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Lesson 9

Men of the World

Objectives

- To observe how men in superior positions affect Willy
- To clarify Willy's state of mind in the planting scene
- To clarify Howard's insensitivity

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson concentrates on two important scenes in act 2, both of which lead to Willy's tragic end. Investigating the effects of these two powerful men on Willy when he is most defenseless helps to understand the final tragedy.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 30**. Ask students to reread pp. 76-84 before answering questions.
2. Distribute **Handout 31**. Reread pp. 125-127; pp. 133-135. Answer questions.

Suggested Responses:

Handout 30

1. To Willy, it suggests a closeness, an importance to Howard's father--part of the past. To Howard, it is trivial since it has nothing to do with his skills or sales.
2. He has a lack of sensitivity, an air of superiority. Students may see a parallel to white people's, in an earlier era, addressing adult black males as "Boy."
3. It reveals his insensitivity again, disinterest, a habit of bragging to any audience. Willy, who can't even afford a car radio for his frequent long trips, is used to lying about his finances and pretending to be affluent.

4. Both men boss their wives and worship their children. Miller may be showing that Willy's qualities are common to all levels of society--the more affluent may steal or cheat in more subtle, sophisticated ways, but are actually just like Willy.
5. Howard treats his act of firing a long-term employee as if it were a minor nuisance, cured by a brief rest.
6. He can no longer keep up the pretense of bringing home a salary; he cannot pay his bills; he is totally defeated.

Handout 31

1. a. The speeches are no longer about going to Alaska or Africa.
b. Ben listens carefully to Willy and responds to his ideas instead of preaching.
c. Ben doesn't brag.
d. Ben looks at his watch as usual, but discovers he has a little time.
e. His "jungle" line is changed.
f. Ben encourages Willy.
g. Ben says, "We'll be late" instead of "I'll be late."
2. It is not a memory scene as the others were. Willy has "created" Ben to discuss his problem with.
3. Willy is actually arguing with himself while remembering the dead Ben's earlier promise of diamonds (the insurance money).
4. He is out of his last dream and realizes he has to make the final decision.

Howard

Directions: Answer the questions below.

Howard, like Ben and Charley, is a successful businessman, although he apparently inherited his position and his wealth from his father, Willy's original boss.

1. Whether true or not, Willy keeps reminding Howard that he named him. Why is that fact important to Willy and unimportant to Howard?
2. Several times Howard calls Willy "kid." What does that reveal about Howard?
3. After Howard tells Willy that he is going to throw out all his technical "toys" and just play with his new wire recorder, Howard says, "Sure, they're only a hundred and a half. You can't do without it...You tell the maid to turn the radio..." Howard employs Willy and knows his tenuous financial situation. What does this speech reveal about Howard? What does Willy's pretense that he might buy one reveal about him?
4. Howard plays his wire recorder for Willy, who also has a fascination for mechanical things: cars, refrigerators. What does the recording show that Howard and Willy have in common concerning their wives and their children?
5. What is ironic about Howard's advice to Willy after he fires him: "Sit down, take five minutes, and pull yourself together..."?
6. How does this scene lead to Willy's suicide?

The Other Ben

Directions: Reread pp. 125-127 and 133-135 before answering the questions.

In the 1920's Ben makes two visits to Willy's house, visits which Willy recreates in the present. During these times he offers Willy a job in Alaska, repeats his success formula ("When I was 17 I walked into the jungle and when I was 21 I walked out. And by God I was rich"), and offers questionable advice. He is obviously Willy's ideal, his model. He is also dishonest, as discovered in a previous lesson.

The memory of these visits gives Willy inspiration when his life turns sour. But Ben, always in a hurry, disappears when Willy wants to continue talking. He walks off into the darkness.

At the end of act 2, Ben reappears while Willy plants seeds that have no chance to grow. This scene occurs after his sons desert him in the restaurant, after he remembers the event that turned Biff against him, after he has been fired. Although Ben leaves when Biff enters, he returns after Willy learns that Biff loves him.

1. Reread these last two scenes with Ben. List at least five things that are different from the earlier appearances of Ben:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

2. What assumption can you make about this appearance of Ben's, based on these differences?
3. In effect, with whom is Willy discussing his imminent suicide?
4. After his "elegy" to Biff ("Now when you kick off, boy...") he realizes he is alone and asks, "Ben! Ben, where do I...? Ben, how do I...?" What do these questions show?