

Ben's Role in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

Ben Loman is an important character in *Death of a Salesman* but he is quite unusual. The audience encounters Uncle Ben during Willy Loman's hallucinations of the past and as a result, it is tempting to disregard his character as just another creation of Willy's delusional mind. However, Ben is much more than that. His character is representative of Willy's unrealistic dreams as well as the reality of his life.

When the audience first encounters Ben, he represents the success that Willy is striving for. Before the audience learns of the success that Ben encountered in Africa, they see him on the stage accompanied by an idyllic musical motif. When Ben finally appears, Willy must ask him, "how did you do it?" Ben's theme is heard for the last time towards the end of the play "in accents of dread" as Willy finally resolves to commit suicide so that Biff may receive the insurance money. While the peaceful theme music that accompanies Ben and his father would at first seem to represent Willy's positive memories of the past and optimistic views of the future, they really represent selling out and abandonment. They oppose the fine theme of nature that begins and ends the play.

Ben is also a very peculiar character. The audience first encounters him with the full knowledge that he is dead. Ben is also the one figure that is able to move freely between the past and the present.

Because Ben represents that which Willy seeks, Willy feels that he can achieve his goal the same way that Ben did and so he believes that "opportunism, cheating and cruelty are success incarnate".

Ben Loman is Willy's successful older brother. Ben Loman made a fortune discovering diamond mines in Africa and appears in Willy's imagination throughout the play.

Ironically, Ben's success is a result of a lucky mistake. Initially, Ben planned on traveling to Alaska but ended up in Africa because of his "faulty view of geography."

Willy idolizes his older brother and regrets not travelling to Alaska with Ben. However, Willy misinterprets Ben's behaviour as the key to success. In Willy's mind, Ben represents success and the American dream.

Despite Ben's selfish personality and amoral tendencies, Willy looks up to him and continually asks Ben for advice. Willy can only hope to attain the wealth and status of his older brother; he has not been as fortunate as Ben. Willy also cannot differentiate the importance of dedication and hard work from Ben's blind luck. Ben is essentially a symbol of good fortune, success, and the American dream.

Ben Loman is Willy's older brother who apparently had success where Willy failed. How much of what we know about Ben is from Willy's mind, so it's honesty is questionable.

According to Willy, Ben was an explorer and adventurer who found diamonds in Africa and in Alaska. Ben never appears in the reality of the play, but is revealed through Willy's thoughts. Ben is everything Willy wanted to be, and everything he wants his sons to be.

It is also through Ben that the reader learns about Willy's father-a successful inventor with a likeable charm. It's no wonder that, with these two as role models, that Willy is unable to cope with the realities of his shortcomings as well as those of his sons.

Whether Willy's memories are accurate or exaggerated (which is more likely,) the reader understands more about why he is driven to suicide. The fulfilled dreams of his father and older brother stand in bleak contrast to Willy's failures.

Although Willy claims to respect and admire them, deep inside he knows that he will never be like them. Ben symbolizes the mirage that American Dream turns out to be: too good to be true, and too far away to ever reach.

In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy is a character whose idea of success is not to work hard and work your way up the corporate ladder. Instead, he believes that being lucky and being well-liked are the keys to being successful and to being truly happy.

This is why he admires his brother Ben so much. Ben was on his way to Alaska, but made a wrong turn somehow and found himself, luckily, in Africa. This is where he made his fortune. In addition, this is the type of success that Willy desires and admires; to get rich accidentally without having really worked for it.

Stumbling upon riches is his dream and is why he characterizes his brother's success. This is what he yearns for in his own life, and it is his life's regret that he never accompanied Ben on his voyage. Consequently, because of Ben's accidental success, Willy lives his life with the unrealistic expectations of becoming such a success.

Ben Loman affects Willy tremendously because his character is a foil of Willy's. Older than Willy Loman, Ben was Willy's support system when their father left the household. However, the first difference we encounter in the brothers, aside from

their age, is that Ben is courageous, and set out to look for their father in Alaska. Contrastingly, Willy is left defenceless, and alone.

Secondly, Ben was daring and willing to initiate and take on challenges. One of them left him a very rich man when he decided to take the risk of entering the African mining business. In contrast, Willy never became successful and led his life trying to chase after the successes and dreams of people who led their own goals, namely, Dave Singleman: The man whose success inspired Willy to be a salesman for the sake of becoming rich quick.

Third, Ben's success wipes on Willy's ego at all times. Certainly Willy loves his brother, but it is impossible to maintain a healthy brotherly relationship when Ben continuously reminded Willy about his lack of success.

In all, Ben shares the same ambition and desire for a better life as Willy. However, as often happens in life, success is achieved by the survival of the fittest. In this case, Ben was the fittest man and became successful. As a result, Willy had to endure the act of relaxing on his brother's glory or accept his own failures.