LINDA’S ROLE IN DEATH OF A SALESMAN:

Beginning to despair over her husband’s gradual loss of touch with reality, Linda Loman proves little help to him. Willy has finally realized that his life is a failure when judged by his unrealistic expectations, but instead of helping her husband to deal with a difficult reality, Linda feeds his expectation and fuels his optimism. By trying to work within her husband’s warped reality, instead of attempting to remove him from it, Linda speeds his downfall despite her good intentions.

Linda, in imitation of her husband, is concerned with appearances. Like a mother who forces her failed family together once a year for a smiling group portrait, Linda had rather her sons keep up a pleasing façade for Willy rather than confront him with their true feelings. Linda tries this herself with empty and insincere comments like “You’re the handsomest man in the world.” One wonders, upon hearing Linda say “Next week you’ll do better,” how many consecutive weeks she has repeated this same phrase to a man for whom every week is an unsuccessful attempt to “get ahead.” To please Willy, Linda has adopted many of his standards—such as judging the quality of a product by the size of its advertisements.

Were Linda a true idealist like her husband, whose delusions were sincere, her behavior could be excused—she would be another victim of a failed American Dream like Willy. But Linda’s damming flaw is her awareness of reality. Linda recognizes the desperate state of her husband, knows he’s living in an unstable world of empty hopes, and admits to herself that he is even suicidal, yet she continues to feed his confusion, and perhaps speeds his death. Miller describes Linda as having built up an “iron repression of her exceptions to Willy’s behavior.” Linda not only plays along with Willy’s unrealistic hopes, she does her best to heighten them, setting him up for even greater disappointment. She refuses to let his sons confront him with their belief that he is “a fake,” instead assuring Willy that “Few men are idealized by their children the way you are.” Linda’s feelings are laid bare when she admits her discovery of Willy’s suicide apparatus, the rubber tube, but refuses to remove it or to ask Willy about it because she doesn’t want to “insult” him. Linda is more concerned with preserving Willy’s pride than with taking practical measures to save his life. She shifts most of the blame for Willy’s problems to her sons, hoping to use guilt to make them conform with her wishes: “...he put his whole life into you and you’ve turned your back on him.... Biff, his life is in your hands!” The fact that Biff is unafraid to voice the truth about his father terrifies Linda, and she refuses to allow him to confront Willy with his true feelings. Biff recognizes the absurdity of his father’s behavior; Linda seems to have accepted it as eccentric and unavoidable—when he starts to take a walk in the middle of the night, Linda asks him why he’s wearing his slippers instead of why he feels compelled to wander around the house in the first place. Also distressing to Linda is Biff’s recognition of the truth about her, and her total conformity to his unrealistic expectations: “He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you.”

It is certainly true that Linda’s intentions are good, and that she is sincerely concerned about her husband, as her passionate defense of Willy shows, but she seems intelligent enough to realize the futility of her attempts to save him from himself. Her method, not her motivation, is flawed, and her situation difficult. By playing to his delusion, Linda makes it worse, and is no doubt one of the key causes of Willy’s steady mental decay and eventual suicide.

Great observations: the slippers, the rubber tube, Biff's comments about her. Good work.
In Death of a Salesman, Ben shines like a diamond in stark contrast to the
dark, jungle-like surroundings of Willy's urban cage. Dressed in all black, he
assumes the physical properties of the diamond; but eventually comes to embody many more
of the diamond's subtle qualities. Ben is urbane and intriguing amid the
everyday world of Willy—he is the bright light at the end of the tunnel, beckoning
Willy to his final reward. Ben, Biff, & Vanya is Willy's ideal, the perfect paragon for
his sons to emulate. Ben's example convinces Willy that, far from honest and dedicated
men, there are diamonds for the taking. In Willy's just universe, he is convinced that
loyalty and faith in others will lead to a just reward for years of toil. Ben's warnings
that, in the jungle, no one truly lives their lives. It is this lesson, finally
learned by Willy at the end of his life, that provides the logic and motivation for his
suicide; suicide is the only way for Willy to take control of his destiny and
catch the diamond that had always eluded him.

