

Death of a Salesman Character Descriptions

Note: *The characters of Willy, Linda, Biff, Happy, Charley, Bernard, and Ben play two separate age ranges (see description for each character).*

Male roles:

Willy Loman. Plays Ages 40 and 60

A self-deluded traveling salesman. Willy believes wholeheartedly in the American Dream of easy success and wealth, but he never quite achieves it. Nor do his sons fulfill his hope that they will be successful. When Willy's illusions begin to fail under the pressing realities of his life, his mental health begins to unravel. The overwhelming tensions caused by this disparity, as well as those caused by the demands of society, form the essential conflict of *Death of a Salesman*.

Biff Loman. Plays teenager and age 34

Willy's thirty-four-year-old elder son. Biff led a charmed life in high school as a football star with scholarship prospects, good male friends, and fawning female admirers. He failed math, however, and did not have enough credits to graduate. Since then, his kleptomania has gotten him fired from every job that he has held. Biff represents Willy's vulnerable, poetic, tragic side. He cannot ignore his instincts, which tell him to abandon Willy's paralyzing dreams and move out West to work with his hands. He ultimately fails to reconcile his life with Willy's expectations of him.

Happy Loman. Plays teenager and age 32

Willy's thirty-two-year-old younger son. Happy has lived in Biff's shadow all of his life, but he compensates by nurturing his relentless sex drive and professional ambition. Happy represents Willy's sense of self-importance, ambition, and blind servitude to societal expectations. Although he works as an assistant to an assistant buyer in a department store, Happy presents himself as supremely important. Additionally, he practices bad business ethics and sleeps with the girlfriends of his superiors.

Charley. Plays ages 40's and 60's

Willy's next-door neighbor. Charley owns a successful business. He is a good friend to Willy who is jealous of Charley's success. Charley gives Willy money to pay his bills, and Willy reveals at one point, choking back tears, that Charley is his only friend.

Bernard. Plays teen ager and 30's

Bernard is Charley's son and an important, successful lawyer. Although Willy used to mock Bernard for studying hard, Bernard always loved Willy's sons dearly and regarded Biff as a hero. Bernard's success is difficult for Willy to accept because his own sons' lives do not measure up.

Ben. Plays 40's and 70's

Willy's wealthy older brother. Ben has recently died and appears only in Willy's "daydreams." Willy regards Ben as a symbol of the success that he so desperately craves for himself and his sons.

Howard Wagner. Age 40's

Willy's boss. Howard inherited the company from his father, whom Willy regarded as "a masterful man" and "a prince." Though much younger than Willy, Howard treats Willy with condescension and eventually fires him, despite Willy's wounded assertions that he named Howard at his birth.

Stanley. Age 20's - 30's.

A waiter at Frank's Chop House. Stanley and Happy seem to be friends, or at least acquaintances, and they banter about and ogle Miss Forsythe together before Biff and Willy arrive at the restaurant.

Female roles:

Linda Loman Plays ages late 30's and late 50's

Willy's loyal, loving wife. Linda suffers through Willy's grandiose dreams and self-delusions. Occasionally, she seems to be taken in by Willy's self-deluded hopes for future glory and success, but mostly she is far more realistic and less fragile than her husband. She has nurtured the family through all of Willy's misguided attempts at success, and her emotional strength and perseverance support Willy until his collapse.

The Woman Age 30's-40's

Willy's mistress when Happy and Biff were in high school. The Woman's attention and admiration boost Willy's fragile ego. When Biff catches Willy in his hotel room with The Woman, he loses faith in his father, and his dream of passing math and going to college dies.

Miss Forsythe and Letta. Ages late 20's, early 30's.

Two young women whom Happy and Biff meet at Frank's Chop House. It seems likely that Miss Forsythe and Letta are "loose women" judging from Happy's repeated comments about their moral character and the fact that they are "on call."

Jenny

Charley's secretary. Age 20's (Could double as Letta or Miss Forsythe)