deliberately smashed into the bridge railing to drive his car into the river. Willy has also tried to use the gas line to kill himself. Biff apologizes to Linda and promises to stay and try to become a success. Happy tells Biff that he never tries to please people in business, and that he whistles in the elevator.

Willy enters and tells Biff that he never grew up, and that [Bernard](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#bernard) does not whistle in the elevator. Biff says that Willy does whistle, however. Biff tells Willy that he's going to see Bill Oliver tomorrow to talk about the sporting good business. Happy says that the beauty of the plan is that it would be like they were playing ball again. Willy says that it is personality that wins the day. After the boys leave, Linda worries that Oliver won't remember Biff. Willy says that if Biff had stayed with Oliver he'd be on top now. Willy reminisces about Biff's ball game at Ebbets Field. He promises that the next day, he'll ask Harold if he can work in New York.

Biff finds Willy's rubber tubing behind the heater, and is horrified.

Act II (Loman Home, Present Day):

Willy sits at the kitchen table the next morning. He claims that he slept well for the first time in months. Linda says that it was thrilling to see the boys leaving together, and says that Biff had a new, hopeful attitude. Willy dreams about buying a little place in the country. Linda asks Willy if he will talk to Howard today, and he says that he will tell Howard to take him off the road. Linda tells him that he is supposed to meet the boys for dinner at Frank's Chop House. As soon as Willy leaves, Linda gets a phone call from Biff. She tells him that the pipe that Willy connected to the gas heater is gone; Willy must have taken it away himself. She is disappointed to learn that Biff is the one who took it away.

Act II (Wagner's Office, Present Day):

Willy enters the office of his boss, [Howard Wagner](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#howard-wagner), a thirty-six year old man sitting at a typewriter table with a wire-recording machine. Howard plays Willy recordings of Howard's daughter and son. Willy tries to tell Howard what he wants, but Howard insists on playing a recording of his wife. Willy tells Howard that he would prefer not to travel anymore, but Howard says Willy is a road man. Willy says that he was in the firm when Howard's father used to carry him as a boy. Howard does not have a spot.

Willy talks about how being a salesman used to be a position that had personality in it and demanded comradeship and respect, but today there is no room for friendship or personality. Willy keeps asking for lower and lower salaries. Howard's father made promises to Willy, he cries, but Howard tells him to pull himself together, and then leaves. Willy leans on the desk and turns on the wire recorder. Willy leaps away with fright and shouts for Howard. Howard returns and fires Willy, telling him that he needs a good, long rest. Howard tells him that this is no time for false pride and he should rely on his sons.

Act Two (Loman Home, Past):

Howard exits and [Ben](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#ben) enters, carrying his valise and umbrella. Willy asks him if he has secured the Alaska deal. The younger version of Linda enters, and she tells Ben that Willy has a great job in New York. She tells him not to go to Alaska. She wonders why everybody must conquer the world, and tells Willy that he's well-liked, and that Old Man Wagner promised that Willy would be a member of the firm someday. Young Biff enters with Young Happy. Willy insists that it is "who you know" that counts, but Ben leaves. Young [Bernard](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#bernard) arrives, and begs Biff to let him carry his helmet, but Happy wants to carry it. Willy prepares to escort them to the championship game. Willy tells [Charley](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#charley) that he cannot go to Biff's baseball game because there is no room in the car. Willy is insulted when he thinks that Charley forgot about the game. Willy prepares to fight Charley.

Act Two ([Charley](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#charley)'s Office, Present Day):

[Bernard](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#bernard), now mature, sits in Charley's office. Willy talks to Bernard, who tells him that he's going to leave for Washington soon. Willy tells Bernard about the deal with Bill Oliver, and asks Bernard his secret. Willy wonders why Biff's life ended after the Ebbets Field game. Bernard asks why Willy did not tell Biff to go to summer school so that he could pass math. Around that time, Biff disappeared for a month to see his father in New England, and when he came back he burned his UVA sneakers. Bernard wonders what happened in New England.

Charley enters and tells Willy that Bernard is going to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court. Charley gives Willy some money. Willy complains about Howard firing him, but Charley says that things like naming a child do not matter: the only thing that matters is what you can sell. Charley offers him a job again, even though he admits that he does not like Willy and Willy does not like him. Willy refuses once more, and Charley realizes that the sticking point is jealousy. Charley gives him money for insurance, and Willy remarks that a person is worth more dead than alive. Willy tells Charley to apologize to Bernard for him, and, on the verge of tears, tells Charley that he is his only friend.