Ben is a man of stark contrast. He is, at base, a diamond, a creator, and adventurer. He is willing to take risks
in order to achieve his dreams, as he proves when, in Act II, he "steals a
money bag" and ends up in Africa, where he remains to find his fortune. At first glance,
Ben is extremely one-sided and simplistic—almost too good to be true—when he says
"when I was twenty-one I walked into the jungle and when I was twenty-one I walked
out. And by God I won with it." This kind of bold statement convinces Willy that
Biff, Biff, & Vanya is correct and presents men will find diamonds—Ben, there has no
hesitation in doubt about his future. Ben also represents, like the diamond, worldly wealth,
tangible results of hard work. Diamonds, the symbol of Ben's success, can be touched,
held, looked at, and appreciated. They are the physical embodiment of the goals
Willy set for himself and his sons.

Wally, Willy, takes decisive action in the present to secure his future. Willy rushes
dreams, unrealistic and naive dreams, about his destiny, expecting others to work out the
details for him. Tempted by fortune, Willy is convinced that his future and uncertain Spy
later will eventually bring him success, justly rewarding him for the hours he put in.
Wally, at least, obviously stresses the need for something tangible, for honest and
palatable work—a man who won't be handled, a man who is more than a man, he claims. Biff is no man at all.
But Ben, Ben, Ben, Ben catches him in his contradictions and readily points it out. Speaking of him,
career. Willy claims, "I am building nothing with this firm, Ben...
Ben quickly demands, "What are you building? Lay your hand on it, where is it?" Ben has contradicted Willy with the truth he has so long denied: Willy has nothing to show for his work. Ben represents tangible rewards, physical riches, and sincere satisfaction. Willy's life, in contrast, is built around vague hopes and dreams - a shaky foundation for any future. Ben teaches a lesson to Willy that Willy cannot learn. Biff, however, quickly realizes its significance. When Ben challenges Biff to a fight, Biff fights nobly and valiantly and achieves victory. But Ben, as usual, is in complete control, breaking Biff down and pointing his umbrella at Biff's throat, saying, "Never fight fair with a stranger boy. You'll have to get out of the jungle that way." The lesson Ben taught was how Biff, with a narrow and blind trait leading his father, had assumed that the younger would fight him, would honor his victory and effort, and would reward him. But Ben, like any competitor, had waited for the apparent weakness and had seized control of his own destiny, refusing to admit defeat. Ben teaches Biff what Willy should have known: that in the jungle, faith, honesty, and loyalty don't win the struggle - luck, selfishness, and trickery do. Biff quickly realizes that he cannot lay his fate in the hands of others whom he cannot trust, but must take decisive action to ensure his future. Like Ben's voyage to Africa, Biff soon decides that he cannot go the way of his father in search of impossible dreams, but must look for the tangible and honest work that will satisfy him. Biff places great value on honesty, and he knows he cannot survive in the jungle, and how it's good sense to get out alive. Willy, however, fails to realize this until it's too late. Willy had expected that men like Harold would reward him for his loyalty and dedication, but he discovers that, to them, he is just another human to be exploited. Willy's faith in his trust in others to bring him his riches, his faith in society to reward a deserving man, instead of being central to his life, Willy trusts in others, as Biff had with Ben, will fight fair. At the end of the play, Biff realizes that, though his long-sought diamond is within his reach, tangible and substantial - his life insurance money. Biff is that respect. Willy, mind that urges him to
follow him into the dark continent, the unknown and mysterious realm. For Willy, the money is the diamond, not death. Finally, Willy has the opportunity to take command of his life, to make it certain, and to gain something to show for his work. The money is something his family can finally lay their hands on. — as Ben says, "that is something one can feel with the hand, it is there."

Willy's logic is taken straight from Ben: "I can see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough. I can pick it up and hold it in my hand. Not like—like an appointment!" At Ben tells Willy, wisely and conveniently.

But for Willy, it represents his decision to no longer fight fair — to take control of his life, to make his own justice instead of relying on others to act justly towards him. By finally clutching the diamond, Willy wins the game of the jungle.

Work — Excellent and beautifully developed.
You have an accurate picture of both the characters and the development of the language — especially as indicated in this last paragraph.

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