

Act two analysis:

Analysis

Biff's decision to seek a business loan raises Willy's spirits, and the way in which Willy expresses his optimism is quite revealing. The first thing Willy thinks about is planting a garden in his yard; he then muses to Linda that they should buy a house in the country, so that he could build guesthouses for Biff and Happy when they have families of their own. These hopeful plans seem to illustrate how ill-suited Willy is to his profession, as it smothers his natural inclinations. Indeed, the competitive, hyper-capitalist world of sales seems no more appropriate for Willy than for Biff. Willy seems happiest when he dreams of building things with his own hands, and when his instincts in this direction surface, he seems whole again, able to see a glimmer of truth in himself and his abilities.

Willy's thoughtful fantasy of living in the forests of Alaska strengthens the implication that he chose the wrong profession. He does not seem to like living in an urban setting. However, his fascination with the frontier is also intimately connected to his obsession with the American Dream. Ben, whose success involved a literal jungle in Africa, represents one version of the frontier narrative. Dave Singleman represents another. Willy chose to follow Singleman's path, convinced that it was the modern version and future of the American Dream of success through hard work.

While Willy's dissatisfaction with his life seems due in part to choosing a profession that conflicts with his interests, it seems also due in part to comparing all aspects, professional and private alike, of his own life to those of a mythic standard. He fails to realize that Ben's wealth is the result of a blind stroke of luck rather than a long-deserved reward for hard work and personal merit. Similarly, Willy misses the tragic aspect of Singleman's story of success—that Singleman was still working at the age of eighty-four and died on the job. Mourning for him was limited to the sphere of salesmen and train passengers who happened to be there at his death.