Act Two (Restaurant, Present Day):

At the restaurant, [Stanley](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#stanley) the waiter seats Happy. A lavishly dressed girl enters and sits at the next table, and Happy tells Stanley to bring her champagne. Biff enters as Happy flirts with the girl, who is named [Miss Forsythe](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#miss-forsythe). Happy tells Miss Forsythe that Biff is a quarterback with the New York Giants. Happy asks the girl out, and asks her if she can find a friend for Biff. The girl exits, and Happy remarks that girls like that are why he can't get married.

Biff tells Happy that he did a terrible thing. Bill Oliver did not remember Biff, and walked away when Biff approached him. Biff stole his fountain pen, though. Biff insists that they tell their father tonight to prove that Biff is not lying about his failures just to spite Willy. Happy tells him to say that he has a lunch date with Oliver tomorrow and to prolong the charade, because Willy is never so happy as when he is looking forward to something. Willy arrives, and tells his sons that he was fired. Although Biff tries to lie to Willy about his meeting with Oliver, Biff and Willy fight when Willy thinks that Biff insulted Bill Oliver. Biff finally gives up, and tells Happy that he cannot talk to Willy. As Biff tries to explain, Willy imagines himself arguing with Young Biff and Young [Bernard](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#bernard) about Biff failing math, and imagines Bernard telling Linda that Biff went to Boston to see Willy. Biff continues to explain what happened while Willy imagines the woman in the hotel room. Miss Forsythe returns with another woman and Willy leaves. Biff and Happy argue over who should do something about their dad. Happy denies to the women that Willy is their father.

Act Two (Hotel Room, Past):

Willy follows the Woman as he buttons his shirt. Someone knocks on the door, but Willy says he is not expecting anybody. [The Woman](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#the-woman) claims that Willy ruined her, and that whenever he comes to the office she will make sure that he goes right through to the buyers. The knocking persists, and Willy tells the Woman to stay in the bathroom while he opens the door. It is Biff, who tells Willy that he flunked math. Biff begs Willy to talk to Mr. Birnbaum, his teacher, to convince him to pass Biff.

Biff hears the woman laugh, and she enters from the bathroom. Willy tells Biff that the woman is staying in the next room, which is being painted, so he let her take a shower in his room. Willy throws the woman out, as she claims Willy promised to buy her a pair of stockings. Willy tries to explain that the woman is a buyer, but Biff starts to cry. Willy admits that he had a relationship with the woman, but claims that it means nothing to him, and that he was lonely.

Act Two (Restaurant, Present Day):

At the restaurant, [Stanley](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#stanley) stands in front of Willy as Willy shouts at the waiter, thinking that he is Biff. Stanley tells Willy that his boys left with the two women and said that they will see him at home. Stanley tries to help him. Willy asks if there is a seed store in the neighborhood, because he has to buy some seeds to plant. Willy leaves for the seed store.

Act Two (Loman Home, Present Day):

Happy and Biff return home to find their mother there. Happy gives her flowers, and tells Linda that he and Biff met two girls. Linda knocks the flowers to the floor at Biff's feet. She asks whether they care if their father lives or dies. She says that they wouldn't even abandon a stranger at the restaurant as they did their father. Linda asks Happy if he had to go to his "lousy rotten whores" tonight, but Happy insists that all they did was follow Biff around trying to cheer him up. Linda throws them out, calling them a pair of animals. Linda says that Willy didn't have to say anything to her because he was so humiliated that he nearly limped when he entered the house. Biff insists that he talk to Willy, but Linda refuses to let him.

They hear a noise outside; it is Willy planting his seeds in the garden. They find Willy outside, carrying a flashlight, a hoe and a handful of seed packets. Willy imagines that he talks to [Ben](https://www.gradesaver.com/death-of-a-salesman/study-guide/character-list#ben) about his own funeral. He says that people will come from miles around, because he is well-known and well-liked, but Ben says he is a coward. Biff tells Willy that he is not coming back anymore and that he has no appointment with Oliver. Willy does not believe Biff, and tells him that he cut down his life for spite. Willy refuses to take the blame for Biff's failure. Biff takes the rubber tube out of his pocket and puts it on the table. Biff asks if it is supposed to make him feel sorry for his father. Biff tells his father that the reason they couldn't find him for months was because he was in jail for stealing a suit, and that he has stolen something at every good job since high school. Biff says that he is a dime a dozen, and so is Willy, but Willy insists that neither of them are unimportant.

Crying, Biff asks Willy to give up his phony dream. Willy is amazed to realize that Biff likes him. Linda says that he loves him. Willy can't believe Biff cries for him. Happy tells Linda that he will get married and change everything. Everybody goes to sleep but Willy, who remains in the kitchen talking to Ben. He imagines what wonderful things Biff could accomplish with $20,000 insurance money. Linda calls from her bedroom for Willy to come to bed, but Willy runs out of the house and speeds away in his car. Biff and Happy don jackets, while Linda walks out in mourning clothes and places flowers down on Willy's grave.