# Distorting reality can result in both good and bad.

## To distort: manipulate, deceive, change, mold, deliberate action

Reality: what is real, what is perceived by others

To result in: consequences, cause and effect

Good and bad: positive and negative, an escape from pain, to suppress painful memories

Images: fun house mirrors, masks, reflections in the water (ripples)

References to DOAS:

* Willy’s distortion of reality puts a strain on the Loman family
* Flashbacks
* Exaggerated/false memories
* Willy imagines that his sons are “great men” and creates a fantasy world to escape his painful reality
* Perceptions of how other see him – utmost importance
* Writing similar to the way that Willy speaks – repetitive when distressed
* “Isn’t that a remarkable thing?”
* Use of metaphors – Miller’s style – to drown in a sea of grief, to fish in troubled waters, time is a thief, your voice is music to my ears, my mind is a prison, the world is a stage and all the men and women merely players, sweet dreams,

Other sources to reference:

* The Matrix: taking the red pill or the blue pill; curtain being lifted on the illusion
* Wizard of Oz: paying no attention to the man behind the curtain, clicking my heels to realise it was all just a dream – and you were there and you were there too.
* Alice in Wonderland – falling down the rabbit hole
* Article on Dementia by David Campbell – dreaming vs awake, grasp on reality
* Quotes –
  + “Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life” – Picasso
  + “Chaos is a friend of mine” – Bob Dylan

**Context**: Whose Reality?

**Text**: *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller

**Prompt**: Distorting reality can result in both good and bad

**Style/form**: Persuasive/Imaginative hybrid – Personal letter – A mother with dementia persuading her son not to send her to an aged care facility.

19th November, 1984

To my darling Benjamin,

It may surprise you to learn that I remember the day you were born like it was yesterday. It truly was a remarkable thing. I recall so vividly the moment I first held you in my arms – your sweet gurgling and cooing was music to my ears. Your tiny, pink hand was a vice around my finger and I knew when you gazed into my eyes that my life had changed forever. Despite these crystal clear fragments of time, other parts of my memory flicker from a Kansas sepia to an Oz techni-colour in my mind. It is true, as you say, that my formerly razor-sharp wit has dulled and turned somewhat blunt over my many years. But let me assure you, my little love that I will not be sent away – I am more capable and competent than you give me credit for.

I put this in writing to you, my son not because I am afraid of speaking to you in person, but because I sometimes get confused as I talk – writing helps me to get my thoughts in order and I know that a letter will be more effective in convincing you and your sister that I am not as mad as a march hare. By reading this, you may also come to realise that perhaps the occasional trip down the rabbit hole does not actually hurt anyone.

You must agree, my Benny that life has not been so kind to your mother, especially in the last few years. When your father drew his last breath, I was drowning in a sea of sadness. There was nothing that could bring me any comfort – not music, not food, not the warm sunshine on my face. My days were full of darkness, even in the height of summer. I stopped caring what people thought – I couldn’t care less what they thought. How dare people assume to tell a grieving widow how to grieve! I know that I failed you. I know that it must have seemed that I forgot how to be your mother. But, my dear boy where were you? Did you come to visit me? Time is a thief, and I fear it has stolen the once close relationship that we had. Oh, the hopes I had for you! You were going to be a great man! I knew it from the vice grip on my finger moments after entering the world. Such strength! But a great man would have visited his mother in her hour of need. Perhaps I was wrong about you. Oh, I will admit, I drew the curtains; I changed our home so that I could feel safe; shut out daylight so that I could grieve your father. Tell me, darling does this make me crazy? Does this warrant you sending me away like an old horse to pasture?

I received your letter on Friday. Your letter broke my heart. The brochure was the real icing on the cake. Do you really think that weekly aqua-robics, arts & crafts and “round the clock care” at Greener Pastures is what I need? Who are you to tell me what I need? I am your mother and don't you forget it! Attention should be paid to me, not short, unemotional and impersonal notes with pamphlets for retirement homes! You don't know what I have been through, and you have never cared to ask. I live in hell, Benjamin. You can’t see it, but you don't see what I see. There are times when I feel as if I am in a fun house, with mirrors all around reflecting different versions of myself. Sometimes I am short and fat, as if squashed by the weight of who I am meant to be. Your mother, his widow. Sometimes I am tall and slim, as if I am being pulled hard in two directions, by my feet set firm in reality and my head drifting like a hot air balloon, off to far away places. And yet I have no control over what I see. It’s as if there is a man behind the curtain, pulling the levers and pushing the buttons, distracting me with smoke and lights so that I can’t see the truth. Will I one day be able to click my heels and wake up in my own bed? Is it all a dream? Or is there really somewhere over the rainbow, bluebirds and all where I can be free from my heartache?

Perhaps you are right. Perhaps I have lost my mind. I only skimmed through the brochure but is this new home that you propose where I will find it? What will people think of me? The mad old woman sent away by her own son. I am not mad and I am not old. I am your mother. I can take care of myself. I even took myself to the doctors last week, after waiting 45 minutes for you. Where were you? I think I prefer Dr. Stark to this new Dr. Lannister, but he was nice enough. He said that I have a sharp mind, very sharp indeed. The sharpest mind that he has seen in all his years! His questioning approach was different to Dr. Stark’s but I am confident that he will get to the bottom of my dizzy spells. Did I tell you I had another fall? Your father was so worried that he made the doctors appointment himself. He takes such good care of me, you know. He is here now, and wants me to ask you about going to the football next Friday. He says it will be a great match! I remember your first football game – what a great player you were! So many goals I lost count – the team worshipped you! Your coach called me personally to tell me that you were the greatest player he had ever seen. Even the neighbours couldn't help but comment on how skilled you were. I was beaming with pride, my little love.

I’m getting tired, my Benny so I think I will make your father and I a cup of tea and then head off to bed. I do hope to hear back from you soon, my darling, it has been so long. I know that you are very busy with work, but, as Shakespeare said “all the world’s a stage and all the men and women are merely players” – we each perform our many roles, some more convincingly than others, but don't forget to stop and smell the roses once in a while. Isn’t it funny, I don't actually remember what the scent of a rose is like...I don't know that I have ever smelt one. Perhaps you can bring me some one day. That would be nice.

Yours always, my little love,

Your mother

WRITTEN EXPLANATION: This is a personal letter, written by a mother living with dementia to her son, Benjamin who wants to put her in an aged care facility. The piece is persuasive, with many emotional appeals, inclusive language and rhetoric, all designed to get across to the audience (her son) the distress and anguish felt by the author. The piece is also imaginative in nature, because, while it begins with logical arguments, the symptoms and effects of the author’s condition take over, with distortions in time and hallucinations. The language of the piece is emotional and familiar, as it would be as a mother speaking to her son. The piece explores the consequences of distorting one’s own reality – the idea that these manipulations (whether deliberate or not) can be an escape from painful memories or heartache, but they can also bring confusion, aggression and the burden of obligation onto the family. I have used several quotes and paraphrased ideas from the text *Death of a Salesman* and I used metaphors and descriptive language, as is Arthur Miller’s style. I also wanted to mirror Willy Loman’s experiences, in terms of the sense of responsibility he felt to his family, the guilt he felt when he let them down, and the expectations he placed on his sons. I also emulated Willy’s exaggerated and false memories, as well as his delusions and self-deception. I used my knowledge of the symptoms and effects of dementia to add references to the piece.