

The real tragic hero

It has been argued that Biff Loman is the modern-day tragic hero of *Death of a Salesman* rather than Willy Loman. Explore this suggestion, considering Miller's presentation of both characters.

In order to answer the above question, consider the following:

1. What are both characters like in the past? Do either of them seem to be on the height of their success? Do they appear successful? Are they aware of their success? If they are not successful do they still behave as if they are? Is the success their own or are they living vicariously through the success of someone else?
2. Are either of the two happy in either the past or the present?
3. What sort of lifestyle do the two have in the present? Do either of them seem content? What is it they aspire to?
4. How do the two measure success? Are they successful in the present?
5. What dreams do the two have? What is that which the two long for – both in the past and in the present? Who, if either, has their dreams realised?
6. At the beginning of the play do you think the audience can predict what will happen to the characters at the end?
7. Do either Biff or Willy learn anything from their experiences? In what ways do they learn?
8. Do you find either Biff or Willy remarkable in any way? Explain your ideas.
9. Which, if either of them, do you think suffers? In what way is this suffering presented? Do you sympathise with them suffering?
10. Consider whether Miller gives either of these characters a tragic flaw; what is it and how is it presented?
11. How, and in what ways, do other characters in the play affect the actions and behaviour of these two? Do you consider Biff to be a central character or is it only Willy who is the protagonist?
12. Overall, who, if either of them, do you consider to be a modern-day tragic hero? Explain your ideas fully.