

**How significant is the notion of dreams in *Death of a Salesman*?**

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Look through the essay below, which was written in response to the above essay title. Use the specification, and assessment objectives, for your exam board to mark the essay. Don't just tick the essay at the end or write 'well done'; highlight or underline sentences or phrases that you think are particularly effective and make a note as to which of the assessment objectives they fit. If you are studying *Death of a Salesman* for an oral assessment, such as the Oral Commentary (IB), consider from where in the play the quotations are selected and look at the scene where they come from; consider whether it is a key moment in the play and how you might use the ideas suggested here to develop an oral response to that scene.

Once you have finished assessing the essay, compare your ideas with others in your group.

Dreams are the most important feature of the play, in my opinion. It is Willy Loman's need to dream, and to achieve the American Dream, that ultimately brings about his demise.

Throughout the play, Willy strives to achieve the American Dream; he buys the latest car, the refrigerator with "the best ads for any of them", and even contemplates a "wire recorder" on the very day that he loses his job. The notion of the American Dream was key to society at the time; everyone wanted to achieve success at work, regardless of whether they were actually in a position to do so. This was little related to talent (at selling, in Willy's case) and a lot related to luck, and being at the right place at the right time. Willy does not have the luck that his brother Ben had, "walking into the jungle and coming out "rich". Despite his hard work, and his dreams of achieving, he never makes it in the same way that Ben did.

Willy aims to die the "death of a salesman" like Dave Singleman, selling to the very last. Ultimately, though, he commits suicide, driven to it by his inability to live his dreams. This is a tragic end for a man who "had the wrong dreams" Had he been able to accept that he was not cut out for sales, that his ability to sell was directly linked to the affairs with the receptionists for the buyers, he might have been happier. He might not have achieved the American Dream that he strove for, but he would not have driven his car off a bridge either.

## Death of a Salesman

Willy's incessant dreaming leads to his sons dreaming too. Neither of them is happy with his lot – Biff moves from job to job, whilst Happy is employed but dissatisfied. Thanks to their father, they both grew up with the notion that to dream is key; however, all three fail to see that unless dreams are achievable, a person is bound to be unhappy. It is only at the end of the play that Biff realises that his father (and they too) had “the wrong dreams”. Hoping of being “number one man” is commendable but not achievable; everyone in America at the time had the same dream, which inevitably meant that not everyone could achieve it. Charley seems not to dream, but is happy with his lot and a success in his own right, which implies that Miller believed that it was more important to be satisfied with what you have than to constantly hope for more.

In the end, Willy realises that he cannot hope to achieve his dream for himself. It is at this point that events take the most tragic turn as he believes that, with some money behind him, “that boy [Biff] will be massive”. It is this dream for the future of his son that leads him to take his own life. I cannot help, however, thinking that this was a bad decision. Biff's behaviour until this point in the play suggests that he has inherited his father's need to dream, and that no matter how much money he has behind him, he will always squander it.

The male Lomans seem to share Willy's tragic flaw, which is his need to achieve the American Dream in some way or another. It is this that is the ultimate tragedy of the play; the fact that as an audience, we can see the cycle of dreams and failure repeating itself with the sons.