

LITERARY SYNTHESIS ESSAY



Coming to America brings a lot of excitement and the desire for success among individuals because of the perception that it is a land of endless opportunities. The idea of the American Dream is clearly depicted in the *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *Two Kinds* by Amy Tan. Notably, *Death of a Salesman* brings out the cost of blind faith in the American Dream by Willy who works extremely hard with the desire of making it in America. Willy's problems in life emanate from the constant chase of the American Dream and the belief that he has a chance to become a successful businessman. On the other hand, *Two Kinds* highlights a mother's desire to see her daughter, Jing-Mei Woo, become a successful person in America. She believes that America is a land of opportunities that her daughter has to exploit for a better life in the future. These two pieces of literature exhibit both similarities and differences in the portrayal of the American Dream. **Thesis:** The *Death of a Salesman* and *Two Kinds* are similar in their depiction of the American Dream as something that could be attained through persistent hard work, and self-realization and redemption among individuals.

Comparing and Contrasting

Both the *Death of a Salesman* and *Two Kinds* depict the American Dream as something that could be achieved through persistent hard work. Willy, in *the Death of a Salesman* works himself to death with the desire of becoming a successful businessman in America. His wife, Linda, is concerned about his culture of working without relaxing. However, he does not care about the concerns of his wife, as his only dream is to make it America. When he gets to the house, he tells his wife, "I'm tired to death...I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda." This is an illustration of the view that he had worked all day without taking time to rest. Despite the numerous opportunities in places such as Alaska, he believes that he still has to keep working hard to realize his dreams. This similar view is brought out in *Two Kinds* where the mother is keen to ensure her daughter succeeds through hard work. For instance, the mother tells Jung-Mei, "Not the best. Because you are not trying" to illustrate the view that she is not working hard enough to achieve the American Dream, as the mother had wanted since immigrating into America. She wants her to learn numerous arts including playing the piano, as this is the only way to succeed in America. She scolds her daughter every time she fails to follow instructions that would have assisted her get to her dreams. The overall view from both works is that as much as America is a land of opportunities, one needed to stay focused on working hard to make a breakthrough.

Additionally, both works depict the view that the American Dream as an achievable target for those who come to self-realization and redemption in terms of their work. In the *Death of Salesman* Biff rediscovers himself

and believes that he can take a different route to his self-prosperity. For instance, he tells Willy, "I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hardworking drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I'm not a dollar an hour Willy!..." He says this to emphasize the idea that he is taking a different route in the pursuance of his own success as an individual. Self-realization and redemption comes about after learning from the mistakes that Willy had initially made in his life in the course of moving toward his dream of becoming the most successful salesman America. Tan brings out this similar view in *Two kinds* especially after the death of Jing-Mei's mother. When her mother dies, she rediscovers herself and realizes the value of her insistence of trying out playing the piano and other different things. For instance, Jing-Mei says, "Last week I sent a tuner over to my parent's apartment and had the piano reconditioned, for purely sentimental reasons." In this statement, she means that she has realized the need to work positively towards ones desires. The depiction brought out by both authors is that the best way to get to the American Dream is to have a personal understanding. Individuals need to know what they can do better and work towards that positively to realize the American Dream. Jing-Mei was determined to make up for the years she had wasted arguing with her mother's dreams for her, as a prodigy. The best way to do this was to make it a personal initiative without necessarily copying or working under someone's command. The ultimate point from both authors is that the American Dream is a long journey that needs more of personal conviction and self-realization.

The only difference in the depiction of the American Dream in the two works is seen in the association between popularity and success in America. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy tries to say that success in America

comes through popularity and being liked by everyone in the country. In justifying his course toward the American Dream. Willy tells Ben, "I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey-I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all." With this assertion, he tends to explain the view that the American Dream becomes more realistic in cases where one is popular and connected across the different states. He believes that he can rise to the top in America by being popular and well-liked across different states. Willy teaches this similar idea to his son, but it unfortunately fails to work out for both of them. On the other hand, Tan's story is primarily focused on the concept of exploring the different opportunities available instead of relying on popularity. For instance, Jing-Mei states, "My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get good retirement..." to highlight the view that there are several options for individuals. However, this success does not come from being popular, but through regular exploration of the many opportunities available to individuals.

Significance of the Comparison/ Differences

This comparison is highly significant in reflecting the varying understanding of the American Dream. For instance, the *Death of a Salesman* was published in 1940 while *Two Kinds* was published in 1989. The different depictions especially with the focus on becoming successful through popularity is reflective of the events that transpired

in these two periods. For instance, the publication of the *Death of a Salesman* came in the days of the World War II when popularity and braveness was the best way to make it in life. However, Amy Tan's *Two Kinds* was published at a time when everyone was aggressive in terms of work, as the only means to success. Therefore, this comparison is significant in illustrating the attitudes of individuals of Americans over the years in the course of working toward their success and self-determination.

Tan came from a moderate social background while Arthur Miller came out from a wealthy socio-economic background as his father was a business person. This is significant in reflecting the shared depictions of the American Dream, as something that comes through hardworking. Amy Tan worked up the ladder through different works while Miller picked up his father's attitude of working hard toward prosperity in the world of business. Both of them reflect the view that the best way to succeed in America is to focus on hard work, as they did in their past lives.

The comparison is also significant in indicating the similar social philosophies of the two writers. Philosophically, Tan is a person focused on highlighting the relationship between mothers and daughters and Miller also talks about the role of parents in trying to encourage their children to move toward the attainment of their dreams. It is vital in reflecting the social philosophy that both writers hold in terms of appreciating the role played by parents in leading to the success of their children through their own dreams.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Death of a Salesman* and *Two Kinds* depict the American Dream similarly as something that comes through hard work and commitment. Somebody has to remain focused and work hard toward the realization of quality life. Additionally, both of them appreciate the significance of self-realization and reflection in the attainment of the American Dream. Biff and Jing-Mei reflect on their future and take a personal stand to progress with their dreams in line with what would make them happy. Understanding the concept of the American Dream from both works is vital because it reflects the significance of history in influencing the attitudes of individuals toward work and prosperity. Success in America only comes through hard work, as there is massive competition for different resources among individuals.