

Act Two – the evening out

Re-read the scene in which Happy, Biff and Willy meet for dinner, beginning at: STANLEY, a young waiter, appears, carrying a table, followed by HAPPY, who is carrying two chairs. (p.73)

And ending with:

STANLEY (to the waiter) Well, whatta you looking at? (p.93)

Now complete the following tasks:

1. Write a summary of the scene which is no more than two short paragraphs.
2. Share your writing with a partner and see which events and comments you have both chosen to record and which differ. How do you account for these differences?
3. Look through the following comments made by Stanley to Happy and discuss your understanding of them:

'I only wish during the war they'd a took me in the Army. I coulda been dead by now.'

'Great! That's the best for you. Because a family business, you know what I mean? – that's the best.'

'Geez, you got a life, Mr Loman.'

Why do you think Miller has Happy speak to the waiter before Biff or Willy arrive? Think about the way Stanley addresses him in comparison to his brother or father.

4. What impression do you get of Happy in this opening conversation with Stanley? Explain your opinions.
5. Why does Miller have Happy talk to the young woman, Miss Forsythe, before Biff arrives? What do you think of the following comments he makes to her:

'I sell champagne, and I'd like you to try my brand.'

'Selling is selling, y'know.'

'Would you object to a compliment from a stranger? You ought to be on a magazine cover.'

'His name is Biff. You might've heard of him. Great football player ... Biff is a quarterback with the New York Giants.'

6. When Biff arrives, he tells Happy about his attempts to see Bill Oliver. Happy's response is to say, 'Because you're not shown' the old confidence, Biff.' What do you think he means by this? Do you think it is true?
7. Biff tells Happy, 'I even believed myself that I'd been a salesman for him! And then he gave me one look and – I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been.' What do you think Biff means? Do you think Biff has learnt something from his attempts to see Oliver? Do you think Happy has learnt anything from Biff's account of the meeting? Explain your ideas.

8. Biff tries to tell Willy the truth about his meeting with Bill Oliver but it appears as if Willy does not want to hear it. When Biff insists that he was never a salesman for Bill Oliver, Willy replies, 'I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of the kind because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around.' Why do you think Miller has Willy say this? Does it make sense? What does he mean?
9. What does Happy's behaviour throughout the argument between Biff and Willy tell us about his character?
10. Willy's understanding of the past and the present blurs with dramatic consequences in this scene as he holds a conversation with Biff in the past whilst Biff is talking to him in the present and he drifts back to the night Biff arrived at his hotel room whilst he was with another woman. Who do you think learns anything from this scene? Is it: Willy; Biff; Happy; the audience? You can name more than one but you must explain your opinions. Who learns nothing?
11. Why do you think Miller has Biff, after the argument with Willy, tell Miss Forsythe, '... you've just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hard-working, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys.'
12. What impression do you get of Biff and Happy towards the end of the restaurant scene when Willy is so confused he goes off to the bathroom? Think about how they both react to their father's confusion.
13. Why do you think Miller juxtaposes the past scene of Willy with an unnamed woman with the present in which Happy has just persuaded Miss Forsythe to join him and Biff with a friend?
14. Why does Miller reveal the scene in which Biff discovers Willy with the anonymous woman immediately after the scene in the restaurant? What effect does this have on the audience? How does it make us feel about the various characters? Does it change our opinions of them? Why, and how, does it do this?
15. In the past scene Biff says to Willy, 'You – you gave her Mama's stockings! (*his tears break through and he rises to go*)'. Why does Miller have him say this? Why is this so shocking to Biff?
16. What do you think of Willy's conversation with Stanley at the end of the scene? Why do you think Willy is desperate to get seeds?
17. Why does Miller have Willy try to pay Stanley and Stanley surreptitiously put the money back in Willy's pocket? What do the actions reveal about both characters?
18. Overall, how do you, as an audience member, feel about Willy after he departs in this scene? Does this add or detract from the possibility that he might be a modern-day tragic hero? Explain your ideas.