

Glengarry Glen Ross: Act 2.2

"Am I talking about the deal? That's over. Please. Let's talk about you."

The second half of Act Two is a cascade of chaos. Lingk arrives to cancel his deal under pressure from his wife. Roma scrambles, spinning excuses and staging an impromptu charade with Levene that nearly sets the deal back on track – but Williamson carelessly blows the cover, killing the sale. What follows is pure Mamet: rage, blame, and a fatal slip. In his fury, Levene reveals knowledge only the office thief could have, and Williamson pounces. The truth comes out: Levene stole the leads, and his big ‘victory’ was worthless. As Williamson twists the knife, Roma plots to profit from Levene’s downfall, and Aaranow mutters resignedly. The play closes with Roma heading back out to the Chinese restaurant, ever the predator, hunting for fresh prey.

Knowledge Check

Try to answer these questions from memory:

1. What is the cue Roma sets up to hustle out of the office?

- (a) Kuncheng
- (b) Christchurch
- (c) Kenilworth
- (d) Kettering

2. What is Lingk’s wife’s name?

- (a) Jinny
- (b) Jenny
- (c) Josie
- (d) Jemima

3. How long does Lingk have to cancel the check to the bank?

- (a) 24 hours
- (b) Three business days
- (c) Until Monday
- (d) A month

4. What’s the last thing Lingk says to Roma?

- (a) You’ve got a deal
- (b) Thank you
- (c) Forgive me
- (d) Don’t forget lunch

5. How much did Roma potentially lose with the collapse of the Lingk sale?

- (a) Six hundred dollars
- (b) One thousand dollars
- (c) Three thousand dollars
- (d) Six thousand dollars

6. Which of these insults does Levene NOT throw at Williamson?

- (a) Shithead
- (b) Scum
- (c) Deadbeat
- (d) White-bread

7. What ironic thing does Williamson say to Levene?

- (a) You’ve got a big mouth
- (b) I don’t like you
- (c) I don’t care
- (d) You are going to jail

8. Why does Williamson think the Nyborg sale will kick out?

- (a) The bank won’t cash their check
- (b) They will back out at the last moment
- (c) There is no sale, they just like talking to salesmen
- (d) The contract got lost in the post

9. What does Roma offer Levene?

- (a) A fifty-fifty partnership
- (b) To share his good leads
- (c) A ride in the Cadillac
- (d) To speak to Mitch and Murray for him

10. What is the last line of the play?

- (a) I hate this job
 - (b) did the leads come in yet?
 - (c) I’ll be at the restaurant
 - (d) Did they find the guy who broke in yet?
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Understanding and Interpretation

1. When Lingk comes in, Roma and Levene improvise a 'performance' to steer him away from his intention to cancel the check – and it nearly comes off! How do they use their wits, words, and skill in different ways to deflect Lingk in this scene?
2. How and why does Lingk's deal collapse? What are the different contributory factors?
3. The character of Williamson has been ambiguous though the play. He flip-flops from being a draconian tyrant figure to a childish, impotent one. Are there examples of one or the other (or both) in this section of the play?
4. Do you agree with the way Williamson manages the office? Or with the way he chooses to resolve the situation at the end of the play? To what extent is he responsible for the whole situation?
5. The ending of the play is cyclical, meaning things return to how they were at the start. Identify how this is done and suggest why Mamet creates a cyclical ending to Glengarry Glen Ross.

Drama Study: *the off-stage world*

"My wife said I have to cancel the deal."



In the 1992 film of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Alec Baldwin plays Blake, a personification of the outside forces that hold power over the office. He calls the salesmen in to deliver the news of the sales contest. This scene was written for the film by David Mamet.

An interesting dramatic choice in *Glengarry Glen Ross* is how much influence belongs to characters we never see. The play's world feels controlled by invisible hands; figures like Jerry Graff, who shapes the salesmen's ambitions without ever stepping onstage, or Lingk's wife, whose insistence derails Roma's triumph. Even Levene's daughter, mentioned only in passing, presents a reason for his desperation. These absent figures remind us that the men's struggles are not self-contained; they are entangled in relationships and subject to hierarchies beyond the office walls.

