Son Of A Salesman. (Death Of A Salesman) Essay, Research Paper

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AP English

Death of a Salesman topic – #1

Son of a Salesman

A father is an important role model in a young man’s life; perhaps the most important. A father must guide his children, support them, teach them, and most importantly, love them. In the play Death of a Salesman, written by Arthur Miller, an aging salesman of 63, Willy Loman worked all his life for his children. Happy and especially Biff, his two sons, where his pride and joy and his reason for living. Willy tried as hard as he possibly could to provide for them, to support them, to mold them into men; but he failed. Willy’s greatest fault, perhaps, was his inability to see his sons for what they really were. Biff and Happy were never destined to be great men, yet Willy always believed in them. Although Willy’s hope is touching, it is also foolish. Willy Loman’s blind faith in his son Biff’s abilities destroyed Biff’s sense of moderation and modesty.

Despite Biff’s obvious incompetence and mediocrity, Willy vehemently refused to accept his son’s failure to “make the grade.” Biff “stole himself out of every good job since high school!” (131), yet Willy cannot accept that his son is a “dime a dozen” and declares that Biff is merely failing to spite him. “I want you to know…where ever you go, that you cut down your life for spite!” (129). By blaming Biff for his problems, Willy clears himself of all guilt. Willy cannot realize that it was his ineptitude as a father that created Biff’s character. If Willy was a little more aware of his son’s situation, his true character, Biff may have realized sooner that he was not “a leader of men.” When asked whose fault it is that he never accomplished anything, Biff answered “…I never got anywhere because you (Willy) blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That’s whose fault it is!” (131). If only Willy would have recognized his son Biff’s mediocrity instead of believing he was a great kid, Biff may have become a good man. No matter what Biff did, Willy would never believe it was because he was incapable of success.

Unlike his older brother Biff, Happy did not receive the affection or attention he craved from his father. Willy’s preoccupation with his more attractive, better-liked son Biff, left Happy trailing in his sibling’s footsteps. Happy always tried to get his parents’ attention, hoping one day he could please them. “I’m losing weight, you notice, Pop?” (29). “I’m gonna get married, Mom. I wanted to tell you.” (68) Yet Willy never noticed his younger son’s accomplishments. The lack of recognition from his father only made Happy try harder, but he could only do so much. Happy, not unlike his older brother Biff, was not a great man. In hopes to please his father, Happy also went into the “selling” business, but met little success. He was “one of the two assistants to the assistant buyer” and was miserable. Biff questioned Happy, “Are you content, Hap? You’re a success, are’t you? Are you content?” (23), and Happy responds, “Hell, no!” Yet Happy stuck with his job, longing to one day please his father. Even after Willy’s death Happy did not give up on his quest. “I’m gonna show everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain.” “I’m staying right in this city, and I’m gonna beat this racket!” (138). Happy, still trying to please his father from beyond the grave, dooms himself to live the same life, and perhaps death, of his father. Happy never knew his father, and if he had, he may not have respected him so much. If Willy had talked with his son Happy, opened up to him, Happy would have probably chosen a different path of life. Instead, Willy focused his all his attention on Biff, leaving Happy a lost child, yearning for attention, willing to do anything to receive it.

The lack of morals in the Loman household also contributed to Biff and Happy’s degeneration. The two boys didn’t have a positive role model in their life. When Biff stole a football, Willy congratulated him on his initiative. Willy prompted his sons to steal building materials for a new stoop. Biff’s kleptomaniatic tendencies most likely came from his father’s acceptance, and even approval, of his thievery in his younger days. When Biff found Willy in an affair with another woman, all respect he had for his father whatsoever was lost. It was at that point when Biff realized that the one man, the only man, he ever looked up to was nothing more than a “fake”, and Biff lost all reason to his life. Everything that Willy taught him was destroyed on that one night. Every rule, every piece of advice, was nulled by that one act of adultery.

Willy Loman tried his best to be a good father. He encouraged his sons, he worked all his life for them, and he tried to help them in any way he could. The only problem was, although his heart was there, Willy just wasn’t a good father. Willy did his best to raise his sons, but tragically, the more he tried, the worse they became. Ultimately, Willy failed as a father, but he did try his best. He loved his children, in some cases, too much. He loved them blindly, and never once questioned their greatness. Although love like that is touching, it also harmful. Willy’s delusions of grandeur for his sons hurt them more than it helped them.