This offstage power creates an interesting irony: the swaggering salesmen seem dominant and in-control, yet their fates hinge on voices we never hear and decisions made by people we never see. Lingk's wife, for example, never appears, yet her influence is decisive when she cancels Roma's deal and exposes the fragility of his control. Her absence also highlights the play's gender dynamics: for example, when Roma tries to recapture Lingk's commitment, he tries to undermine his wife's authority by suggesting that women are not equal to the task of making big deals. He says: *"It's a common reaction, Jim... It's a sizeable investment. One thinks twice... it's also something women have. It's just a reaction to the size of the investment."* Yet ultimately, Roma's plan is undermined by a woman he dismisses as secondary. Therefore, in a world of men talking 'man-to-man', Mamet uses the off-stage world to show that power can operate indirectly, shaping lives from the shadows and prompting the audience to ask if we're subject to unseen forces beyond the walls of our perceptions.

Analytical Writing Practice

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, influences come from characters we never see. Figures like Jerry Graff, Lingk's wife, Mitch and Murray, and even Levene's daughter shape decisions and create conflict without ever stepping onstage. Think about how these unseen voices affect the men we do see. Choose one offstage character mentioned in the play and focus on what role they play in the unfolding drama. How does their power compare to that of the onstage salesmen? Who really controls the outcome of events? Write a short analysis of how absence drives the action onstage. Express your ideas about why Mamet gives so much weight to voices we never hear. What does this suggest about (the illusion of) power in the world of the play?

Important Theme: *toxic masculinity*

“Whoever told you you could work with men?”

Toxic masculinity happens when traditional male traits (such as dominance, aggression, and emotional stoicism) are exaggerated. Some environments enforce these traits in ways that are harmful to both individuals and society, creating a toxic culture. It pressures men to conform to rigid gender norms, often discouraging vulnerability and empathy while rewarding behaviours that prioritize power and control. This concept is not about men per se, but about the destructive extremes of masculine traits when they become the only measure of worth that are valued.

David Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross* offers a vivid portrayal of toxic masculinity because it’s set in the high-stakes environment of a real estate sales office. The sales contest, which threatens to fire the losers, reinforces a survival-of-the-fittest mentality where success is synonymous with manhood and failure is emasculating. Emotional suppression is a prerequisite in this environment: vulnerability is treated as weakness and met with contempt. For example, when Levene is at his most desperate and shows a glimmer of vulnerability, he is met with the dispassionate responses: *“I don’t care”* and *“because I don’t like you.”* Women are absent from the play except when they are spoken about in dismissive ways, as housekeepers and cooks who can’t understand finance and investments.

Toxic masculinity is represented on stage through the play’s dialogue: sharp, aggressive, profanity-laden, reflecting a culture where words are used to dominate others. Insults and humiliation are common tools for asserting superiority. Throughout the play, the worst insults are directed against Williamson: these are almost always gendered, revealing how toxic masculinity operates. When Williamson is called a *“secretary”* it feminises him through association with a traditionally female role, implying his authority lacks basis. The insult strips him of masculine status in a space where manhood is defined by authority and power. Similarly, telling him he has *“no balls”* equates courage and competence with men, reinforcing the idea that masculinity is expressed through aggression and risk-taking. Roma’s use of the C-word is the most extreme example of misogyny and the ultimate insult in a patriarchal culture: being female. This word doesn’t just express Roma’s anger – it reduces Williamson to the lowest possible status (in Roma’s eyes). This is the essence of toxic masculinity: ‘male’ = strength and power, while ‘female’ = weakness.

Quotation Hunt

David Mamet’s play reveals and critiques toxic masculinity through its language and character interactions. Find quotations that illustrate different aspects of gendered power dynamics in the play. Can you find quotations that fit each of the following categories:

1. Gendered insults?
2. Success is tied to manhood?
3. Feminism is degraded or dismissed?
4. Vulnerability is mocked or hidden?
5. Stoicism is idealised?
6. Aggression equates to masculinity?